

To Be Loved

Chapter 1

Emma's new apartment was in the heart of the *Balık Pazarı* which meant 'fish market' in Turkish, but really was just another of the many dark passages that you found everywhere in Taksim. She thought it was one of the most romantic places she had ever seen – you could buy old books and maps thick with dust, silk scarves and glass lamps, green birds screeching their heads off, spices the colour of gold, dark olives with crinkled skins, white cheese, and fish, of course, shining on their beds of ice under light globes that dangled on thick black cables. Dim light filtered down through the dirty plastic roof, the air was full of the sing song of the salespeople – *Fındık – lar! Doma – tes! Midye Dol – ma!* and cats darted from one stall to another, sleek cats, some pregnant, bellies swaying, slinking and begging scraps from the fishmongers – big men with thick fingers and soft hearts. Overlaying all the smells – the rank drains, the smoking cooking oil, the fragrant spices, was the sweetish smell of old dust, the kind of dust that has built up in a place over thousands of years.

Here was the entrance to the apartment, by the short man who sold nuts from hessian sacks on the ground. He had a bald head shaped like a peanut, and an absurd, delighted grin.

Merhaba! he shouted out to her as she walked by. *Hoş Geldiniz!* And gave her a handful of pistachios. Emma smiled, surprised.

She went into the dark foyer and began to climb the six flights of stairs laboriously, her heavy backpack weighing her down. The stairs were steep and shabby and had a long curving wooden handrail. Each floor had just a single door, painted blue, and as she panted her way up she felt as though she might have been Alice in Wonderland – as though the doors were waiting for her.

Finally, she arrived at her own blue door and dropped her backpack with a thump.

My new home, she thought, savouring the moment.

Two young American teachers from her school, Cindy and Josie, had lived in the apartment before her, but had left Istanbul after only a few months because 'it was too intense'. When she had come around to check out the apartment it had been chaotic, and now, opening the door, she saw it still was. Junk all over the living room, the bathroom black with mould and the kitchen covered in grease, the smell of old garbage permeating the air.

"Bloody hell," she said, staring in disbelief.

A wave of fury washed over her, but anger never lasted very long in Emma and the feeling soon passed. The air in here stank of failure, she thought, of lives that had been too hastily abandoned. Well it wouldn't happen to her.

She threw open the windows, filled up a bucket with hot soapy water and started in on the kitchen.

Soon she was singing. She had always enjoyed cleaning, and as she worked she felt she was making the place hers.

After an hour, she sat down to drink tea and smoke. Emma had smoked since she was fifteen, and thought that she would never be able to quit, certainly not while she was in Istanbul, where everybody smoked everywhere.

She looked around at the apartment. It was small, but it was so high up in the sky and had such a big window that it had the illusion of space. And she had found a good flatmate, an American teacher called Jay, who had made her feel comfortable as soon as she met him. It was actually Jay who had told her about the apartment – he had been sleeping with Cindy, or was it Josie? Whichever it was he had treated her terribly, according to the girls, and that had been one of the reasons they left. But as far as Emma could make out all he had done was to fuck her for a while and then stop.

And Emma didn't judge a man for that.

When she had finished her cigarette, she stood up, stretched, and started to tackle the bathroom. But as she was cleaning the shower, she caught sight of her reflection and stopped to look at herself in the mirror, to try to see what others saw, to see if she was beautiful. Her long, brown hair was pulled back into a ponytail, showing off her frank, green eyes and her flat, wide, tanned face with the strong cheekbones that she thought made her look exotic. As usual, she frowned at the faint acne damage on her cheeks from her teenage years. She laid her hands over the damage and looked at herself in the mirror again and thought how much better she would look without it. One day, when she had money, she would get it fixed up. Then she looked at her body. She was tall and bony, and had small breasts, but she did have long legs which men seemed to like. Was she beautiful? She thought about all the men who had told her she was beautiful over the years. Some of them had said she had beautiful eyes before they kissed her. Some had said she was beautiful at the exact moment they were coming. Some had lain in her arms afterwards and said she was beautiful before they nodded off to sleep, but not many of them had liked her enough to want to stick around. She didn't know why. She thought something must be seriously wrong with her, and the longer it went on the more it ate away at her. Until she had met Marco, of course, and after two years that hadn't lasted either.

Emma was twenty-six and had never been in love, not real love, the kind that changed your life, the kind where you *just knew*. But maybe she just hadn't met the right person. That was what her friends always said to her anyway.

She pushed her hands up under her breasts to make them look bigger, and as her hands brushed her nipples through her t-shirt the thought of masturbation vaguely crossed her mind, but there was still so much to do, so instead she plunged the sponge back into the bucket and continued cleaning the shower, scrubbing hard into the corners until the black disappeared, bit by bit.

The next morning, bright sun edged under the bedroom blind, and Emma stretched out in the bed and ran her hands over her skin and felt happy with her body and with herself. Today she was going to teach for the first time. Today her life in Istanbul was going to start. She could feel it.

She walked out of the Balık Pazarı smack into the heaving chaos of Istiklal Cadessi. On every corner was a hawker, selling everything from *simit* (a kind of sesame bread) to mussels stuffed with rice, to lottery tickets, special whistles, and even live ducklings, and

they all shouted over the music competing from the different shops – romantic mournful clarinet spliced side by side with frantic techno and pop music. Beautiful old buildings rose up four stories high, the bricks glowing in the morning sun, and all the names of the shops were written in gold – strange names, like *İnci* and *Konak* and *Sütiş*. Most were big white spaces alight with fluorescence and slogans, the windows full of brash fashions, but secreted away under archways were smaller clothes shops, tiny old cinemas plastered with posters, and restaurants with trays of meat and vegetables steaming up the windows.

There was suddenly a clanging behind Emma – the old red tram was squeezing through the masses, and she pulled over to one side with the rest of the crowd. Two little boys hung from the back like monkeys, screaming with delight, and Emma wished she was young again – it was just the kind of the thing she would have loved. As the tram pulled away, the people merged slowly back together in its wake, at leisure in the midst of the chaos, and the great river flowed on again, as seamlessly as though it had never been disturbed.

English Easy was in a narrow, tall old building in one of the back streets. The fat security guard in the little foyer recognised her from the last time she had come, and nodded and smiled at her from under his white moustache and she smiled back, until the lift arrived.

“So Emma how is your new house?” Çiğdem, the school manager, asked her when she arrived. She was determinedly cheerful, like a sports coach, short and full of energy. You almost expected her to punch the air.

“It’s great,” Emma said.

“Great!” Çiğdem echoed. “So today you will teach your first class! Are you excited? They are special students. I think they are true beginners, do you know?”

“No,” Emma said. “Not really.”

“This means they do not know any English words, maybe ‘hello’, maybe ‘goodbye’. So you will have to teach them everything. Is it OK for you?”

“That’s fine,” Emma said, although in reality she had no idea if it would be fine or not. It would be her first time teaching outside of her course, and the course had only been four weeks long.

“OK! Excellent!” Çiğdem said. “So here are the books, and you can go into the teacher’s room for preparation, OK?”

She gave her a little push, and Emma set off through the school, past all the Turkish office staff who looked up and smiled at her in a friendly way, past the kitchen where some students stood smoking and drinking tea, and down the corridor of classrooms until she came to the teacher’s room.

There was only one person in there today – a stocky, bald man with glasses who was hunched over a computer in the corner, typing an email very quickly and violently using only his two index fingers. She stood in the doorway for a second, watching him and smiling, until he suddenly swung around and gazed at her. He was wearing a very bright stripy scarf that trailed down to his knees and a red jumper.

“Hello there,” he said, in one of those funny northern British accents. “Are you a new teacher?”

“Yes, hi,” she said, blushing faintly. “I’m Emma.”

“My name’s Eddie,” he said, standing up and giving her a firm handshake. “Nice to meet you Emma. Are you Australian?”

“I am.”

“I love Australia. I went there once on a boat and caught a really big fucking fish.”

“Oh really?” Emma laughed. “And where are you from?”

“I’m from Manchester,” he said, giving her a hard man look, which made her want to laugh. He was one of those people who was funny without meaning to be.

“And have you been here long?” she asked.

“Six years.”

“Six years!”

As they sat there chatting, she wondered how old he was. Maybe in his mid thirties, but it was hard to tell. There was something about his manner that was almost childlike, but he had the confidence of an older man, of someone who knew himself. And although he wasn’t bad looking, he acted like someone who was very good looking.

“So Emma, shall we go for some tea?” he asked her suddenly, and as intimately as if they had known each other for years.

“Oh!” She wondered if he was hitting on her. It was hard to tell when you were overseas – everyone was always so friendly. “I can’t. I have to prepare for this class.”

“It’s your first class, is it? Do you need help?”

Probably, she thought. But she was proud.

“No, I’ll be OK thanks,” she said.

“Alright then.” He stood up. “Good luck, Em.”

“Actually, people usually just call me Emma,” she said, to put him in his place.

“What? Don’t they love you then?” he said with a grin.

She stared at him.

“Of course they do!” she floundered.

“That’s good,” he said, seriously. “Well, I’ve got to get going, Emma. See you round.”

“See you,” she said.

After he left, she felt a little forlorn. He was right, really. None of her friends had ever given her a nickname. She wasn’t that kind of person, the kind that everybody loved.

She sat still for a moment, watching a screensaver on the computer loop in on itself again and again. Then she gave herself a shake, looked down at her books and turned the first page.

In the afternoon, she hailed a *taksi* down the back of the school, near the British Consulate. It had been bombed the year before by terrorists. Now its great white walls stood silently, covered in dust, while life went on busily around them.

“*Merhaba*,” she said to the driver as she got in. Hello. She said it with a certain amount of pride as it was one of the few Turkish words she had learnt. She handed the driver the address on a piece of paper.

He replied with a stream of Turkish.

“Sorry, I only speak English,” she said, feeling stupid.

“Ha,” he said, “*Ingilizce?*”

She nodded.

“Okeh,” he said, and took off like a rocket, hooting through the winding streets, turning as he drove to chat to her merrily in Turkish anyway. She shrugged and said in English, “I really don’t know why you’re speaking to me, I can’t understand you,” which he seemed to take as encouragement. She laughed, and looked out the window. The streets were full of people walking to and fro; younger girls dressed in daring fashions, older women dressed more conservatively, some wearing headscarves, and men in nondescript dark pants and light shirts standing around, or sitting on low stools out the front of the shops, smoking cigarettes. The buildings were old and sooty, and cast long, afternoon shadows over the narrow streets.

Emma bit at her nails, and thought about the upcoming lesson, trying to remember everything she had learnt at teacher’s college, but it was all a blur, like something she had learned a long time ago.

Teach them everything, she thought now. What did that mean? The whole English language? How long would that take? And where would she start? She wished she had asked Eddie for help.

They suddenly pulled out of the little streets onto a bridge that spanned the Golden Horn, and Emma caught her breath.

Istanbul seemed to go on and on forever, apartments sprawling for miles. It was beautiful and ugly at the same time – the glittering water and the buildings like teeth crowding out of a mouth, the mosques like little jewels with their gold rooves, minarets leaping into the sky.

She was so glad she had decided to come here. It had been on a whim really, because Istanbul had sounded exotic. It wasn’t exotic, not in the way she had expected, but it was constantly surprising her with its mix of old and new, of east and west, and it was alive, so alive you felt that it was going to erupt.

All too soon, they were there. The taxi driver pointed to a large white square building, and she walked up the steps slowly, dragging her feet, wondering how on earth she had ended up in this situation. What had she been thinking? She couldn’t be a teacher, she didn’t know anything. Until a month ago she had been a waitress, for God’s sake.

She stopped midway and tried to gather up confidence by thinking about all the brave things she had done in her life, the time she had hitchhiked in Israel by herself, the time she had taken ecstasy and walked along the ridge of a rooftop, the time she had jumped the fence of the swimming pool with Henry in the middle of the night and had sex in the pool...but were these brave things or just dangerous things?

"Ha!" a security guard shouted down, noticing her book. "*İngilizce öğretmen!* Hello hello!"

“Hello hello,” she said back, and they all cracked up. There were three of them.

“Ples. Ples,” said one, beckoning, so she followed him through a set of turnstiles, into the building and down a series of long grey corridors.

She could feel her heart beating, irregularly.

The room he led her into was old, and looked like the classrooms of her childhood – all peeling paint and plastic chairs and blinds that didn’t close properly. A circle of mostly middle aged men and women were waiting for her, smiling big frozen smiles. Most of the men had enormous moustaches and all the women wore bouffant hairstyles.

“Hello,” she said, tentatively, after the security guard had gone.

“HELLO!” they chorused, and promptly fell over themselves laughing. She had had no idea she could be so funny. It went to her head a little. She wrote her name on the board.

“My name is Emma,” she said, banging at her chest like a gorilla. “What’s your name?”

Silence.

“My nem Mustafa,” said one daring individual finally. Titters rippled around the room.

“Hello Mustafa,” she said. “And you?” She pointed to a little woman.

“Benim Neşe.”

“Hello Benim.”

Dead silence fell, followed by sideways glances at Mustafa, who had clearly appointed himself the expert.

“No, no,” he said. “Means I Neşe. She name Neşe.”

“Oh!” Emma blushed, and wavered. “Ummm. Can you all *write* (she made little writing motions with her hand) your name?”

They wrote their names, and she watched them, grinning a little hysterically.

She was teaching them how to introduce themselves:

-Hello, my name is Emma.

-Hello, my name Mustafa.

-How are you?

-How are you?

-No. *I’m fine. How are you?*

-How you?

-*I’m fine.*

-Ha! OK. I em fine.

After this small success, they went to a kitchen for a break. A man in grey overalls was snoozing on a stool in the corner but he immediately leapt up and began serving them tea in glasses, brewed strong. It was very pretty, the little glass that Emma held, with its heavy base and flaring mouth, and the saucer was patterned with red flowers, faded from long use.

She joined the students on a balcony and they smoked cigarettes and ashed in the wet saucers and they pointed to things and she named them – *glass, ash, sugar, sky*. And they all giggled together and looked out to where the great ships sat, motionless, on the horizon. And she thought that she would like being a teacher.

*

Emma had no class the next day, so she spent the morning downstairs in the markets shopping for food and then came back and put some lentil soup on to cook. The aroma filled the flat, and flooded her with memories of the first hippie house she had lived in, of Sam and Jen and Tony sitting around the kitchen table smoking big fat joints all day long, and how they had spent days writing stories, writing one line and folding over the piece of paper and passing it on, and how when they were finished reading them and laughing,

Tony would hide them all over the house, for posterity, he said. That was the year she had done nothing but smoke pot, when she was nineteen.

While the soup cooked she went through the cupboards. Household things were always different in a new country, the shape of the bowls (shallow), the size of the water glasses (small), the patterns on the tea towels (ornate), the blankets (cheap and shiny), even the power points (two round holes). She found a Turkish teapot up the back of one cupboard and set about making tea – in the bottom part you boiled hot water and in the top part you steeped the tea. Once it was done, you poured them out together into the glass and the colour was golden brown.

Emma sat and drank the tea and smoked a cigarette, and looked around at the clean flat as the soup bubbled and rattled away on the stove, and felt enormously pleased.

She had made the apartment into a home, a safe place, a place where only good things would happen.

Late in the afternoon, Jay shouted hello through the open door.

“Hello!” she said. “Come in!”

“Hi,” he said in his American drawl, coming in and looking around. “Wow, it looks great.”

“Well, you missed out on all the cleaning. Those girls left it in a real state.”

“Oh God,” he said. “I could not *believe* the state of this place when I used to come over. So they didn’t clean up huh?”

He dropped his backpack with a thud, and stood looking around with an air of satisfaction, his loose clothes flapping about him. Jay was tall and gangly with a high domed forehead, moon shaped glasses, a fashionable beard and an expression of perpetual amusement. He was twenty-six, two years younger than Emma, but mature for his age. He wanted to be a journalist and always had a camera slung around his neck.

“This place is really great, isn’t it,” he said. “So high up! Like living in the sky! And the blue walls, what colour do you think that is? Eggshell blue?”

She liked talkative people like him, people to fill up her silences. He had only arrived a couple of weeks before her, but he seemed to know everybody at the school already.

“So, which room are you in?” Jay asked, looking between the two.

“Actually, I took the bigger one,” she said, shyly. “But I’m happy to change if you like?”

“No, that’s fine,” he said. “I feel like the other one is mine anyway. That’s where I always used to sleep with Cindy!”

The image hung in the air for a fraction of a second, and they looked at each other awkwardly. They were going to live together in this little place and they hardly knew each other.

“Well, I guess I’ll unpack,” he said, laughing suddenly. “Shouldn’t take me long!”

“Would you like an unpacking beer?” she asked.

“An unpacking beer?” he echoed, and cocked his head on one side thoughtfully.

“Absolutely.”

They smiled at each other, and she felt a surge of liking for him.

She sat down at the dining table and drank her beer and while he unpacked she gave herself a lecture.

Do not fall for this guy, Emma, she told herself sternly. He is your flatmate. You will be friends, you will be like brother and sister.

One of her flatmates had become her boyfriend when she was twenty-one, she remembered. It had felt so wonderfully wrong when they had first got together, that first night in her bedroom. That was what she always liked, something illicit, someone out of bounds.

Stop it, she thought, and gave herself a little pinch on the leg.

She wondered idly if she should have moved in with a girl. But she had never liked living with girls. They were so particular, always going on about who had moved their shampoo bottle or where everyone was up to in the cleaning roster. Boys were messier, but easier.

“Hey Emma,” Jay said, coming out of his room wearing a pair of black leather pants. “What do you think of these?”

He sashayed around the room with his long skinny legs, and she laughed.

“What?” he said, his sly smile blooming under his beard.

“Nothing,” she said.

“But everyone wears them in Germany!” he said. “And they cost me a fortune!”

“They’re hot,” Emma said. “You should wear them when you’re teaching, impress all the girls.”

“Ha ha,” he said, stalking around the little room like a model, and she thought how glad she was she had moved in with him.

She hardly ever had this with people, this instant ease.

“You know what? I’m starving,” she said. “Do you want to have dinner with me tonight? I made some soup.”

“Oh, I almost forgot!” he said. “I’m going to meet Eddie at the pub tonight. You know him, don’t you?”

“Not really,” she said. “I met him yesterday in the teacher’s room. He seemed a little strange. But nice.”

“Yeah. He is kind of strange. Anyway, he said to invite you.”

“Me?”

“Yeah, he knows I’m moving in with you.”

She pretended to hesitate but really she was dying to go.

“Come on,” Jay said. “It’ll be fun.”

“OK, why not?” she said.

She had spent every night alone in a hostel since she had arrived, waiting for life to start happening.

Istiklal Caddesi was just the bright surface of the city, the pumping artery it showed to the world. But on every block were *pasajlar*, passages as old as the city itself, that twisted and turned like dark veins, full of bars and restaurants and cool clubs hidden from sight but seething day and night.

Jay took Emma to *Madrid*, a dimly lit place down one of the alleyways.

“All the teachers hang out here,” he said. “It’s got the cheapest beer, and it stays open until we leave.”

As they arrived, a billow of smoke escaped out the door. It was a small place, painted in warm colours – oranges, yellows, and browns, all a little smoke stained, and Spanish

prints hung on the walls, mostly Miro and Dali. Knots of foreigners were sitting at the tables, and some Turks at others and the waiters sat on stools in a corner, waiting to take orders.

Eddie was sitting at a back table talking with a tall man who looked up awkwardly as they approached.

Handsome, Emma thought to herself. He had beautiful coffee coloured skin, and aristocratic cheekbones, high and flat.

“Guys, this is Kai,” Eddie said. “He’s just arrived.”

They introduced themselves. Emma sat down next to him and smiled.

“I just got here too,” she said. “Where are you from? You look like a prince.”

He gave her a startled glance.

“Uh, Egypt actually, but I grew up all over the place, mostly in the States.”

“Oh yeah? Which part?” Jay asked.

“Uh, Jersey actually,” he said, looking embarrassed. “How about you?”

“Boston,” Jay said. “So how long you planning to stay?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Why not?” Emma asked.

“Uh.” He looked off into the distance, solemnly. “Well. I’m just not sure, I guess.”

Emma and Jay looked at Eddie, and he responded with a bemused lift of the eyebrows.

“So, where are you living?” Jay asked.

“In some house for teachers for now.”

“Oh no, is it that total shithole in Çukurcuma?” Jay asked.

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Man, you’ve got to get out of there. That place drove me crazy. Hassan won’t pay for a professional tradesman, so everything is totally falling to pieces when you, like, touch it.”

“Yeah, I kind of noticed.”

His face broke into a frank smile which crinkled up the skin on the bridge of his nose and set his eyes twinkling, and the effect was transformative.

Suddenly they all liked him.

One round led to another, and soon the music was rolling around Emma and she felt expansive, gregarious, as though her heart were open to the world. The bar was packed now and everyone was smoking and drinking and shouting over the noise, and the waiters were going backwards and forwards with trays of beer and trying not to spill them.

Emma looked back at the three men sitting with her from a sentimental distance. By a strange coincidence they all wore glasses. Eddie’s were round and thick, Jay’s were wire rimmed, giving him a studious air, and Kai’s were blue and flared out at the sides. There was something touching about it, about the vulnerable air it gave them, and it made her feel maternal.

“You know, I love the company of men much more than women,” she announced, lighting a cigarette.

“Why’s that?” Kai asked, giving her a smile.

“Well, mostly, I just love the attention,” she said, and Kai tipped back his head and laughed. He laughed like a child, giving himself completely to the experience, and Emma liked him for it.

But Jay was too cool to laugh and smiled his sly smile instead.

“Is that it?” he said. “What about all our other qualities?”

“True, true,” she said. “I do also love the simplicity of men.”

“I’m not simple,” Jay said.

“No, no. But you know what I mean. Compared to women.”

“Absolutely I do,” said Eddie. “Women are fucking mad.”

“Except for me, of course,” Emma said.

“Well, I don’t know. I don’t know you very well yet.” He smirked at her.

“Fuck off,” she said, smiling. They exchanged a look, and her heart jumped.

“So,” he said. “You’ve been travelling for a while, haven’t you, Em?”

“Yeah, for years, on and off.”

Jay lit a cigarette, and shot smoke into the air. “Why do you travel?” he asked.

“Well, I go crazy if I stay in the same place for too long,” she said. “I get itchy feet, you know. Suddenly everything seems boring and I have to go.”

But she knew she was lying. Usually she left because she was running away from something. It was so much easier to take off and to start a new life than to stay and deal with things. She remembered all the times she had sat on the floor of her room, packing up her few possessions – clothes, books, a suitcase full of memorabilia, and the intense happiness she had felt, underneath whatever bad stuff was going on, to know that life was moving on again.

“How about you, Eddie?” she asked. “Which countries have you been to?”

“Oh, all around, really. Every continent.” Eddie looked up. “This is the best place though, guys, this is the best fucking place you will ever teach.” He waved an arm around the room, his face flushed with enthusiasm. “You will never want to leave, I promise you.”

“I don’t know,” Emma said slowly. “I want to see the whole world.”

“You’ll come back though,” Eddie said. “No matter where you go. You’ll realise.”

He looked at Emma earnestly, and it seemed as though he were already unwilling for her to go. As though she already mattered to him. But that was absurd, surely.

“I’m married, actually,” Kai said, out of the blue, and then he looked ashamed.

They all laughed, because it was so sudden.

“Well, Mr full of surprises,” said Eddie, raising his eyebrows high. “And is your wife coming here too?”

“No, uh, actually, we just separated. But it’s just. Well, I have a daughter.”

Jay gave him a sharp look.

“Wow. How old is she?” Emma asked.

“Uh. She’s two.”

“That’s young.”

“Yeah.” He looked off into the distance again in his vague way. “I know.”

He was wearing beautiful clothes, Emma noticed. Either he or his wife had very good taste, and money – there was definitely money. She wondered why he was here. She couldn’t understand leaving a child who was that young, but she didn’t judge him for it. She didn’t really have any feeling for children herself. When she thought about them at all, she thought of them as noisy.

“I’ve got kids too,” Eddie said.

“Really?” Emma said, with a note of disappointment in her voice.

“Yep.”

“What happened?” Jay asked curiously.

Eddie gave them a measuring look. “It’s a long story.”

“Go ahead,” Jay said.

“Yes, tell us,” Emma said.

“Well, firstly, my wife fucked another man.”

Emma stared at him in surprise. “Oh. So you’re married.”

“I *was*. We were together from when we were sixteen. She was my true love, you know? And then one day I came home and found her fucking this guy in our bed.”

“God,” Emma said. “That must have been terrible.”

“And we had two kids.”

“Really? How old are they now?” Jay asked.

“Well,” he hesitated. “They’d be nine and eleven.”

“And um,” he was blurting this out now, and his fist clenched on the table. “I hit her. I was so angry. I mean I really hit her. And she was the love of my life.”

He was looking at them in a strange, challenging way, as though daring them to judge him, but you could see he didn’t really care one way or the other if they did.

“Anyway,” he said in a tough voice. “She took out a restraining order out on me. So I haven’t seen my kids for ten years.”

His face got a closed over look, and he took a long sip of his beer.

“That’s fucked man,” Kai said, and they all murmured in sympathetic camaraderie. Of course it was wrong to hit a woman, Emma thought, but she could understand it under the circumstances. He must have been out of his mind with jealousy.

“So I left,” he continued. “I couldn’t stand it, being in the same city and not being able to see them. And once I started, I didn’t really stop, I just kept going and going, for years.”

They all waited for him to go on.

“Well, that’s it. It was all for the best really,” he said gruffly.

Emma wasn’t sure why, but for some reason she was even more attracted to him now. There was something about the simple honest way he had told the story that made her admire him.

They had only been there a short while when Jay said he had to go, or so it seemed, but when she checked her watch, it was already midnight.

“Ah, come on. It’s only early,” Eddie said.

“Actually, I might go too,” Kai said, looking at them all with a pleading expression. “I’m a little tired from my trip, you know.”

“Oh my bloody godfather,” Eddie said. “And what about you, Em? Don’t tell me you’re leaving me too!”

That nickname again. She liked it.

“No, I’ll stay for a bit,” Emma said. She never wanted to stop drinking once she had started. She wanted the singing in her mind to keep on forever.

After the boys had left, a little silence fell between Emma and Eddie, like a leaf falling from the sky. The bar had emptied out now, and there were only a few people sitting at the other tables, talking more quietly now.

“So, what did you study at uni?” she said finally.

“Engineering,” he said. “How about you?”

“Oh I just did an Arts degree.”

He looked away for a second.

“Actually look, Em, I’ve never told anyone here this, but I’m not really an engineer.”

“So you don’t have a degree?”

“Well, I do, but I didn’t go to university.”

“What do you mean?”

He gave her an embarrassed look. “I got it off the internet.”

“Really?”

“Yeh. You need a degree to teach English in Turkey, and I never went to university.”

Emma laughed and he joined her.

“It’s a relief to tell someone actually. I wish I’d picked an easier degree. You’d be amazed how fucking hard it is to pretend to be an engineer!”

She laughed harder. “I can imagine!”

“Don’t tell anyone,” he said. “You’re the only person here I’ve ever told.”

“Of course not,” she said, feeling flattered.

“I don’t know why I told you,” he said. “I just –”

“What?”

“Oh nothing.”

She felt suddenly nervous.

“Well, I didn’t finish high school,” she said, speaking quickly. “But I went back to uni years later, as a mature age student. Actually, I’ve just finished. It’s the longest time I’ve stayed in one place, those three years. I was going crazy.”

“Did you have a boyfriend there?”

“Yeah.”

“What happened?”

“Well, we were together for two years, and it was all getting pretty serious, you know, we were talking about having kids. And –” She looked at him, considering.

“Go on.”

“Well, we were planning on moving to Byron Bay together. And we were saving, we’d been saving for months.”

“And?”

“I came home one day and there was a big fuckoff TV in the living room.” She started laughing. “It was his way of telling me that he couldn’t leave Sydney, his family and everything, he was Italian, you see. And I thought, well if you can’t even leave *Sydney*...”

It was true what she was saying, but really that hadn’t been it. Deep down he had known that she wasn’t in love with him, that she had just been pretending. She blew smoke out into the air like a sigh, and stubbed out her cigarette.

“Anyway, how about you? Have you had any serious girlfriends here?”

“One,” he said, pursing his lips. “She was lovely. When I met her, I couldn’t speak a word of Turkish and she couldn’t speak a word of English, but it was love at first sight. We were together for a few years, but that was years ago now.”

“Oh,” Emma said. She felt a rush of irrational jealousy for the unknown girl. Love at first sight. Why didn’t men fall in love with her at first sight? She wasn’t fun enough, she supposed, wasn’t nice enough, or dumb enough, didn’t flirt enough, couldn’t even imagine flirting really, would feel stupid trying. Or maybe she just wasn’t beautiful

enough. She had always watched those girls, those beautiful shining girls, with a mix of curiosity and envy, wondering what it would be like to be always desired, always pursued, to have the luxury of choosing, of trying, of rejecting, until you found the perfect partner.

There was a time when she was young that she had thought that her life would be like that, that all women's lives were like that, but as the years went by and the only men who pursued her were all wrong, and as the other men (the right men) slept with her again and again without ever falling in love with her, it did something to her, it made her believe she didn't deserve to be loved.

"Let's have another drink, shall we?" Eddie said. "It's my round."

"Nah, I'm a bit tired now actually," Emma said.

She was falling into depression in that sudden way you did after a night of drinking, when you felt that nothing would ever go right, and your mood slid down and down and down. It was the place she had been heading for all night, this familiar place. Emma knew she was drunk, but now being drunk seemed more natural than being sober, as though her real self was suddenly awake.

"Let's go," she said.

She stood up to get her things together, knocking the table, and feeling a little unsteady on her feet.

"Do you want me to walk you home?" he offered.

"No, I'll be fine," she said.

"Oh, come on," he said. "Let me take you."

She looked at him, feeling her breathing in her ears. He was looking at her seriously, holding out one hand.

"OK," she said. As they left, he gave her his arm, and she held on to him as they twisted and turned down the passageways, left then right, then right again.

"Lucky you came with me," she said, weaving slightly as she walked. "These passageways are like a maze."

"I'll look after you, don't worry," he said, tightening the hold he had on her, and she looked up at him, and giggled.

When they got to the entrance to her apartment, they stopped and looked at each other.

"OK so thanks for bringing me home," she said.

"Are you going to make it up those stairs?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, laughing.

"Good," he said, and leaned over and pulled her head towards him with both hands and kissed her, hard. Then he pushed his tongue into her mouth, and she felt a little sound come out of her throat that she hadn't planned.

"I was going to wait to do that," he said after they broke apart, "but I just couldn't."

She looked at him, her mouth open, breathing and trying to think what to do, but her thoughts were down in a dark, sluggish, deep water, and only surfacing one by one. It had been a long time since she had been with someone else, two years. And she didn't know if she was ready.

Eddie leant over and pinched her cheek.

"Come home with me," he said.

She looked up at him, blushing.

"OK," she said recklessly, and he held out his hand to pull her up.

Eddie made her come very quickly, quicker than anyone ever had, and she shouted out into the night. She wanted to kiss him, but he stopped to put on a condom, then pushed her over, and started fucking her from behind, and she lay there, breathing hard, and feeling sad.

He doesn't care about you, she thought, they kiss you if they care, I wish I could stop, but I can't, I can't just stop now, he'll be furious.

Two hot tears ran down her face, and she bit her lip. Eddie fucked her harder and harder and finally all her mind went still and focused, and after a while he moaned and fell down on her back, breathing heavily in her ear. And then the sadness came back to her.

He went to the bathroom, and then lay down next to her with a thump, and a minute later fell asleep without saying a word to her. But she didn't want to talk to him. She was just happy that his arm was over her, so she could pretend to be loved. There was just this short period of time after a one night stand, when you could imagine you were like all the other girls, falling asleep with your boyfriend.

Emma dreamt about Istanbul.

She felt herself grow long and thin, and then very wide, and then Istanbul was seeping into her bones, the cats slinking along with their swaying bellies, the ferries rocking in the wind, the cloud shadows scudding over the Bosphorus, her students learning the words *spoon, sky, wind, ash*, and the call to prayer ringing out across the city – *Allaaaaaah, akbar!* mosque by mosque, voice upon voice, until it was all one voice growing louder and louder, until it seemed the whole city was inside her.

She opened her eyes. She was lying alone in Eddie's bed with a bad tasting mouth, a pounding head and a desperate thirst. The call to prayer in this part of town was sung by a man with a high off-key voice that threatened to split her brain in two. But finally he ground to a halt, and the loudspeaker clicked off.

"Eddie?" she called.

But there was no answer.

The dream had disappeared, slipping away like water. But it stayed with her – that feeling that the city was inside her, had taken hold of her. She lay for a long time not moving.

When she finally struggled out of bed, she found a note on the kitchen bench.

Had to teach. See you later.

His handwriting was big and round, like a child's.

She went into the bathroom and looked at herself in the mirror. Today there was laughter lurking in her eyes, the same kind of laughter that was always there when she had a hangover, saying *what have you done to yourself this time?*

She pulled a face at herself, and splashed water on her face.

Outside it was a clear, sunny, windy day, and everything was shaking and clattering. The sounds of the city were too vivid and demanding – the screech of a car, the sudden shout of a *simitci*, a red Turkish flag flapping and flailing in the wind. Emma's head was pounding, and the blood pushed through her veins sluggishly. She trailed home along Istiklal Caddesi through the swarms of people, who were all awake, all showered and

bright, and she squinted against the sun and felt dirty, and swore to herself for the millionth time that she wouldn't ever again make an important decision when she was drunk. Whenever she was drunk, that part of her brain that was connected to logic and reason simply turned off, like a tap.

But she felt good from the fucking. She always did. It was a small, quiet kind of glee that she held inside herself, despite that scrappy note. Eddie had just wanted to fuck her, and she had been stupid, had given herself too easily, but she would be fine. It was no big deal.

She had been meaning to try the *hamam* near the school for days, and as she walked past it she decided on a whim to go in. Maybe it would make her feel better.

She paid the woman at the door, who gave her a towel and directed her to take off her clothes, then pointed at a door. Once inside, it was nothing like Emma had expected. She'd imagined something like a peaceful spa, not this vaulting cavern of stone with its echo of voices. All around her women shouted to one another and threw water over themselves from the little basins on the walls. The energy in the room was boisterous and free and powerful, and as Emma looked around she suddenly felt she was a part of the world of women in a way that she had never felt in Australia, where men were always around.

She washed herself slowly, then lay down on the hot stone in the centre and after a while the alcohol started to come out of her in hot sweaty drops. Images of the night before surfaced in flashes, the sex, the stumbling through the little streets, the story of Eddie hitting his ex-wife. Had it meant anything, she wondered, when he had told her about his fake degree? It had seemed as though he really liked her, as though she were somehow special, but then maybe that was just because he was so confident, so oblivious to what anyone thought of him.

On and on her mind circled over him. She had forgotten what this was like, this endless analysis.

A big old woman wearing nothing but a pair of saggy underpants eventually came in to give her a scrub. It was terribly rough, and the skin came off her black with dirt. The woman's tits swayed as she scrubbed, and her fat jiggled. She talked sideways to the other women and laughed sourly as she worked, but Emma was too tired to care about what she might be saying.

Afterwards, she felt raw, and cleaner than she ever had in her life. All around her the sound of running water bubbled on, and the women's voices rose and fell, talking about what? What did everyone talk about, at the heart of it all? About love. *Who will love me? Will they love me forever?*

As she lay there on the hot stone, the sun came in through the domed ceiling and lit on her pale skin in yellow circles, like pieces of gold.

She was a little crazy in class that afternoon. She was always crazy, somehow her shyness disappeared from the moment she stepped in to the classroom, but she was extra crazy when she was teaching hungover. It was the only way she could get through the class.

Today she had her new intermediate class.

“So Hüseyin,” she said, calling on him first because he was always entertaining in a weird way. “Tell me about your Friday night.”

“No, I can’t,” he said, grinning. “Is top secret.”

She snorted, and the class laughed.

“Really?” she said. “Why? Are you a spy?”

“What is spy?”

“You know, like James Bond.”

“No, no.” He thought about it for a second. His big eyes closed and his long lashes lay on his cheeks. Then he looked up and broke into a handsome grin. “But maybe I am a love spy.”

Emma laughed.

“What is a love spy?” she said.

“I already say. Is top secret.”

“I hope you’re not doing anything *wrong*, Hüseyin,” she said. Underneath everything she was suddenly a pit of nerves.

“No, no, teacher,” he said, smiling broadly. “I am gentleman.”

For a second she hated him, hated all men and the way they could move so freely through their sexual encounters with women. She knew she would see Eddie that night. They had already arranged to meet at the pub, the four of them. A part of her was looking forward to it, and another part of her was dreading it. Particular images of the night before kept appearing in her mind, like flash photos, and each time they did they became imbued with more and more power. She could feel her body doing what it always did when she had slept with someone, sending chemical signals of love to the mind, whether she were really in love or not. And even though she knew most women’s bodies did this, and that men’s didn’t, and that it wasn’t real, she nevertheless felt the whole process taking place in her subconscious, inexorably, and giving the experience the power to hurt her.

Emma finished teaching late, and then went home to do her makeup before she went out. She wanted to look gorgeous and act unattainable and cool. But all she really had were jeans and t-shirts. She picked out her best t-shirt, and put on fresh eyeliner and mascara and lipstick. Emma never wore much makeup. It didn’t suit her and she thought it made her acne scars look worse. After a minute, she looked herself over in the mirror, sighed, then pulled a face at herself in the mirror for courage.

The boys were at Vera, a bar on the corner of *Nevizade*, the little laneway full of bars that snaked down the back of the Balık Pazarı. It was a cosy bar, dark and warm, with long red booths that you could snuggle up into. When she arrived, the three of them were already there.

“Emma!” Kai shouted when he saw her, and waved and knocked over his drink. The other boys jumped up and shouted at him good naturedly, and then they all smiled and said hello to Emma as she approached. As she said hello back, her eyes swept nervously over Eddie’s. Every detail of the way he had fucked her came back to her, and she found it difficult to reconcile the way he had been with her in bed with the social situation they were in. She felt herself turning red. So much for being cool.

The bartender came over and cleaned up the table for them and Emma ordered a beer.

“We’ve just been talking about Eddie’s adventures in South America,” Jay said, as they settled down.

“Oh. How long were you in South America for?” she asked as she sat down. She was aiming for a careless tone, but her voice came out a little brittle. She was very conscious of his body, of the flat part of his forearms, his hands, his broad fingers tapping on the table with their bitten down nails.

He gave her a warm smile, and his eyes rested on her from behind his glasses. “Two years.”

She felt a sense of relief, that he was being normal with her, and she began to relax.

“Wow.”

“Yeah, but as I was saying, towards the end of it, I was so broke one day I wasn’t sure I would be able to eat. But then I saw this guy who was making these arm bracelets from thread, you know, all the different colours?”

“Yeah, I know,” Kai said. He said it a little too loud, though, like he were arguing. Wasted, Emma thought. They were all wasted, and she wished she had been able to come earlier.

She would have to drink fast now to catch up.

“Anyway, so I went up to him, and I asked him how he did it. And he taught me, he was this Peruvian guy, and then when he found out I didn’t have any money, he gave me a whole heap of thread, and told me to go for it.”

“Oh God,” Jay drawled, rolling his eyes. “Are you making this up?”

“No. So, I took this thread and I made a bracelet and then someone bought it, and then I made another one, and someone bought it, and in the end I got really good at it, and I travelled all the way up the coast just making bracelets and selling them.”

“You total fucking hippy,” Jay said.

Eddie sat back, his lips pursed, looking pleased with himself.

“By the way,” he said, reaching into his pocket. “You forgot these.” He laid Emma’s two rings on the table calmly, and her insides gave a great squirm of embarrassment.

“Thanks, I was hoping you would bring them,” she muttered, glaring at him, and feeling herself blushing again.

Jay gave her a sharp look.

“I’m always forgetting things,” Kai said vaguely.

“Anyone want another drink?” Emma said.

“Actually, I’ve got to get going,” Eddie said. “I promised a friend of mine I’d meet him.”

Rejected, Emma thought, and felt humiliated, but she swallowed it down her throat like a lump.

“How about you guys?” she said to the others.

“Sure,” Jay said.

“Actually, I’m going to have to go too,” Kai said, apologetically.

“You and me, roomie,” Jay said, and she smiled, weakly.

“So,” he said, when they had left. “You slept with Eddie.”

“Yeah. Not very subtle on his part, was it.”

“And?”

“Oh, it didn’t mean anything,” she lied. “We were drunk. I mean, I kind of like him now, but I think women always feel that way when they sleep with someone, a little bit, but it goes away.”

He nodded.

“I don’t have any real feelings for him,” she said. “We’ve done it now, but it’s in the past. And we can all be friends now. You know what? In a way, I’m *glad* we did it, because it’s behind us now, so we can be better friends than we would be if it was always, you know, hovering.”

“Yeah, I suppose,” he said.

They both knew it was bullshit, but that was what friends did, pretended to believe each others’ bullshit.

Chapter 3

Spring arrived secretly, slowly. Curled up vine leaves appeared overnight on the wires stretched over the outdoor cafes, warm breezes played in the corners, and more and more cats appeared, slinking by busily on all the streets. The city came alive outdoors, and there was suddenly a flurry of parties every weekend.

All the teachers were crowded into one corner of the heaving dance floor at Cambaz, a club with a rooftop where you could dance under the stars, laughing and jumping around to the music that blasted out into the night.

There was Robbie, a short, dough faced man from Canada who was always depressed about not being an alpha gay, talking to Gerard, a handsome black American who wore white suits to work and loved to brag about his time in the CIA, even though it was obvious that nobody believed him. And there was Tony from the south of England, who was older and quiet, but when he came out with them he drank too much and then started dancing like Fred Astaire. Dancing with him was the Irish girl, Lisa, who was always worrying about her weight and going on weird diets that involved her eating only beetroot, for example. And in the middle of the dance floor, surrounded by enthusiastic Turkish men, were the two most beautiful girls, one American, Heather, and one South African, Jean, who were real women, not like Emma, and who always had a different boyfriend dangling from one arm. And there was Thorsten by the bar, the German, with his bad skin and crazed eyes, always off on wild benders and in danger of losing his job, and Marie, his long suffering girlfriend with the wild tattoos, watching him like a hawk, although really she had no power over him whatsoever.

None of them had any money to speak of, and most of them were misfits, somehow, in their own countries, but here all eccentricities were tolerated. And like most ex-pats they were all open minded, with a streak of bravery, and this gave them a certain charm regardless of their other failings.

Emma danced with all of her boys. Jay was a wild dancer. His long thin body whipped this way and that and sometimes, when he was drunk, he went really crazy, his hand down on the ground and his pelvis thrusting into the air like one of Madonna's dancers, only half tongue in cheek. Emma had never seen an Australian man dance like Jay.

But he was a solo dancer – you didn't so much dance with Jay as dance around him. Eddie, on the other hand, always wanted to dance with a girl arm in arm. Emma was hopeless at it, but he usually tried.

"Come on, Em," he would say. "This time you'll get it."

But soon he would give up in disgust, waving his hands in the air and shouting comically, "Oh God, you're terrible!" before wandering away to find another partner. And she would be left feeling rejected and foolish, but also relieved. Half the reason why she never got it was because she was always slightly overwhelmed to be so close to him. Although the world continued moving on the outside, it suddenly stopped moving inside her – and everything receded, the music, the people, the big dark sky, and all she knew was the beating of her awkward heart. And then he would be gone, off dancing with another girl, and she would pretend to herself that she didn't care. She knew him well

now, and felt annoyed with herself for sleeping with him when she had just met him. Women weren't serious for him.

Emma liked dancing with Kai the best. Kai was slightly awkward, he shuffled his feet sideways in a strange motion, but what he lacked in skill he made up for in enthusiasm, grinning wildly with his eyes sparkling behind his kooky glasses. And he liked spinning Emma in and out of his arms, which was one of the only moves she could do. She had grown up in the clubs, where everybody danced alone, communing with the dj. It was different here, where the music was always happy – R&B, house, hip hop, the kind of music made for clean cut young Americans who didn't take drugs.

She felt the other female teachers watching her with the three men, perhaps envious, or perhaps judging her, but she didn't care. Everyone at school knew the four of them were close now. Since they had met, they had been together almost every night for months. They went drinking or dancing, or spent time at each others' flats, playing cards and cooking each other dinner. Sometimes Helene joined them, but she didn't drink like they did. They drank hard and played hard, they drank until there was no more drinking to be done, often until they passed out or had to be taken home.

If you drank this much at home people would say you had a problem, but here you were outside society, and there was no norm, no 9 to 5, no grind, no responsibility, no thought of saving for the future. And nobody thought anything of drinking. It was just part of the ongoing party that was their life. Emma had always drunk a lot in Australia anyway – it was part of Australian life and especially of hospitality life. It was what you had to do at the end of the night, to convince yourself that you had a life.

When she and Jay made plans, they always said *Shall we invite the family?* And that's what they were – a family, who took care of each other and loved each other, and Emma felt lucky to be a part of it, to be at the centre of it. For the first time in her life, she knew what it was like to be in a gang. There was something heady in it, in this feeling that the people you wanted to see every night also wanted to see you. It was like they were in a relationship, the four of them. Together they were indomitable.

Emma was happier than she had ever been in her life.

Eddie suddenly appeared and pulled her and Kai over to Jay and the four of them danced around in a circle, arm in arm, laughing, until they felt silly, and spun apart again, breaking into pieces.

*

Emma loved going to work. When she arrived, she was greeted by Sibel, the cheeky young receptionist with the black eyes, who automatically ordered her a Turkish coffee from the *çayci* downstairs. Then she walked through the office, where the staff all looked up from their desks and said hello, and Çiğdem, the manager, usually stopped her for a chat about her classes or her students. Emma had a lot of classes now – a group of young people who came to the school at night, a manager at a gym in a fancy hotel, and a small class of executives that was held in the boardroom at a big multinational company. But her favourite students were still her true beginners at ISKI, her babies. And now they were improving, she was so proud.

She felt she was in her element when she taught. It was a new thing for her, having a job that she excelled at. It changed something inside her, allowed her to love herself a

little, and she felt herself changing, becoming more confident, and only then realised that she hadn't been for most of her working life.

Hassan the boss spent most of the day sitting in his glass office in the corner, silver hair swept back from his rapacious face, casting his eagle eye over everyone.

"Aha Emma! How is Istanbul treating you?" he asked her every time he saw her, coming to his office door and looking expectant, as though he were about to pounce. And every time she said fine, he seemed a little disappointed. He had told her in her interview that Australians never stayed for long in Istanbul, that it was too big for them. And every day she stayed seemed to be proving him a liar. She had been here for three months now.

Emma always went into the teacher's room first and checked her emails from home, which were becoming less and less frequent. Some people she had thought were friends never wrote back at all after the first week or two. But there were a few who kept on, and she realised they were her real friends. Soon, the *çaycı* brought up her coffee on a silver tray that swung from his finger. He had a grey moustache and eyes that looked too intelligent and wise for him to be doing something so menial. She always gave him a million lira, which was about a dollar, and he gave her a little ironic bow. They had a good relationship.

Afterwards she went into the kitchen to smoke while she drank the coffee, thick and grainy against her tongue. Gerard seemed always to be there, wearing one of his ridiculous white suits, and holding forth loudly on his favourite topic – himself. Some teachers ignored him, like old Tony, and others indulged him, especially new teachers who didn't know what he was like. Still others, like Thorsten the crazy German, gave it to him straight.

"Shut the fuck up, Gerard," he said in his thick accent. "I can't think straight." Eddie would tease him.

"Do you ever actually *teach*, Gerard?" he said. "And do you have a *home*?"

But Gerard was impervious, and only laughed and drifted out into the office, to continue his monologue with the office girls.

If nobody else was in the kitchen, Emma would look out of the window down onto the people swarming past on Istiklal. There were often protests directly beneath, knots of men who stood quietly, surrounded by an equal amount of police in combat gear with machine guns. Emma had been surprised at first, and unnerved by the presence of so many guns on her way to work, but now it had become normal. On Saturdays, there was always a group of women protesting. Her students told her the women were protesting because their sons had gone missing. But when she questioned them further, they didn't want to talk about it. They wanted to pretend that everything was good in their country. The Turkish staff were equally reticent.

"They think the government takes their children," Çiğdem told her finally.

"So you don't think so?" Emma asked.

But Çiğdem just shrugged, and smiled. "I don't know."

"Why do they have so many guns to control a small group of women?"

She shrugged again. "Sometimes other people come, and make trouble," she said.

She made Emma feel she was prying into something that didn't concern her, and Emma learned not to talk about it.

*

One night they went to a meyhane for Thorsten's birthday, a restaurant where traditionally you drank rakı, the strong Turkish spirit, listened to live music, and ate a meal that consisted of a series of mezzes. There was eggplant salad, humus, yoghurt, beans, cold fish, artichoke and a spicy tomato paste that was Emma's favourite. But the mezze were never enough to combat the effect of the rakı, and rakı made you get drunk like tequila, a wild kind of drunk.

After dinner they went to Exit and sat out the front drinking jugs of beer, all talking with the earnestness of the truly drunk, their stories overlapping in their eagerness to get them out, stories about the strangeness of a different culture, a different religion, a different way of thinking, a different language, different food, different politics, different money, different girls, different guys and different rules about sex and love. Then of course they were teaching in the business world and what did most of them know about business? Nothing. But they bluffed it, you had to, going on about the four bloody P's of marketing as though you knew it like the back of your hand, as though you gave a shit.

Kai was telling one of the girls his heaven story. He had told this story so many times when he was drunk that they had banned him from telling it again.

"...So you see, in hell they starve, but in heaven, they feed *each other*," he was saying seriously.

"Not that stupid fucking heaven story again," Jay shouted across to him.

"What?" Kai said, looking up innocently, his eyes twinkling behind his glasses.

"We've *told* you Kai," Emma said.

"If he's allowed to tell that story, I'm allowed to dance on the table," Eddie said. It was another thing they had banned, because it usually got them kicked out.

"No!" everybody around him said.

"But I'm so sexy," he said, standing up and throwing out his chest.

And on they went, shouting and screeching into the night.

Sometimes, in the midst of it, when the bartender came to collect their glasses, Emma wondered what the Turks thought of them, of their drinking, of the way they threw their money around, the way they treated the city like their playground. Everything they did took place in the headlong pursuit of fun, as though having fun would help them to forget the meaningless of their existence. And at this point, Emma would vow to whoever was sitting next to her at the time that she was going to spend her time more seriously, by reading books about Turkey, for example, or by studying the language more.

But the next night there was always another party, another dinner, another card night, and she would forget about it, until she reached the philosophical phase of her drinking, and the vows would start all over again.

Emma went and sat down next to Kai.

"How's it going?" she said.

"Uh, yeah, pretty great actually," he said, looking full of secrets.

"Why?" she said. "What happened?"

He gave her a laughing look and said nothing.

"What?"

"I can't say," he said.

“Now you have to tell me.”

“No, no, I can’t, you’re a girl.”

“No, I’m not,” she said. “Not for all practical purposes anyway. Come on, what is it?”

“OK, OK,” he said. “Well, obviously this is a secret.”

“Get on with it.”

“So, well, today Neslihan let me touch her breasts in class.”

“What?” Emma’s eyes lit up and her mouth dropped open. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Uh, well, no!” he said, looking proud and embarrassed at the same time.

“She’s your private student from that fashion company?”

“Yeah!”

“And what did you do? Just come up behind her and grab them?”

“Kind of yeah.” His eyes were alight with laughter.

“Jesus,” Emma said, enthralled. “What if she hadn’t wanted you to? You would have been fired.”

“Nah nah, I knew she wanted me to.”

“How?”

“I just knew.” He smiled and his nose crinkled up.

Emma wondered if she should disapprove, but there was something sexy about it that appealed to her. She hadn’t thought Kai was the kind of man to do that kind of thing.

“Oh my god,” she said, looking at him admiringly. “I have to tell the others. This is too funny.”

“No, don’t,” he said.

But it was too late, she was already up and moving back to sit with Jay and Eddie. Jay pulled at his beard and pretended to be offput, but Eddie got a lascivious look in his eye and laughed.

Emma weaved her way back to Kai.

“We’re going to call you boobman from now on,” she said, and Kai tipped his head back and let out a great big laugh, throwing himself into it, and the other two looked over and winked, and then they all had another drink and the night played on like one long piece of raucous music.

*

The tissue girl was young, maybe ten, and had a raw beauty, with her dark skin and high cheekbones. They saw her everywhere, at the pub, on the street, at any time of day or night, sometimes with her younger brother and sister trailing after her. Her method was simple – when she approached you she was terribly surly, but after you bought a pack of tissues from her she rewarded you with an incredible smile.

Tonight when she came they were all at Madrid, sitting out at the tables on the street. Emma called her over and bought a packet from her, but the girl ignored her and smiled at Eddie instead. Eddie had been around town for a long time and she knew him well.

“*Tamam canim?*” he said. OK darling?

“*Tamam,*” she said, and walked away. He was the only one she ever spoke to, Emma thought jealously.

Eddie looked at her as though he knew what she was thinking, and put his hand on her arm. Her heart started beating fast at the feel of his hand on her skin.

“It’s OK, Em,” he said. “Not everyone can be me.”

“Ha ha,” she said. “Whatever.”

He leant over.

“You look gorgeous,” he said in her ear. “Come home with me.”

“No,” she said, pulling away. “I can’t.”

“Listen, Em,” he said, in an undertone, and tightened his grip on her arm. “I’m sorry I acted like such an asshole with you. I don’t know why. I think I’ve just been afraid of how I feel about you. I haven’t felt like this for a long time.”

A feeling of triumph and incredulity welled up in her.

“Really?” she said.

“Really.”

She looked up at him with her eyes full of happiness.

“OK,” she said. “But I’m not coming home with you tonight. You can forget it.”

But somehow she did. Drunk again.

“Stand up,” Eddie said in a thick voice.

“No.”

“Stand up.”

She stood up on the bed, feeling conscious of her beer belly. She had put on weight from all the drinking.

“Touch yourself.”

“I don’t want to.”

She didn’t want to have this kind of sex. She wanted to be in a horizontal position so that her fat would be less obvious. And she wanted him to make love to her, to get to know her before all this stuff. But she didn’t say anything. Emma was always passive in bed. It was a good disguise for her shyness.

“Touch yourself.”

She put her fingers up, and played around for a while, but she felt foolish. She wasn’t a good enough actress to pretend she was enjoying herself. She felt tears pricking at her eyes.

“Come here,” he said and, with relief, she dropped down on to the bed.

He slapped her face.

“You’re a bad girl, aren’t you?” he said.

She stared at him in shock, and rolled over onto her side, and curled up into a ball, crying.

“Hey,” he said. “What’s wrong?”

“Sorry,” she said, after a while.

She sat up and wiped the tears away from her face, viciously, with the back of her hand.

“You can’t fuck me like this, Eddie,” she said. “I really like you.”

“I like you too,” he said.

“Well, you have to treat me like that,” she said. “Do you see what I’m saying?”

“OK,” he said, looking sulky.

She pulled him over, and began to kiss him.

And then he fucked her slowly, the way she wanted him to.

But soon after he started again, insistent, and this time he put his finger inside her, and then all his fingers, in and out, first slowly, then faster, and while he was doing it, she ran her hands over his arms, and felt how strong he was, how the tendons stood up at the back of his arms, how the muscles lay beneath the skin. It was something amazing, she thought, to get to know a man in bed. Everything was so clearly displayed on their faces, the hunger, the greed, the dirty thoughts, all distilled into the intentness of their mouths, the stillness of their eyes –

After she came, Eddie pushed her down onto her knees, and put himself in her mouth, holding her hair while she went backwards and forwards, and going deeper and deeper until she almost gagged, then stood her up against the wall, pressing her skin into its rough coldness, and took her from behind, slamming his weight into her over and over again until they both cried out.

They lay in bed afterwards, looking at each other.

She felt she was shivering on the inside, all through her body.

He was a good one, she realised, one of those men who knew how to dominate her just enough to make things exciting.

She looked over at him and smiled.

“Em,” he said after a minute, and his voice was strange. “I won’t be faithful to you.”

“What?” she said blankly.

“I just want to be honest with you,” he said.

“What are you talking about?”

“It’s not in my nature, to be faithful. I’ve tried it before, and it never works out.”

She felt herself sinking. Here we go again, she thought, bitterly. Just when you think things are going well in your life.

“Fuck this,” she said, and sat up and started pulling on her clothes.

“What are you doing?” he said.

But she ignored him, and fumbled around in the dark for her clothes until she was dressed.

“Em,” he said. “Can’t we talk about this?”

“Fuck you,” she said, and walked out into the living room, opened the front door, and slammed it behind her.

He doesn’t love me, she said to herself over and over again as she walked away. *Another one*. And a feeling of shame and worthlessness spread through her, familiar and insidious. It was a rotten feeling.

As she turned down a dark street, giggles broke out from an apartment above her head, ha ha ha ha! And she realised she was on the brothel street, the prostitutes staring out of their red windows, half of them boys under their makeup. Women never came down this street, although Eddie had taken her down there once during the day.

Emma suddenly turned around and gave them the finger, and they let out delighted screams.

It made her laugh a little and she felt better, but not much.

She hoped desperately that Jay was home.

“Jay!”

He had fallen asleep on the sofa as usual, his head lolling on his chest.

She shook him a little.

“Jay!”

“What!” he snarled.

“You fell asleep on the couch.”

“Oh.” He looked grumpy. “Why’d you wake me up?”

“Sorry,” she said. “I thought you’d get a sore neck.”

“Hrmp, thanks,” he said, staring at her hazily.

“Well, now you’re awake...want to go for a drink?” she asked, with a wavering smile.

His eyes narrowed. She saw him noticing her red eyes. “What’s wrong?”

“Everything.”

He only hesitated for a second.

“OK,” he said, getting up awkwardly. “Let’s go.”

They sat on the rooftop of a bar down in Nevizade, huge beers in front of them, and lit cigarettes.

“So, what’s happening?” he asked.

“I can’t explain.”

“Oh come on. You can’t wake me up in the middle of the night and drag me out for a drink and then not tell me anything.”

“Well, Eddie just told me he’s going to cheat on me.”

A feeling of despair swept over her at the thought.

He stared. “What are you talking about?”

“He said he can’t be faithful with a woman.”

“Right.” He had the awkward look on his face of a man that has been told something about his friend that he doesn’t want to know.

“And I think I’m in love with him.”

He gave her a measured look. “Are you sure?”

“Well it feels pretty awful. But I don’t know. Because I don’t think I’ve ever been in love.” She giggled mirthlessly. “How can you be sure?”

“I don’t know,” he said, and they both fell silent.

“But have you had all that stuff, where you just know that she’s *the one*?”

“Kind of,” he said.

“But that’s what I mean,” she said. “Is there a kind of? Shouldn’t it just be totally black and white?”

“I guess that’s what the movies tell us.”

“And books.”

“Right.”

“It makes me feel fucked, that I haven’t had this. It makes me feel like something’s wrong with me.”

“Oh come on, Emma, you’re alright. Just give it some time.”

“I know. That’s what I’ve been telling myself all my life, though.”

She looked away. *Don’t cry*, she told herself. *Don’t be a baby*.

And after a second, she turned back and gave Jay a brilliant smile.

“Listen,” he said, stroking his beard. “If you can, I think you should stop it now with Eddie.”

“Why?”

“He’ll walk all over you, Emma. You’re not strong enough.”

“Yes I am.”

“If you think so.”

Emma waved her cigarette in the air and laughed.

“I’m stronger than you have any idea of, my friend,” she said.

“Is that so?” he said. “Well, good for you.”

But she could tell he didn’t believe her.

Emma woke up with a hangover and a sense of shame that she felt would cling to her all day. Really, she had been a bit of a drama queen, she thought, storming off like that. When she thought about it clearly, Eddie had been doing the right thing, in his own way. If that was his experience with women, it was right that he had told her about it, it was good that he had been honest with her. And instead of talking about it, she had run off like a baby!

She sent him a text, asking him to meet her at a café, and he texted back quickly.

12:00. She showered and tiptoed out of the house like a thief, glad Jay was still asleep.

She had a feeling he wouldn’t approve.

When she plunged into the crowds of Istiklal Caddesi, she felt high with nervous anticipation, but light in her heart. They would start again. It was a faultless day, blue skies and a light breeze, and all the people around her seemed to be happy and moving to some kind of internal music. The old man who sold the whistles on the street began to play one of his high, strange tunes just as she walked by, and she smiled at him.

Anything, she thought, could be fixed on a day like this.

The café was so full it took her a minute to spot him. He was chatting to the waiter, of course. He always made friends with everybody.. Suddenly, he looked up and saw her, and smiled at her as she approached. Her heart skipped.

“Hi, Em,” he said, pursing his lips.

“Hi.”

“Would you like a beer?”

She grimaced. “No way,” she said, sitting down. “I’ll have a tea I think.”

“So,” he said, looking at her directly. “Are you still mad with me?”

She felt annoyed that he was phrasing the question like that, as though she had been totally unreasonable about the whole thing.

“Jesus,” she muttered. “I don’t even know what the fuck is going on.”

He shrugged his shoulders, looked away. “Actually, I think I’m in love with you, Em.”

How awful he was. Tears sprung up behind her sunglasses.

“Please don’t say that if you don’t mean it,” she said.

“Let’s get out of here,” he said. “Let’s go for a walk.”

She looked up at him.

“OK,” she said.

Walking hand in hand with him for the first time made her feel foolishly happy. His hand was firm and warm. They walked all the way down to the water, down the dark little winding streets of Tünel, and she felt as she always did with him – that the world went very quiet and still inside her.

Down at the ferry dock, they sat with their legs hanging over the edge of the warm wood and watched the huge seagulls wheeling slowly around in perfect circles, as though they were attached to giant, invisible cords.

The water glinted prettily in the sunlight.

“What are we going to do, Em?” he said, looking rueful. “This is what I’m like. I can’t change now. I don’t want to lie to you and pretend that I will.”

She felt the bitterness eat into her again, and sighed. She knew what he wanted. She had had it with Marco. Because he was so much older than her, Marco had said he wanted her to be free to fuck other people, to explore her sexuality. But she had never done it, and neither had he. It was enough to know that they could if they wanted to. But could she do the same thing with Eddie? With a sense of dread, she realised that she didn’t have a choice, that it was probably the only way she could have him.

She looked down at her reflection in the dark water. Her hair hung over her face, and her features were blurred.

“You can fuck anyone you like,” she said through her hair. “I suppose. But not our friends, not people I have to see.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I don’t care about all that stuff, about owning people,” she said, knowing as she said it that it wasn’t true. “But don’t embarrass me.”

“OK, Em.”

He put his hand on her hair, and pulled her to him.

It was a strange feeling, she thought, this happiness all shot through with fear.

In the afternoon, she went to teach at ISKI. The taxi crawled along down the paved side streets with their bent yellow railings, past the corner shops with brightly coloured packages of crisps hanging in the doorways, past the old apartment buildings with their ornate doors and the rusted grills over the windows, past a restaurant, empty at this time, the owner sitting out the front with his friends.

Then, as always, there was the sudden openness of the water after the smallness of the crooked streets, so sweeping and grand, the light of the sky refracted.

Her hangover was a bad one, and although she knew it would make her feel even worse, Emma lit a cigarette and smoked out the window. A part of her felt afraid about what she had agreed to with Eddie, and the other part of her, the careless, brave part, said not to worry, that it was all just another adventure, to just let life happen.

When she was young she had nearly drowned one day at the beach. She’d been caught in a rip and for a long time had tried to fight it – her arms flailing, her legs scissoring madly, the blood beating hard in her ears while the water dragged her out further and further. But after a while, she had simply gone limp, and the tide had gathered her up like a great wet fist and swept her around the point at a speed she could hardly comprehend. The world had seemed very beautiful and intense, she remembers, the water so green, the rocks so black and shiny, the sky white and gleaming like the inside of a giant pearl.

That was how she felt now, that life was out of control and wonderful.

When she arrived in class, there they all were, her dear students, waiting for her just as they had on their first day. They always sat in the same seats. Once they had found their place in the classroom it was their home forever

“Hello everybody!” she said.

“Hello teacher!” they chorused back.

“Not teacher,” she said, as usual. “Call me Emma.”

But they never would, not without a great deal of pleasurable giggling anyway. God, she loved them, she thought suddenly. Young or old, they were all so charming, so untainted by cynicism, so warm and so connected to each other. She thought it came from something lost in the West – a strength in their families, a rootedness in their culture, and a way of life that had nothing to do with being cool. Because wasn’t it this desire to be cool, to be accepted, that made people so hurtful, so greedy, so scrambling? It would come to Istanbul, of course, like it came everywhere eventually, but for now it was expressed only as an insecurity about their country and the way it measured up against the rest of the world. They thought it was wonderful, but what did Emma think? It was an anxiety they were always expressing, that she would love Turkey as much as they did.

“Did you had a nice time this week in Turkey?” Fatma asked with her cheeky smile.

“*Have* I had a nice time?” she corrected, smiling. “Well, yes. I love it here.”

“Why?”

“I love the food,” she said. “I love Adana kebab.” This wasn’t strictly true, but she knew that it would make them happy to hear it.

“Really?”

“Yes, I *love* it.”

They looked at her suspiciously, catching the laughter in her eyes.

“And did you like Turkish peoples?” asked Neşe, dimpling.

“Yes, I *do*. But not you.” They all laughed, especially Neşe, because she knew she was one of Emma’s favourites.

“Our kultur very like other people,” said Nazmi, the oldest student, earnestly. “We like to guests. We like –” He looked helplessly at the other students, and said something in Turkish. They all frowned.

“Strangers,” offered Metin. “We like stranger peoples.”

“Foreigners,” Emma said, writing it on the board. “Yes, I know.”

She smiled at them. She had heard it all before in other classes, the same fears, the same desire to have her understand how much they welcomed the world in.

In the afternoon Eddie took them all to the Grand Bazaar to meet his friend, Murat, who owned a carpet shop. It was an overcast Saturday, but the weather was warmer, warm enough to do without jackets for the first time. They took the little underground cable car down from Tünel to the water. It was hidden away in the hillside, and at each end were old echoing stations covered in tiny green and blue tiles. Everything in Istanbul was so mysterious and secret. Emma loved it.

“It’s not actually called the Grand Bazaar in Turkish,” Eddie told them all as they emerged and walked over the bridge to Eminönü. “It’s called *Kapalı Çarşı*, which just means ‘covered market’.”

Fishermen lined the bridge, their rods a tangle of smudged black lines against the white sky, despite the jerking traffic all around them, smoky exhaust from the old cars, and the air full of honking. Further along, a woman sat begging on the footpath further along, a little boy in her lap, his eyes dull. Emma's students had told her not to give the mothers money because it encouraged them to bring their children out into the streets all day. She averted her eyes and hurried past, but she felt the usual mix of anger at the injustice and self loathing at her inability to really care, enough to want to make a difference. There were 14 million people in Istanbul and more coming every day from the countryside, and poverty was everywhere in Istanbul, but people usually sold something on the street, whether it was roses or bottled water, rather than begging.

Out on the water a great old ferry went by, seagulls gliding in its wake.

The fishermen cast out with careless sweeps, their lines like whips sailing through the air.

"Do they catch many fish?" Emma asked.

"Not many, usually," he said.

He went over to one old man and started to chat to him in Turkish, and the man started to laugh at whatever Eddie was saying, a wheezing rusty laugh, and clapped him on the back.

"Ah Eddie – man of the people," Jay said, archly, stopping to take a photo of the two of them, before walking on with Helene and Kai. Helene and Jay were both beaming all over each other. Something must have finally happened between them, Emma thought, and was glad. They made a good couple.

Eddie and Emma kept walking on together, and he pointed at the giant mosques and palaces perched along the water, and told her all their names. He always explained everything they saw around Istanbul proudly, as though he were showing her around his house.

"You really love it here, don't you?" Emma said to Eddie as he caught up with her.

"Yeh. I think it's like no other place in the world."

"So, do you think you'll stay here forever?"

"I don't know," he said. "It depends."

"On what?"

"On love, I suppose," he said, giving her a look.

Her heart gave a great leap. She couldn't think of anything to say.

Eminönü was bustling – the shouts of the hawkers battled with the roar of traffic and the wind which came in, blustering noisily off the Bosphorus. They walked under the shadow of a huge mosque, and it loomed over them, an insistent presence.

"I feel like the mosques watch me," she said to Jay as they caught up to one another. "It's like they know we're not meant to be here, and they're keeping an eye on us. Do you know what I mean?"

"That's the New Mosque," he said, slowing down. They watched some men in skullcaps washing their feet under the long gold taps attached to the wall, and he took a quick photo. "It was built in the Ottoman empire."

Jay was like someone from a hundred years ago, she thought, the kind of traveller who should have been going around with a compass instead of a mobile phone. He had so

many books about Turkey at home, books about its history, its politics, its foreign relations, and in the corner of his bedroom he had a stack of maps and books of notes he had made. Sometimes he just disappeared by himself, and when he got back, he said he had been off to visit a church hidden down some alleyway, or that he had been reading in a café he had found on the top floor of a tall building, where he had been the only customer for hours.

“So, things with Helene going well?” she said teasingly.

“Yep.”

“No details?”

“*You* haven’t been exactly forthcoming,” he said, giving her a fond look.

Emma thought about what had happened with Eddie and knew Jay would think she was being stupid.

“Ha ha. Fair enough.”

They would tell each other everything when they were drunk one night anyway.

In the winding, narrow, ancient streets that led towards the Grand Bazaar, trestle tables spilled out onto the street, sinking under layers of clothes. Each table was buzzing with women, like bees at a hive, fingering fabric, holding clothes up against their bodies, and bargaining with the owners. Emma tried to push by, but it was better to walk slowly, to walk at the same pace as everyone else. After all, they weren’t in a rush. But it was like being in a slow moving herd, claustrophobic and intimate. Eddie and Kai had fallen behind, and Jay was up ahead, walking with Helene. He turned round, caught Emma’s eye, and smiled, and she smiled back, feeling calmer. She was glad he was happy.

Eddie’s friend had a carpet shop on the outskirts of the bazaar and he was so delighted to see Eddie that he wrestled him to the ground.

“Eddie!” he cried, and pulled him up and kissed him smackingly on both cheeks. He was short and stocky, with thick black hair, and calm black eyes. Other men came swarming around. They all kissed Eddie and one giant man picked him up and swung him around like a girl.

“Put me down, you big oaf!” Eddie shouted, and the man set him down laughing.

“Eddie! Where’s your beautiful girlfriend?” his friend cried.

“Gone,” said Eddie, winking.

His friend laughed richly, then looked uncertainly at Emma. “You’re not his girlfriend, are you?”

Was she? “No,” she said, blushing and avoiding Eddie’s eyes

“Thanks God!” he cried. “This man he is very good for friend, but terrible for boyfriend. Believe me!”

“Oh, what a load of bollocks!” shouted Eddie.

“No, it’s true! He is heartbreaker! Ladykiller!”

“I taught you those words, you bastard,” Eddie said, laughing.

But he avoided Emma’s eyes.

They sat outside on little stools, drinking sweet tea, smoking and talking. Eddie was laughing and speaking Turkish with his strong Manchester accent, completely at ease. Emma sat brooding on a stool in the corner, feeling stupid. Why hadn’t Eddie said anything about her? After a second she got up and said, “I’m going for a look around.” And walked away without checking to see if anyone had heard her.

She wandered through the labyrinth of the Grand Bazaar feeling confused. It was an enormous building built of white stone, riddled with narrow passages, thick and thin, that criss-crossed one another for as far as the eye could see.

Hello!

Hello! You are wanting gold?

The salesmen stood out the front of their shops, slouchy and confident, smiling at Emma.

Excuse me, you look for carpet?

You want to meet me?

Why you don't speak to me?

*Beautiful lady! We are having **best** prices in Grand Bazaar!*

Excuse me!

The word *bazaar* had such magical connotations. But this place was more like an endless nightmare of tourist shops, all selling the same thing, carpets and jewellery and everywhere the ubiquitous 'blue eye' which was to protect you from the jealousy of others.

That wasn't what she needed, she thought. She needed something to protect herself from her own jealousy. She couldn't bear the thought of Eddie sleeping with someone else. Suddenly, she felt claustrophobic again. She needed space, wide open space. But there wasn't any in Istanbul – everything and everyone was crowded in together, all higgledypiggledy.

She closed her eyes and thought about Australia, about the wide beach by her grandmother's house. About the emptiness of it in winter, the shore speckled with pale shells, the flat sea bridling in the wind, the old jetties leaning like a jumble of burnt matchsticks against the white sky.

Someone clutched at her arm, and she swung around in a panic. But it was only Kai.

"Hey girl, what are you doing, sleeping?" he said, grinning. "I've been looking for you everywhere. Why didn't you answer your phone?"

"I guess I didn't hear it," she said.

"Why'd you take off?"

Emma hesitated. "I don't know," she said.

He gave her his awkward smile.

"Uh, if you ever need to talk to someone, Emma, you can talk to me," he said.

"Thanks," she said.

"Everyone got really worried," he said.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Let's go back."

He put a friendly arm around her shoulder and she laid her head on his shoulder.

They stayed that way for a second, unmoving, while all around them the river of people flowed on, as the salesmen's shouts echoed against the stone walls, and the blue eyes twisted and flashed on their strings, winking in the wind that whistled through the passageways.

Chapter 4

Eddie and Emma did that thing that new couples do. They told each other all about their lives. It was such a pleasure to have a person who wanted to hear all your stories, a person who wouldn't say, "You've told me that before". Someone who was happy to sit for hours just listening. They lay in bed and told each other stories, about their travels, the jobs they had had, the crazy people they had met, the strange things they had done. About the clubs and festivals they had been to, the DJs they had seen, the drugs they had taken, the ecstasy, the acid, the coke, and which was the best, the cheapest.

About their relationships, the small heartbreaks, and what had gone wrong in the end, about the sex that they had had, the things they had tried, if they had a 'type' or not (they both didn't), the things that they liked.

About their families.

"I was terrified of my mother half the time," Eddie said.

"Why?"

"She used to belt the shit out of us when we were little."

A silence fell while Emma tried to imagine it. Her parents had hit her too when she was in trouble. But not that badly. She remembered the ruler that they kept hanging on the wall, the steady strokes they had both administered, the humiliation that had suffused her.

"And where was your Dad?" she said.

"Gone."

"Where?"

He took a drag on his cigarette. "We never knew. He left when I was little and I never saw the bastard again."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"Doesn't matter. Anyway, I was well shot of it by the time I was seventeen. I got out of there and never went back."

Emma reached over and put her hand on the back of his neck.

"I left home when I was young too," she said.

"How old were you then?"

"Sixteen."

"Really? Why?"

"I don't know really. I had a lot of fights with my family. I wanted to be free, to do what I wanted."

"It makes you grow up fast, doesn't it, moving out so early?"

"Yeah, absolutely, in some ways. But I don't know, I was kind of lost for a long time. I didn't do anything with my life. In some ways, I stayed a child."

Some days they talked about their future, about all the countries they would visit together – nowhere boring, of course, maybe Russia, or Africa, they would go on safari. She thought he would be a wonderful person to travel with. They would meet everyone, do everything. He said he would only be prepared to leave Istanbul for her. Emma wasn't very good at saying sweet things like that. But he knew she wanted to.

When he wasn't cooking or painting he watched sport on tv, lying on the sofa while she read a book in the opposite corner. Sometimes he would shout *rubbish!* at the tv, and she would look up and smile. Sometimes, when he got bored, he would try to annoy her

to get her to stop reading. Sometimes he would pull her over and have her lie on top of him until she squashed him and then he would scream that she was the heaviest woman in the world. He liked to tease her like that.

By unspoken agreement, they were restrained with one another when they were out with the family, a foot on her thigh under the table, a hand that lingered on his neck for a second. If the family were a real family, they would be the parents; Eddie the father, dispensing advice to Jay and Kai about how to cook and making all the decisions about what games would be played and where they would go, and Emma the mother, listening to all their problems, advising them on girls, and nagging at them to eat more healthily. Sometimes Jay even called them Mom and Dad, tongue in cheek. So they acted like parents in front of the children, hiding their sexual relationship, playing a strange game.

Their 'arrangement' began to seem romantic to her, just like something out of a European novel, and she felt very grown up when she thought about it in this light. But deep down it still made her anxious and jealous, and she wondered if she was just being a fool.

"Would you tell me if you were sleeping with someone else?" she asked him one morning while they were lying in bed.

His face became inscrutable.

"I don't know," he said in his gruff way. "Would you want me to?"

She stretched out on the bed, then curled up again. A small part of her had hoped he would tell her not to worry about it, that it would never happen.

"I don't know," she said. "I think a relationship can only work with honesty. But maybe I wouldn't really want to know. I'm not sure."

"Maybe we should decide."

"OK," she said. She looked at him for a second, and felt suddenly nervous. "I guess tell me."

"You sure?"

"No, not really," she said. "But anyway."

"Alright then," he said.

He closed his eyes as though he were going back to sleep. A breeze blew in the curtains at the window in a sudden puff of sweet air. Outside all the normal sounds of Eddie's neighbourhood wafted through the air, the distant hum of traffic on Tarlabasi, sparrows twittering, children playing football in the street, a barking dog going mad in a corner somewhere.

*

It was the end of another big night and Eddie was hardly able to walk. After Emma got him home he fell into bed, sprawled across the entire mattress, and immediately started snoring. She watched him for a while. Why did he have such a strong hold over her? She felt she would do anything he asked. But did she love him? How did you know if you loved someone anyway? In books, they always said they would die for each other. Would she want to *die* for Eddie? She imagined they were both standing on a cliff and one of them had to jump. A giant canyon loomed below them. What would she do? But her mind couldn't take the next step.

She sighed, and went to sleep on the couch.

Some time later, she was woken by a loud noise, and she sat up fast, her heart pounding.

In the darkness, she could make out Eddie standing in the kitchen staring at the wall.

“Hey, what are you doing?” she asked.

In response, he punched the wall. The little flat rattled.

“What’s wrong?” she said.

He hit the wall again.

“Fucking whore,” he said in a low voice.

Emma didn’t say anything. She sat in the darkness and watched him in surprise.

“Fucking bitch.” Punch.

Who was he talking about? His ex wife? His mother?

“Cunt.” Punch.

After a few minutes, he turned around quietly, and went back to bed.

Emma sat there, not moving for a while, until she heard him snoring again.

She felt like a hypnotist might, that she had seen the soul of someone laid bare. It was both ugly and beautiful, like a piece of white bone gleaming in a cut of meat.

*

Their salary was good by Turkish standards, but they drank most of it away. Toward the end of the month, things were always tight and someone always had to lend money to someone so that they could all still go out together. One night, a teacher from another school who was leaving Istanbul asked Emma if she wanted to take on her private student for some extra cash.

“Why not?” Emma said.

She had just been wondering how she was going to afford a new pair of shoes.

The knock, when it fell on Saturday morning, was confident.

“Hello,” Emma said, as she answered the door. A girl in her mid twenties with a heart shaped face and long dark hair was standing there, her eyes laughing. “You must be Melek.”

“Yes,” she said, smiling. Dimples appeared.

“I’m Emma. Come in!”

Melek came in cautiously, like a cat, and looked around the apartment from a vantage point close to the door.

“I was thinking we should go and sit somewhere outside,” Emma said. “It’s such a beautiful day. What do you think?”

“OK,” Melek said, looking pleased.

“Can you recommend a good place to go?”

“Hmm. So, I am not sure,” Melek frowned and fell silent. Emma wondered if she had put her under some kind of cultural pressure. But after a minute, she said, “Do you know Yeniköy?”

“I’ve heard of it, but I’ve never been there.”

“I thought so,” Melek said. A broad smile spread across her face. “I will take you.”

Emma smiled back.

“OK,” she said. “Let’s go.”

They took a *dolmuş* from Taksim Square. Getting the *dolmuş* was a communal experience, like squashing into a minivan with your family. The people in the back seat passed their money forward to the people in the front to pass to the driver and then the whole process was reversed when your change was passed back, and it was all done with smiles and a kind of feeling that you belonged together for a little while. It was a jerking, lurching ride. When they weren’t stuck in traffic, the *dolmuş* drivers screeched along as fast as they could, pulling up abruptly to the curb every few blocks to pick someone up, the sliding door falling open and belting shut each time. And then they would be off again.

Melek smiled at Emma now and then, but she was clearly too shy to speak in English with other people listening.

Once they arrived they went for a walk along the Bosphorous, lined with fishing boats bobbing and creaking in the wind. The water splashed softly against the banks, the air was fresher, and Emma felt the stresses of the city draining away.

“You have been in Istanbul for long?” Melek asked. She had a rich voice, like a singer’s.

“About four months now, I think,” Emma said, proudly.

“So. Then you don’t know much about Turkey,” she said, looking up at Emma with a smile.

Emma looked at her in surprise. “Well, I suppose,” she said. “I feel like I know a lot, but probably I don’t.”

They laughed together. Emma felt suddenly very aware of herself, strolling along in the sun chatting with a girl from the opposite side of the world, as her teacher.

She smiled at how much her life had changed

“So tell me about yourself,” Emma said.

“Well. I am from Bursa. Do you know? It is south.”

“Yes, I’ve heard it is a very beautiful place,” Emma said, and Melek looked pleased.

“So why are you in Istanbul? Are you studying?”

“Yes,” she said, and sighed.

“Don’t you like it here?” Emma asked.

“I love Istanbul. But still I am a little sad.”

“Why?”

“Actually, I miss my boyfriend, Deniz.”

“How long have you been together?”

“Six years.”

“That’s a long time.”

“Hmm. Yes. A long time.” She looked pensive. “Actually he is like the other half of me.”

That’s what I want, Emma thought. Was that what true love was? A soulmate? Someone who completed you? A feeling of envy ran through her.

“So why didn’t he come with you?” she asked.

“He is still finishing his studies.”

“I see.”

“And you, Emma,” Melek said, smiling. “Do you have boyfriend or husband?”

Emma thought about it. She still didn't feel that she could describe Eddie as her boyfriend. Their relationship wasn't normal enough.

"Kind of," she said. "But we haven't been together for very long."

"Is he Turkish?"

"No, English," Emma said, making a face, and Melek laughed.

Melek was the kind of girl a man would really fall in love with, Emma thought as they walked. Her face was very dear and sweet, and she was sweet on the inside too.

"So tell me," Emma asked. "What exactly do you do?"

"Actually, I study biotechnology," she said modestly.

"Far out. I don't even know what that is really."

"Well. Difficult to explain in English," Melek said.

"Try," said Emma. "It's good practice for you."

They eventually came to a double decker boat set up like a restaurant. It was selling seafood but it was moored, so you ate at the shore.

"Would you like to go onto?" Melek asked, looking at Emma and smiling her broad smile. "Maybe it is something different, to eat on boat?"

"Sure," Emma said. "I'd love to!"

They jumped on, and Melek ordered them some mussels stuffed with rice, and they sat at a plastic table and chairs on the upper deck, as the boat swayed gently, and ate.

"So do you love him, your boyfriend?" Melek asked, curiously, and suddenly Emma could see the scientist in her, cold and rational.

Emma looked at her, and decided to tell the truth. It was good to talk to a girl, and Melek was intelligent.

"We have a kind of open relationship," she said, feeling embarrassed. "Do you know what that means?"

"I think yes," Melek said, looking delighted. "This is the same for me!"

Emma thought it unlikely.

"Are you sure you know what it means?"

"Yes," Melek said, but she looked cautious.

"That we can have sex with other people."

"Yes, that's right," Melek nodded, smiling again. "My boyfriend and I just started this.

Because we will get married, we are sure. And we are together so long time, we want to try other people!"

"Wow," Emma said. "Was that his idea or yours?"

"I think we decide together, maybe him a little more," she said. "But it is OK. I am, how I can say this, curious?" She giggled, but then looked a little worried.

"Interesting," Emma said. From what she knew of Turkish women, many of them never even had sex with their boyfriends until they were married. "So have you done anything yet?"

"No, not yet. We just decided this actually."

"Well, it's a bit different for me. I didn't really want this, but he did."

Melek looked solemn. "Why did you say yes?"

"It was the only way I could have him," Emma said, and laughed uncomfortably.

“Hmm. I see,” Melek said, and her hand fell on the table towards Emma. It was a solid looking hand, brown and smooth skinned. It looked like the hand of someone she could trust.

*

The family were out dancing at a new club, and Emma was dancing with Kai, laughing at his attempts to do the twist with his big clumsy feet. They had thrown themselves into drinking that night, starting early. It didn't matter where it would take them, what they might say, what they might do. Almost anything was forgivable the next day if you had been drunk anyway. Emma turned around to see if Eddie was watching Kai too, and to her surprise, saw that Jay was standing next to him, his face very tight, shouting something in his ear. It looked like they were arguing about something, Emma thought, but they never fought.

She danced her way over to them, and when they saw her they both looked up with blank expressions.

“Are you guys *fighting*?” she said.

“No,” Eddie said, smiling. “Don't be silly, Em.”

She looked at Jay, but his face was relaxed. “Nope,” he said.

“Oh, OK,” she said. “I don't know why, I just thought you were. And I came over to sort it out! No fighting in the family, you know!”

“Don't worry,” Eddie said. “We're behaving!”

She flashed them a smile, and danced away again.

But as the night went on, she noticed Eddie was drinking heavily, and he looked like he was in a bad mood. He stayed at the bar, even though she asked him to come and dance with her, and he didn't even seem to want her to sit with him.

Fuck him, she thought, feeling hurt. *I won't let him spoil my night*. And she went to dance with the others.

“Eddie's in a fine mood tonight,” she said, laughing uncertainly.

“Ah, leave him,” Kai said. “Come and dance with me, girl.”

Later on, there was suddenly a great commotion over by the bar, and shouts could be heard over the loud music.

“It's Eddie,” Kai said, pushing his way over, and the others followed.

Eddie and a Turkish man were glaring at each other, their arms pinned back by men who were struggling to hold them. The Turkish man's nose was bleeding, and Eddie was cradling his cheek in his hand.

Eddie swore in Turkish, and when the man shouted back the crowd around him roared. They were excited, their faces ready for a fight.

“You guys, do something,” Emma said, urgently.

Kai walked into the circle, and held up his hands like a magician, smiling foolishly, and everyone in the bar fell quiet. He was a tall man, and his darker skin was unusual.

“Uh, let's go maybe?” he said to Eddie, in a laughing voice.

To Emma's surprise, Eddie looked at him, and smiled, and suddenly stopped struggling. He said something in Turkish to the man who was holding him, and the man reluctantly let him go. As they left, the other man unleashed a string of insults on Eddie,

but Eddie didn't look at him, only kept his head down until the four of them were outside, away from the booming music and into the quiet of the street.

Eddie looked up at them with a comical expression and they all broke into laughter, a naughty kind of laughter, tinged with relief.

"What the fuck was that about?" Jay asked.

"Not much," said Eddie, looking evasive. "He was pissing me off."

"Oh my God," Emma said. "Are you OK?"

"Well, I think I might have a nice black eye tomorrow," he said, pursing his lips.

"I'll take you home," Emma said.

"No, that's alright," he said. "I think I'll just carry on by myself, guys. See you tomorrow, alright?"

And he turned and wandered away down the dark street, weaving slightly on his feet. Emma watched him go, feeling embarrassed and rejected.

"Did we do something wrong?" Kai said.

"No," Emma said. "He's just being a dickhead. And he didn't even say thank you to you for getting him out of there."

"Ah, that's alright."

They all looked at each other, feeling lost. Eddie was always the one who suggested where they should go.

"I guess we'll go home," Jay said.

They walked down Istiklal Caddesi, and Emma kept to herself while Jay and Kai talked to each other about this and that. She felt humiliated that the other boys had seen Eddie speaking to her so dismissively, and furious that he hadn't wanted her, and part of her wondered if the whole fight thing was a smokescreen that he had deliberately set up so he could go out by himself. Probably. The worst of it was that she couldn't say anything about it, couldn't call him to complain, she had to let him be *free*. She lit a cigarette and puffed on it so hard, it was finished in about sixty seconds. He had made her feel worthless, she thought, and all the times she had ever felt worthless in her life rose to the surface of her mind, and congregated there, feeding off each other.

At the entrance to the Balık Pazarı, they parted ways, and Emma stood for a moment watching Kai walk away, with his slightly awkward gait, and his big hands stretched out at his sides. Suddenly, he turned round and saw her watching, and gave her a great wave. He was such a good friend, she thought, as she waved back, then hurried to catch up with Jay. As they walked together the men in the late night restaurants shouted out *Merhaba!* to them and Jay smiled and called back *İyi akşamlar!* which meant goodnight, but Emma was too down to say anything.

"Hey, are you sure you and Eddie weren't fighting?" she said to Jay as they got in.

"Yeah," he said, going into the kitchen.

"The whole night tonight was weird," she called.

"He was just drunk," he called back.

A silence.

"Listen Emma," he said, coming and leaning heavily against the doorway, his words a little slurred. "I know it's none of my business, but I hope you know what you're doing with him."

She looked at him. Probably he was worried about the fight. But Eddie had his demons, she knew.

“Don’t worry, Jay,” she said. “You don’t understand everything, OK?”

“OK, OK,” he said, going back into the kitchen. “Let’s have something to eat. I’m ravenous.”

“So how’s things going with Helene?” she asked as he cut up bread and tomatoes and white cheese, their staple diet.

“I don’t know,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

He gave her a guilty look. “I don’t know if I want to have a relationship yet.”

“Really?” She was surprised. He had seemed so happy.

“Yeah, you know, I want to be footloose and fancy free for a while. I mean, this is the time of my life, right? Travelling around the world, living in Istanbul, I should be sowing my wild oats, shouldn’t I?”

“Does anyone actually say that anymore? *Sowing your wild oats?*”

“Yes. I do.”

“OK. Whatever. Well, Helene is pretty great,” Emma said.

“I know.”

“Have you told her how you feel?”

“Not really. I mean it’s not like she’s my girlfriend yet.”

Emma doubted that Helene saw things the same way.

“God,” she said. “You bloody men. You know you can’t have it both ways, don’t you?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I mean you want your freedom but you also want to be loved. So you take these great chances with girls’ hearts. It’s bullshit.”

He gave her a surprised look. She was usually so tolerant.

Then he patted her on the wrist.

“Here,” he said, kindly. “Have a sandwich.”

She glared at him, but he wasn’t in a fighting mood, and only looked back at her comically. And a second later, they both cracked up.

“Alright,” she said. “Give me the bloody sandwich.”

*

Kai and Emma went out for a cigarette on the small balcony of a bar overlooking one of the narrow streets off Istiklal, while inside Jay and Eddie played pool.

“So girl, how’s life?” Kai asked gently.

“OK, I guess,” she said.

But she was feeling insecure. Since the night of the fight in the bar, Eddie had seemed reluctant to spend time with her, organising their days so that they spent nearly all their free time with the family. But it had all been done so subtly she wasn’t sure if it was really happening.

“Really?”

“Oh, it’s Eddie,” she said. “I don’t know. I feel like things are suddenly a bit strange with us. But maybe I’m just imagining it.”

Kai gave her a sympathetic look.

“You really like him, huh?” he said.

“Yeah,” Emma gave him a rueful smile. “A lot, unfortunately.”

Kai looked away, out over the street, as though he were thinking.

“And you guys have some kind of understanding, right?” he said awkwardly, taking a long drag on his cigarette and blowing the smoke out sideways. He was one of those people who never looked right smoking.

“Yes,” Emma said, blushing in the darkness. “Did he tell you about that?”

“Yeah, he did.” He looked back at her and his eyes were serious behind his glasses.

“Did he tell Jay?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

He wouldn’t, Emma thought.

“So uh, is that deal just for him or for you too?” Kai asked, looking away again.

“Oh. Well, I guess it’s for me too,” she said. “But I don’t think I could. I mean, I’m not that kind of person.”

“Right.”

He glowered, and she could feel how much he cared about her. They all did, in their way.

“How’s things going with you?” she asked. “Are you still sleeping with Elif?”

Elif was his flatmate.

“Nah, I stopped it. You know, she’s Turkish. She was getting too serious.”

“OK,” Emma said. “Well, it’s good that you stopped it.”

“Yeah. I suppose,” he said, his nose crinkling as he smiled.

They laughed.

“So you don’t want anything serious here?” she asked, teasing.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I need to recover from my marriage for a while.”

“I know what you mean. Yeah. I didn’t think I would be in a relationship so soon,” Emma grimaced. “Not that I am, really.”

Inside, the balls thwacked and rattled, and Eddie shouted triumphantly out into the night. Emma had felt drawn to him even more lately. It always worked this way – the more someone pulled away, the more she wanted them. But although it felt like falling in love, she knew it wasn’t. It was something sicker, something that gave him all the power and left her with none.

*

Helene and Emma had both started teaching at a big hotel in Taksim Square. Every day they walked slowly down Istiklal Caddesi, holding their folders to their chests, and talking. Emma had always been a little in awe of Helene, who was so reserved and had such integrity – she was not at all like Emma, who blundered around with her feelings spilling over at the slightest thing. Helene was the way she had always wanted to be – intelligent, rational and self possessed.

But now that Emma was getting to know her better, she found Helene was also lovable. Her French mannerisms and enthusiasms all came together to make her a charming woman, unwittingly funny, and she had a deep smile, a rare smile, that lit up her eyes. She was beautiful in the true sense, the kind that came from within. Although they had always been friends, it was only now that they became really close. Becoming good

friends was such a shy, halting thing, but they made friends as women usually did – by talking about men.

When Helene spoke about Jay, she became soft and pleased, and Emma could see that she was very in love with him. And she worried for Helene, but didn't say anything to warn her about what Jay had said to her.

“So why did you choose to come to Istanbul anyway?” Emma asked her.

“Well, I studied Ancient History at university so it was one of the logical choices,” she said in her clipped British way. “And I have always thought that Turkish would be an interesting language to learn.”

“How many languages do you know again?”

“Well, five, but only four very well. English, French, German, Italian, and now Turkish.”

“God, you make me feel like such an underachiever.”

“I find it very easy, for some reason, to learn a language,” Helene said modestly. “So I don't take any credit for it. It's something genetic, I think.”

At the hotel they taught waiters, porters and security guards, all young and enthusiastic and vibrating with energy. When they arrived, Helene and Emma walked through the opulent lobby down to a dark little stuffy room in the basement of the hotel, full of stored furniture. But they didn't care about the room – they had great fun with their hotel students. Although their grammar was terrible, they spoke quite fluently because they were always practicing with the guests.

“Teacher, do you know Atatürk?” Kaan asked her, pointing to the picture of Atatürk that smiled sternly down from every wall in every classroom she had.

“No,” she said, although she knew a little. “Why don't you tell me about him?”

“OK. He is father of Modern Turkey,” Kaan said. “After war, Ottoman Empire was nearly gone, and all countries fighting for the last piece of the Turkey, but Atatürk, he fight with them, and after he win, he make the Turkey.”

The other students were all nodding and smiling. This was their story, their legend. They loved it.

“Go on.”

“Atatürk want a modern country,” chimed in another student. “So he change the alphabet and he make rules for woman, that woman can vote, and that woman doesn't must close her head with scarf.”

“Really?” Emma said. She hadn't known that.

Sibel, a quiet student, jumped in.

“Actually, teacher, today, woman at university or bank or hospital, she cannot wear scarf. It is illegal.”

“Really?”

“Yes, and some religious women, they get very angry and they wear big hair, do you know? Over the scarf.”

“No. What do you mean?”

The students looked at each other and shrugged.

“It is...not real hair!” said Tuğba.

“Oh,” Emma said. “A wig!” She wrote it on the board.

Everyone said ‘wig’ to themselves. It was funny the words that became important. “Yes, wig,” Tuğba continued. “And this wig is very big, to show that they are wearing scarf under, because they are angry with the government for this rule.”

“Teacher, do you know about the military?” asked Can, who was obviously bored with the topic.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“All men must go,” he said.

“Oh yes,” she said. “I know. Have you been yet?”

His face fell. “Next month I am going,” he said.

Emma didn’t know what to say. She couldn’t think of anything worse than being forced to go into the army.

“Does nobody like it?” she asked.

“No!” said Kaan. “It is very boring. It is the worst time.”

“And sometimes people die, near Iran, because of the PKK,” said Can, trying to look tough, but looking scared.

Emma had been warned against talking about the Kurdish problem with the students. It was too topical.

“Alright then,” she said. “That’s enough chat. Let’s do some work now, shall we?”

And the class moved on, back to grammar, but underneath it you felt all their fear and worries going on.

Life was so difficult for them.

“Is it true, what they are saying about the women wearing wigs to university?” Emma asked Helene on the way home.

“Oh yes.”

“It’s strange isn’t it? For us, freedom means you can be whatever religion you want, but here freedom is seen as connected to suppressing religion.”

“They have to. They have this huge pressure coming from the Middle East to be more Muslim. But they want to be European. They are torn.”

“Do you think they’ll get into the EU?”

“There are still a lot of human rights abuses.”

“Like what?”

“You’ve seen the women protesting downstairs from the school? They are called the Saturday mothers.”

“Oh, yes I remember, Çiğdem told me they say their sons have been taken away.”

“It’s true. The government simply takes away people who disagree with them, and puts them in prison, or they just disappear, perhaps tortured, perhaps killed.”

“That’s terrible.”

“And the EU is worried about allowing Turkey in for other reasons. There are hundreds of millions of people in Turkey. It might be like,” she paused for a second. “Like opening the gates of the flood.”

They walked back up the length of Istiklal, while all around them thousands of people carried on with their lives, stopping and looking in the shop windows, laughing and talking, waving and shouting.

The tram came along slowly through the middle, tinging its bell.

*

It was early evening one night and the family were in the middle of a game of cards at Jay and Emma's apartment when her phone rang.

"Looks like someone's calling me from Australia," Emma said, in surprise.

She answered. "Hello?"

"Emma." It was Marco.

"Wow! Hi!" she said, going into her room and closing the door. She felt strangely flustered. "How are you? What time is it there?"

"It's pretty late," he said. He sounded subdued.

"Are you OK?" she said.

"No, not really."

"Why?"

"I've just taken two pills."

"What? Two? You don't even take drugs!"

"Well, I've just started!" He gave a strange laugh.

Emma didn't like the idea of Marco taking drugs. He had never taken drugs. He was innocent that way.

"Why?"

"I want to forget about you."

"What are you talking about?"

"I want to forget about you so I took these drugs, Emma."

"That's crazy." *Wrong drugs for that*, she thought..

"How are you, Emma?"

"Did you really take two? That's a lot, you know, even for me, I wouldn't take two."

"Yeah."

"Oh my God, I think you should call Vinnie. Get him over."

"How are you, Emma? I'm fine really. How are you?"

Emma looked up at the ceiling of her bedroom and thought about everything that had happened to her since she left Australia. A crazy laugh slipped out of her.

"Well, I'm OK, I guess," she said. "I'm having an affair with this guy who's a bit of a pain in the ass, but I'm OK."

There was silence on the other end.

"Marco?"

"Where's he from?"

"He's English."

"You're having an affair with an *English* guy? What does that mean anyway, an affair?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's bloody stupid."

There was another silence.

"Hello?" she said.

"I miss you, Emma. I want to come and visit you. I want to travel now. What do you think?"

Emma tried to imagine it. But it was impossible. She didn't love him.

"Umm, I don't know," she said. "What would you do here?"

"You don't want me to come."

“No, no, it’s not that. It’s just that there’s not much to do here if you’re not a teacher.”

“OK,” he said quietly.

“Anyway,” she said. “Do you think you really love me in that way?”

“Emma, you don’t know me at all,” he said, his voice starting to sound soft and far away. “You know that? And maybe you don’t even know yourself.”

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing. It’s alright. I don’t know what I’m on about,” he said. “So I’m going to go now. Take care.”

“Wait, don’t go,” she said. But he was already gone.

She went back into the living room, chewing on her cuticle.

“Who was that?” Eddie asked curiously.

“It was my ex,” she said. “I’m really worried about him. He says he’s just taken two pills. And he’s never taken ecstasy before in his life.”

They all looked worried.

“He’s going to have a fucked time,” she said. “And he’s by himself.”

“Well. But he might have a really good time,” Eddie said, with a sudden grin.

“True,” she said, frowning.

“There’s nothing you can do about it anyway,” Jay said. “You are on the other side of the world.”

Emma gave him a rueful smile. “This is also true,” she said.

“Come on, Em, it’s your turn,” Eddie said, waving her over. “We’ve been waiting forever.”

Emma picked up her hand, studied her cards and threw out absent mindedly.

“Hey guys, here come the birds,” Kai said, and they all turned to look at the window.

Every evening, at sunset, hundreds of swallows started to fly around the sky in giant circles and then swooped closer and closer to the window until, if you stuck your head out, they flew right past your nose in a rush of air and feathers. Nobody knew why it happened. It was just one of those things.

Later that night, she bought a phone card down in the Balık Pazarı and went across Istiklal to the phone box to call Marco. But he didn’t answer, so she left a message telling him that she hoped he was OK, and then stood in the phone box for a while, watching the people walking by, all dressed up in their Saturday night clothes. She thought about what Marco had said, about not knowing herself. What had he meant by it? She thought she knew herself pretty well. She had spent most of her life alone, hadn’t she? Thinking about things. But did she think about herself, really look at herself? Not really, she supposed. Well it was almost impossible, like trying to see the water you were in.

She sighed, and then headed back to the apartment, where they would all be waiting for her, her boys.

Sometimes she felt she was the sun at the centre and they the stars that orbited around her.

Chapter 5

“This is going to be the biggest game of the fucking century,” Eddie said to Emma as they settled down.

They were all out at a new place, there was some important football game on, and Eddie had organised for everyone to watch it at a bar in Nevzade with a big screen.

“I’m so excited,” she said, sarcasm written all over her.

“Come on, you’re going to love it, just wait and see,” he said.

She rolled her eyes. “Yeah right.”

He leant over, and bit her ear, and as usual she felt a rush of sexual desire run through her body. She lay her head on his shoulder for a second, and felt the warmth of him through his clothes, until he pushed her playfully away. They never showed much affection in public.

Old Tony was painstakingly explaining the rules of football to Emma when Helene arrived with Lise and Bernard, her friends from France who had been staying with her for a few weeks. Lise had short blonde hair in a halo around her head, pixie features and big blue eyes and Bernard was a shambling man with a kind smile, but terrible teeth. Emma liked them both.

“I hate football, don’t you?” Lise said to Emma in her murmuring French way. “Do you care to sit outside with us and smoke a cigarette?”

“I’d love to,” Emma said, grinning. “If Tony will excuse me?”

“OK,” he said.

“I *am* interested,” she said.

“Yeah, yeah.” He waved her away, smiling.

Lise and Bernard talked to her about their life in Paris. Emma was very interested because they lived in a commune.

“We don’t believe in possession,” Lise said. “We don’t believe in owning things or people.”

“Really?” Emma said. “That sounds impossible. How did you save the money to get here?”

“We are anarcho-collectivists,” Bernard said in careful English. “So we believe that there should be no private owning of the means of production. But people should still take wages.”

“In the commune we share our wages, although this is not usual for anarcho-collectivists,” Lise said.

“So how did you get here?” Emma asked again.

They fell silent and looked embarrassed.

“Lise received some money when her grandfather died,” Bernard said.

Emma laughed. “Surely you’re not expected to share that too?” she said.

“Yes, we are,” Lise said.

“God!”

“We told our commune that we would visit Lise’s grandmother for a month,” Bernard said, looking down.

“What!” Emma said, laughing again. “Come on, seriously guys, who cares?”

They both looked at her, uncomprehendingly.

“We truly believe in this, you see,” Bernard said.

“OK, OK. Well, I won’t tell anyone you’re here,” she said, teasing. “So tell me, how does the commune work?”

“Well,” Lise said. “We decide everything together...”

They talked on and on, and drank beer after beer, while inside, people roared at the football.

By the time the pub closed, she liked Lise and Bernard enough to invite them back to her house along with the family. Once they made it up the stairs, they all collapsed onto the couches together in a heap and started singing a song. Emma found herself lying on Eddie, who was lying on Lise.

But is this wrong? she thought.

She wasn’t too sure, but she was too drunk to do anything about it now, and anyway Eddie’s hands were on her, not on Lise, pushing at her hips and running up the back of her shirt, and falling into places they shouldn’t. Not that anybody noticed. Bernard had put on a French CD, and was wandering around doing strange little dances, and Jay was keeping them all amused with a string of wry commentary on his dancing.

After a while, Jay’s head nodded a few times, and he fell asleep where he was sitting. As usual, Emma thought fondly, taking the beer out of his hand.

Kai stood up and swayed slightly on his feet.

“I’m tired. I’m going home,” he said, in a firm voice.

“Stay! Stay!” they all shouted. “Don’t be a pussy!”

But he insisted on leaving, as they had known he would. Once Kai had decided something, that was it.

“Let’s dance, Em,” Eddie said after he left, and they got up and moved around the room slowly together.

Lise stood up and said, “Can I dance too?”

“No,” Emma said.

But she persisted, and tried to wriggle between them.

“Please?” she said, and giggled.

Emma felt a flush of irritation, spun on her heel, and went into her room, and lay down in bed, waiting for Eddie to come in and take her clothes off.

But after a minute, Lise came in and sat down on the bed.

“Why are you going to sleep?” she asked, and started to stroke Emma’s hair.

“What are you doing?”

“You’re so beautiful,” Lise said.

“Stop it,” Emma said.

“I thought we could all be together,” Lise said, trailing her fingers down Emma’s arm.

Emma vaguely understood that a threesome was being proposed. It was something she had always wanted to try. But the idea hurt her now.

“Just stay away from Eddie,” she said heavily.

“What do you mean?” Lise said, looking puzzled. “I thought you knew.”

“Knew what?”

“I was with him only yesterday.”

Emma sat up bolt upright.

“What?”

“He told me you knew,” Lise said nervously.

A slow wave of understanding rolled over Emma.

“Go away,” she said, turning on her side.

Lise stood up and left quickly, closing the door behind her, and Emma lay there as the truth dawned on her that the whole night had probably been planned.

I am such a fucking idiot, she thought.

And she hated Eddie for making her feel stupid, for letting her sit there the whole night talking with his lover in front of everyone. Then she thought about Eddie and Lise together, and she suddenly felt sick. She rolled off the bed, pulled her hair back, and vomited out of her window onto the plastic roof of the Balık Pazarı below. The sharp taste of stomach acid seared her throat as she stayed with her head out of the window, breathing the fresh air and waiting to see if she would be sick again. But she was alright.

A second later, she pulled herself back in, wiped her mouth with a t shirt, and walked into the living room. The three of them were sitting together at the table, Eddie, Lise and Bernard, and they all looked up at her at the same time.

“You. Get the fuck out of my house,” she enunciated as clearly as possible to Lise. “Why don’t you go back to your little commune?”

They stared at her, stunned, and seemed unable to move.

Emma looked at Eddie and felt even angrier.

“Get the fuck out all of you!” she shouted. “Now.”

In silence, they got their things together and scrambled out, eyes down, like naughty children.

As Eddie walked past, she took a swing at his face, she wanted to *slap* him, but he ducked, and she found herself swinging foolishly at space. He almost smiled, but caught himself, and then they were gone.

Emma stood in the living room, her heart hammering, and looked around wildly. In the corner, Jay snoozed calmly on.

“Jay!” she said. “Jay!”

But there was no rousing him.

In the morning, it felt like the world had cracked open and all the blood had run out of it. Emma lay in bed, looking out of the window. The sky was leached of colour, damp and hollow. Birds shot past, as fast as bullets, and desultory sounds from Istiklal flew up and were swallowed by the sky, the ting ting of the tram, the rattle of the security grilles being rolled up, and the shouts of the *simitci*. *Sicak! Sicak!* he cried. *Hot! Hot!* She could hardly move for despair. Well, she wouldn’t move until she heard Jay. Somehow the morning was always more bearable with Jay.

She closed her eyes. Last night was there, waiting for her like a monster, but she wouldn’t think about it now. Her breath was wheezy from all the cigarettes. *I really have to quit some time*, she thought, *but not today*. Today she would have to smoke.

She ran through the rest of her body – her head, her muscles, the inside of her mouth, and decided her hangover was massive. The word *massive* rested for a while, lazily, in her mind, with the word *monster*. Somehow, she summoned up the energy to take a couple of painkillers, and then she lay back down and waited for them to kick in. And after twenty minutes, they did and her head stopped hammering and the hangover receded, but only slightly, like an enemy pulling back to gather its forces for a renewed attack.

There was Jay now, in the kitchen, clattering around.
She put on some clothes, and shuffled slowly outside.

“Are you making tea?” she called.

He stuck his head out of the kitchen door comically, then the rest of his body emerged, draped in his usual morning outfit, baggy pyjama pants and a t-shirt with a hole in it.

“Well, hello there,” he said. “Look what the cat dragged in.”

“Ha ha.” She realised now that she was standing and talking that she was still drunk, in that next day way, when everything seemed to be tinged with hilarity. “I think I’m still drunk.”

“Me too. Hey what’d I miss out on?”

Emma started to laugh.

“What?” he said.

“OK. But you have to promise not to be mad.”

“Yeah yeah. Spill it sister.”

As she told him the story, his face went tight.

“I can’t believe he did that to you,” he said.

Emma felt ashamed.

“I know.”

But suddenly he shot her a sly smile. “Did you really try and *slap* him?”

“Yes.”

“And missed.”

“Yes.”

He snorted. “That’s not very cool.”

A laugh bubbled out of her. “I know.”

Then he gave her a funny look.

“You know, you’re lucky really.”

“Why?”

“Well, you may not realise it, but you narrowly escaped having group sex with *Bernard*.”

And she saw it was already being transformed, turned into a story, a story of the family, the funniest elements being picked out, refined. It would be retold when they were together, and laughed over, just another story. It wasn’t as bad as all that.

Emma went down to mooch around the basement of the Balık Pazarı. It was her favourite place to lose herself in. It was always dark and gloomy, and the bookshops were down there, books spilling out of the shelves into giant teetering piles that threatened to engulf the shopkeepers completely. Books were even stacked up outside along the windows, where they joined boxes and boxes of old black and white photos and ancient LP records gathering dust. She rarely bought books because they were all in Turkish, but you could find other treasures here. Once she had bought a set of old maps of the world and she had given one to each member of the family.

Today she rifled through the boxes of old black and white photos of people now long dead. Who knew where the photos came from? Or if anyone ever bought them? The faces smiled out at her – a dark eyed mother with a headscarf holding her baby daughter, a father and four tall sons arm in arm, a young groom in a black suit and the bride in white from head to foot.

I'll never have a family, she thought, and felt like she couldn't breathe. Eddie didn't love her, had just been using her, like she was nothing, like she was shit, just like all the others.

The old bookshop owner was staring at her, and she wondered how long she had been standing there.

She put the photo back in the box.

"Görüşürüz," she said, turning away. *See you.*

"Görüşürüz," he said.

On a whim, she decided to eat in her favourite fish restaurant in the Balık Pazarı. It was a simple place, the tablecloths overlaid with glass, where they served the fish on a stainless steel tray with nothing but a wedge of lemon, but it was delicious, and she always ate there when she wanted to cheer herself up because all the waiters knew her by name and treated her like royalty. She was determined to have a good day today and to think about nothing at all.

Her phone started to ring. She watched it vengefully. Eddie's name flashed again and again. *Well, he can ring all day if he wants to*, she thought. *There's no way I'm going to answer.*

Then, quite suddenly, she answered, almost against her will.

"Yes?"

"Em." His voice was vulnerable.

"What do you want?"

"Can I see you?"

"I don't think so."

"Please. I'm outside your house now."

"I'm not there."

"Where are you?"

She sighed.

"I'm at the fish restaurant."

"I'll be there in a minute."

Suddenly there he was, his big eyes scanning the restaurant from behind his glasses. She felt panicky – what was she going to say? She didn't have enough time to plan. He saw her and came over and sat down.

"Hi."

He was repentant, hangdog.

"I'm really sorry, Em."

"That's OK," she said stiffly.

They sat together in silence for a minute.

"Do you think we can we still go on?" he asked.

"Are you crazy?" she said, and started laughing scornfully. "I can't ever trust you again."

"But I love you," he said.

She looked him straight in the eye.

"Bad luck," she said. "I don't like liars."

"I don't know what I'm doing sometimes."

"Bullshit."

A silence fell. She pushed her fish aside and lit a cigarette, her fingers trembling.

“I’m sorry, Em, I’m really sorry.”

“You know what? I don’t think you love me at all. If you did, you would have respected the rules we put down. You said you wouldn’t fuck people we knew and that you would *tell* me. Instead you *humiliated* me.”

“I couldn’t help myself,” he said. “She came to my house one day –”

An uncontrollable rage swelled up inside her. Lise was beautiful and sexy. It made Emma feel sick again just to think about it.

“Look. Why don’t you just fuck off?” she spat.

The waiters looked over curiously. Tears welled up in his eyes.

Abruptly, Eddie pushed his chair back, and ran out of the restaurant, away down the Balık Pazarı.

She watched him go, a flash of colour, swallowed by the crowds. Who would have thought that Eddie would cry? A great wave of regret passed over her, and she wondered if she had done the right thing. Should she call him back? Everybody made mistakes.

But then she told herself not to be stupid. Once someone did something to hurt Emma, she never gave them a chance to do it again.

It would have been unbearable for her to face the class, so she told work she was sick, took three days off, and crawled into bed. She spent the first day feeling angry with herself for being so stupid, and fantasising about how she would have done things differently had she not been drunk. The cutting things she would have said to Eddie. The elegant way she would have disposed of Lise. But considering it took her hours to come up with something decent, she thought it unlikely that she would ever be someone who would be able to say clever things at the right time.

On the second day her mind slowly shut down and went into a different place where the world existed only in the sounds that filtered through from outside the covers. There was a burrow on one side of the bed where her sheets had become soft and smelled like her. This comforted her. Sometimes she got up and went to the window for a cigarette. When darkness came she went to sleep rather than face the awful loneliness.

On the third day a lot of memories came welling up, things she had forgotten. When she was thirteen. The middle of summer. Hot. They had been staying with some other families for a week at a shack up the Murray river. A waterskiing trip. The shack was in the middle of nowhere, just a big tin shed on stilts, and another shed for cooking in, both surrounded by big white gum trees, some shooting up into the sky, some bent over the water as though they were exhausted. The sharp eucalyptus smell of them thick in the heat, the kind of heat that made the cicadas scream all day. The river seemed to hardly move, and when you got in the water was very warm on the surface and cold at the bottom.

Every day they got up early and had breakfast and then spent the day waterskiing, one person at a time standing up behind the boat as it roared off down the river, the rest of them sitting in the shallows keeping cool.

Emma loved the rush of it even though she always fell down quickly. But Nick was good at it. He could stay up as long as he liked. He was fourteen, which Emma thought was old. She watched him, admired his waterskiing secretly, hoped he would talk to her. But there were a lot of kids there, and he didn’t pay her much attention.

The night before they left, as the adults were cooking and the kids were sitting outside by the fire, he came out with something strange.

“I bet you like to play,” he said to her in his soft voice.

And she knew that he meant something else, something that she didn’t know about yet.

“I don’t know,” she said, and felt tight in her chest.

“Don’t you?” he said, and put his foot against hers in the darkness. All the blood rushed to her head.

“What are you *talking* about Nick?” his younger sister said with disdain.

He changed the subject. But he kept his foot against hers for a long time, until the adults came out, and it felt like the best thing that had ever happened to her.

The next morning she had woken up very early with the birds. There were so many birds in the bush, making such a beautiful racket, the screeching ones and the chirrupy ones and the ones that somehow sounded like liquid, all carrying on together. And as she lay there listening, she thought about Nick and the warmth of his foot against hers, and an unbearable feeling swept over her. Although she was happy, there was something deeply sad to it, and she knew that there would always be a sadness to it, to this whole thing of men and love.

When they left that afternoon, she secretly cried in the back seat, hot tears welling up behind her cheap sunglasses, a great lump in her throat, at the thought that she might not see him again for another whole year.

Actually she had never seen him again. But that was the start of everything, she supposed. That was when all this had begun.

After three days, Jay dragged Emma out to Vera, and they sat up on the rooftop drinking for a long time, raving at each other about everything but Eddie. From a quiet part of herself, she watched Jay, gesticulating with his artistic fingers, his glasses glinting in the light, and felt a sudden sense of great relief, as though she had just returned from a long, tiring journey to a place that she loved. It was friends who you could rely on, not lovers. Friends were always there, waiting for you to come back from the madness, back to being yourself again.

“Do you believe in destiny?” she asked him.

“That depends,” he said, stroking the sides of his beard. “Do you mean destiny as the Greeks perceived it?”

Emma rolled her eyes. “Jesus, Jay, I don’t know. I mean for some reason I believe in destiny, that my life is controlled somehow, even though I don’t believe in God. Why do you think that is? Do you think destiny can exist without there being a force to control it?”

“Why do you ask?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “I guess I wonder if I’m destined to have these awful relationships for the rest of my life, you know. Never meeting the right person. Always being unhappy and dissatisfied.”

“Don’t be silly,” he said. “You’ll meet the right person.”

She gave him a watery smile.

“Hey, I knew about Lise, Emma,” he suddenly said. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.”

She looked at him in surprise.

“That’s OK,” she said.

“I tried to warn you, you know, that night after he got in that fight.”

She looked at him ruefully. “I thought you were warning me about his personality.”

“Oh,” he said. “I see.”

“Oh well.”

“And we *were* fighting that night,” he said.

“What about?”

“About you. I wanted him to be honest with you.”

“And what did he say?”

“The same as you. He said I didn’t know what I was talking about.”

“Did he?” she said. “What a dickhead.”

And they changed the subject again.

Emma ran into Eddie at school on her first day back, sitting alone in the kitchen, smoking. He looked up when she came in and when he saw it was her, his eyes lit up.

“You speaking to me yet?” he said.

She raised her eyebrows at him, started to speak, looked instead at the ceiling. She missed him terribly now she saw him again. She missed everything. He was her best friend. But she felt like he had punched her in the guts.

“Not yet,” she said.

*

Emma and Melek had been meeting for conversation practice every Saturday in a café. This Saturday Melek took her to a new place on Istiklal, famous for its cakes.

“So how is life *canım*?” Melek asked her as they sat down, smiling her broad smile. *Canım* meant something like my dear friend.

“Not so good.”

“Why?”

“Eddie and I broke up.”

Melek’s mouth dropped open.

“Oh no! What happened?”

“He had sex with someone else.”

“Oh.” She looked puzzled. “But. I thought this was OK?”

“It was. But we had some rules, about it. That he had to tell me, and that it wouldn’t be someone we knew.”

“Oh, OK,” Melek said. “But why did you make these rules?”

Emma rolled her eyes.

“I suppose I didn’t want people in our group to know about our arrangement. And I wanted our relationship to be honest.”

“Yes, that seems a good idea.” Melek was quiet for a while. “But maybe you should give him another chance?”

“No,” Emma said. “He humiliated me.”

“What does this mean, humiliated?”

Emma thought about it.

“Like embarrassed, but stronger.”

“Hmm. OK. A good word.” Melek opened her notebook. “How do you spell it?”

Emma spelled it for her, laughing a little. Then she felt awful again.

“Let’s talk about something else,” she said, casting around for a topic. “Why don’t you tell me about your family.”

“Oh. OK,” Melek said, pleased. “I have one brother and one sister. They are all in Bursa. My mother is teacher, and my father is in government. I love them very much.”

“My mother is *a* teacher.”

“*A* teacher, yes,” Melek said, looking penitent. She always forgot her articles.

“You know,” Emma said. “I feel jealous of the families in Turkey. All my students tell me they love their parents, and they all seem to have a very close relationship with them.”

“Of course!” Melek said. “It is not like this in Australia?”

“No, not really. Most of my friends have some kind of problem with their parents, and a lot of their parents are divorced.”

Melek fell silent for a moment, and looked thoughtful.

“But,” she said. “Sometimes our parents love us too much, you know?”

“No, what do you mean?”

“I mean they make sacrifice for us.”

“But that’s good.”

“Yes, but then they can ask us to do anything and we feel we must say yes.”

“Like what?”

“Like marry some person, or study what they want.”

“Oh, so you don’t have freedom.”

She shrugged. “Sometimes,” she said, becoming very Turkish again, not wanting to criticise her country too much.

“Well, I think we have lost something in the West,” Emma said. “There is some big problem with our parents and their children. And with our communities. Everyone is too individual. And it makes us feel lonely.”

“Hmm. I have heard about this,” Melek said.

“I look at your families, at your communities, and I feel hungry,” Emma said, with an ashamed laugh. *And jealous*, she thought.

Melek gave her a serious look. “This is not good,” she said.

“I know.”

They sipped at their tea, and looked around them at the noisy café, where everyone was touching as they talked, putting a hand on an arm, sharing a smile, and Emma realised with surprise that she was almost close to tears.

Don’t be ridiculous, she told herself.

She smiled at Melek, abstractedly. The thing about these sessions was that you couldn’t let the conversation falter, like you would in real life. And although Melek was a friend of a kind, she missed having her real girlfriends around to talk to. There were some things she couldn’t talk about with Melek, or with any of the boys.

“So what’s happening at uni?” she asked cheerfully. She had to pull herself together, she thought sternly, get back to how she had been before.

After the class, she went to a department store to buy some new lingerie. She had thought it would make her feel better, but as she stood in the change room, in sexy underpants that she had put on over her old ones, in bras that were mostly too big for her,

with straps that cut into her skin, and turned herself around under the bright lights, looking at herself with the same criticism she always did, at every flaw, she wondered who she was buying it for. There was nobody to see it except herself.

*

Ahmet, one of the students at the hotel, was telling her a story.

“Last week my car breaks down, so I take it to a maniac,” he said. “And this maniac was a big liar. He make me pay too much money for this job.”

Emma began laughing quietly, and he looked at her questioningly.

“Mechanic,” she said. “Not maniac. A maniac is a crazy person.”

“Ha ha! Actually, it is same word in Turkish! We say *mekanik*!” Ahmet shouted, happy to be the centre of attention. “So I try to make it different!”

They all laughed.

“Teacher, are you married?” Eda asked her, suddenly, and the class fell silent in expectation.

“No,” Emma said, with a smile. They always asked her if she was married eventually.

“Well, don’t worry,” said Ahmet. “You look very young still.”

“Oh, thanks Ahmet,” Emma said, laughing. “Good to know.”

She was getting old by Turkish standards. Maybe she was getting old by any standards.

“Teacher,” Damla asked her. “In Australia, when women are getting married?”

“Uh, well it depends,” Emma said. “But maybe around thirty.”

The students all looked at each other in surprise.

“Very old!” some said.

“When do women usually get married here?” she asked, although she already knew the answer. It was like this, teaching English. You had the same conversations again and again.

“I think twenty-three,” said Damla, looking around at the other girls for confirmation.

“Yes,” they said, nodding in agreement. “Twenty-three, twenty-four.”

Ender made a tsking noise, lifting his head as he did so.

“In Istanbul, yes,” he said. “But outside, it is younger.”

The women agreed amongst themselves.

“Yes,” they said seriously. “It is usually nineteen, twenty, something like this.”

“Outside, it is the real Turkey,” Ender said. “You should go to there.”

“Everything there is always the same, teacher,” Eda said. “But in Istanbul, anything can be. Women here can be more free.”

“For a little time!” Damla said.

And all the girls in the class laughed, but there was a edge of sadness to their laughter, because what she had said was true.

*

She came home one day and found three men pulling huge roof tiles down from the attic and stacking them up in front of her door. They were short, smiling men, covered in dust, and seemed totally unaware of what they were doing.

“*Merhaba*,” she said.

“*Merhaba!*” they chorused back.

She pointed at the door, and raised her eyebrows and they stared at her in fascination. She groped for the Turkish word for ‘house’.

“*Ev*,” she finally blurted.

Their eyes goggled. One of them groaned and smacked his forehead. She sat down on the stairs while they moved the tiles away, wishing they would hurry up. She was desperately hungover and hadn’t slept much the night before. All she wanted was a nap before she had to go back to work.

They finally finished, and waved her inside with many apologies, and she smiled and forgave them.

But when she came home later that night, she found the door totally blocked off, from floor to wall, with hundreds of tiles, like a huge silent mouth.

“Unbelievable,” she said to herself, and called Jay.

“Hey, are you inside the house?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Open the door.”

She heard the door open. There was a moment’s stunned silence.

“Holy shit,” he said in his amused drawl. “Are you on the other side of that?”

At that moment there was a blackout, and the landing was plunged into darkness.

“Oh my God,” they both said, and started laughing.

They were always having moments like this in Istanbul. Things were constantly going wrong – there was a blackout once a month, lifts broke down, the water stopped, but you loved it anyway, or maybe you loved it more because of its flaws. You had such adventures.

She called Eddie. Perhaps she had only been waiting for an excuse like this.

“Em,” he said, in a colourless voice.

“I’m sorry to call you now, but I’m in a bit of trouble...” As she explained the situation, she felt herself sounding weaker and weaker, as though the story weren’t even true. “...So I was wondering if I could come and sleep at your house.”

He hesitated for a moment.

“Of course,” he said. “Come on over.”

She felt her way down the stairs very slowly in the pitch black, and then walked out through the Balık Pazarı, where the fruit and vegetables lay, waiting patiently under hessian sacks, forming strange mounds in the darkness.

It had started to rain, softly and persistently.

“What next,” she said under her breath.

The streets were completely empty, the cobblestones slippery, the shop fronts black.

The only light came from the restaurants down the laneways where the tables were lit by tea light candles. The faces of the customers wavered and disappeared in the flickering light and were washed away in the blur of the rain on the windows.

Emma’s heart was beating nervously.

Suddenly, the rain started to fall harder, invisible in the darkness, and the water soaked through her clothes to her skin, trickling down her shirt, over her waist, down her legs.

She shivered, and a thrill crept over her.

Maybe something new was waiting to happen.

Eddie laughed when he saw her.

“It’s not funny,” she said. But she laughed with him, easily, as though nothing had changed between them. There was such electricity between them, and she felt the grip tighten on her heart again.

“Get in the shower, I’ll get you some warm clothes,” he said.

As the hot water ran over her back, she smiled to herself, a rare smile that only came when she was living dangerously again. She loved the feeling of plunging into something dangerous, something which she hadn’t thought through, of just letting life take her where it would. She was going to be reckless with herself, she knew.

“So,” she said when she came out. “I’ve been in a bit of a dark void.”

“A dark *void*?” Eddie said. He loved to make words ridiculous, swooping up high on the end of the word.

“Yes. But now I’m back.”

He gave her a tender look.

“Listen, Em, I love you, you know that, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“So I think we should just be friends.”

She looked up at him, shocked.

“Why?”

“Because I know myself, and I’ll just hurt you again.”

“No you won’t.”

“Em, I can’t be with just one woman. I’ve tried with you. I’ve really tried. But I just can’t. I’m bad, especially when I’ve had a few.”

“I don’t know if I can be just friends with you,” she said, feeling like crying, but holding it in.

“Yes, you can. We can,” he said. “I’m sure of it. You know, we can still see each other every day. We can still care about each other. But I don’t want to make you any promises, because I won’t keep them.”

“OK,” she said, in a small voice.

“I’m only saying this because you mean so much to me.”

“I know,” she said. “Um. Have you got anything to drink?”

“Come over here,” he said. “I want to give you a hug, our first hug as friends.”

Emma inched over towards him on the couch, and he put his arm around her, and squeezed her in close.

But it was too hard for her. She felt like something was tearing.

“I think I’d rather have a beer if you’ve got one,” she said, pulling away awkwardly.

“Sure,” he said. “Of course.”

He stood up to go to the kitchen, and she sat staring at the carpet, her arms folded across her body.

Chapter 6

Summer was creeping in now.

The stones of the city absorbed and radiated more and more heat, and the smells of the Balık Pazarı became sharper – fish scraps, smoky oil, and the faint tang of cats. On Istiklal Caddesi, people moved more slowly, leisurely, more dreamily, and out on the streets there was something half hearted about the way the taxi drivers leant on their horns. The air conditioning was always breaking down in Emma’s classrooms, and her students drooped like flowers, the women perspiring under their heavy makeup, and the men sweating great circles into the underarms of their shirts.

But the nights were beautiful, and the city came alive. All night long, music played from the rooftop bars on Nevizade, and when Emma fell asleep it was still going, a mixed up soundtrack to her dreams.

Emma bought a little *fesleğen* plant, with tiny basil leaves, and put it on the windowsill, and every afternoon the shadow of the plant fell onto the blue wall opposite, and grew longer and darker as the heat of the day fell away. They all loved to watch it, and one day Eddie started a new painting, of the shadow, all in blue. It was the only painting she had ever seen of his that wasn’t of a woman.

“I love it,” she said, when he finished.

“Really?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

“Well, I painted it for you.”

“What?”

“Yeh. It’s yours.”

Emma looked at him, and felt a great happiness well up inside her. It was the nicest present anyone had ever given her. But again she was thrown into confusion, about Eddie and what he wanted from her. These days Eddie treated Emma as though she were very special to him. In some ways she was closer to him now than she had been before.

But she knew he was seeing Ipek, his Turkish girlfriend, again.

He was always joking about her in front of the family, about how possessive she was, and what a pain in the ass she was, how demanding. But he never brought her out with them, and Emma didn’t really mind that he was seeing her. If it had to be someone, she preferred that it was this girl that he obviously wasn’t serious about.

But one night they all met up at the pub and there she was, Ipek, sitting next to Eddie smiling. There was something so proprietary in her body language that Emma knew who she was immediately, without ever having met her before.

Oh God, she thought to herself, *now I’m going to have to pretend to everyone that this is fine*. It was typical of Eddie not to have warned her that Ipek was coming, she thought angrily. Just when she felt she could trust him again, he pulled a stunt like this.

“Hi,” she said, holding out her hand. “You must be Ipek. I’m Emma.”

Ipek looked up and gave her a limp handshake. She had dark sleek hair and a pair of cold intelligent eyes, and Emma saw the surprise there, and the relief, that this Emma who she had heard so much about was so tomboyish. A light of triumph visibly flickered through her, and she flicked her shining hair to one side and smiled.

Emma immediately hated her.

She spent the night on the other side of the table, talking fiercely to Kai about teaching, pretending that everything was fine. But she could feel the way Eddie watching her, waiting for a reaction. Maybe he had brought Ipek along to make Emma feel jealous. But why would he? Why did Eddie ever do the stupid things he did? Sometimes Emma was mystified by it all.

She left early and went back to the flat, where she sat drinking and smoking cigarettes for hours until the ashtray was full. She had a book open in front of her, but she didn't really read it. The words slowly blurred on the page.

After that one time, Eddie never brought Ipek out with them again. As the hot weeks of summer went by, the incident passed out of Emma's mind, and things went back to the way they were. Emma forgot to water the *fesleğen* plant for a few days and it withered in the heat and died, its shadow gone from the wall. She kept saying she would buy another one, but she never did. And anyway, the painting was there, to remind her.

The little apartment up in the sky became a hot box, and Jay and Emma started to spend most of their time on the rooftop of Vera, to keep cool, or so they told themselves. The roof was crowded with tables and stools, and was always full of people smoking and getting drunk and talking seriously or laughing like crazy. There wasn't much of a view, but you could catch the breeze up there, and the bartenders knew them, and let them stay on after closing time.

Sometimes Jay and Emma took their flashcards with them to the pub, to expand their vocabulary.

Kitchen. *Mutfak*.

Pen. *Kalem*.

Ash tray. *Kül Tablası*

Learning the language was a key into the city. Now, when Emma walked the streets, the jumble of words began to untangle. She took great pleasure in the ease with which she negotiated the simple things – getting a taxi, buying groceries, ordering in a restaurant. She felt cool, like an old hand. Istanbul was home.

On the weekends, they had started going to small *meyhanes*, the ones the tourists didn't know about, and to cafes at night with live *Fasıl* music, with wild drums and clarinets, and they danced to the music with their hands above their heads, in a circle, and as the music dipped and swayed so did they.

Emma felt that she was penetrating deeper into Istanbul, discovering the layers beneath the layers, but sometimes she felt that she could go on and on and never reach the centre.

Perhaps there was no centre.

*

Emma and Jay were drinking together again.

Why do people want to be rich?" Emma asked.

"I don't know, I suppose because it makes life easy?"

"Yeah, but all the rich people I know aren't very happy."

"How many rich people do you know?" he said, teasing.

"Lots!" Emma said. "You know I move in elevated circles."

“Of course.”

“But seriously. People want to be rich because they think it will make them happy. But the happiest people I know are the people who have a very simple life. It’s strange, isn’t it? I don’t ever want to be rich.”

“You might when you get older.”

“Maybe. Do you think you will?”

“I was in that whole corporate world before I came here, in sales, chasing the dollar. It’s like you’re chasing something that doesn’t exist, some dream of wealth and success, but it has no meaning outside of that experience, you know? Which is why it is ultimately hollow.”

Emma looked at him with satisfaction. She had never had a friend like Jay before, a person who she wanted to see, wanted to talk to every night, and never got bored with. They did everything together – they cooked together, read together, studied Turkish together and most nights they were there at Vera, talking.

“Does Helene know you’re always drinking with me?” she asked.

“Not exactly,” he said, looking irritated. He was very independent.

“I didn’t mean – “

“She knows I need my space.”

“How are things going?”

He sighed, gave her a measuring look. “Actually, I want to break it off.”

“Again? Why?”

“I don’t know. I miss my freedom.”

“Well, if you really don’t think it’s going to work out, break it off, but I think you’d be crazy. Helene is amazing.”

“Yeah, I know, I know. I just don’t know if I’m ready for a relationship.”

And he gave her a lopsided grin. Secretly, she was glad he and Helene weren’t too close. Now she didn’t see Eddie all the time, Jay and Kai had become so much more important to her. She liked Kai’s company, he had become her confidante and he was happy to talk to her for hours about her love life, but it was Jay who she felt most comfortable with. He was a kindred spirit, and they understood each other without the slightest effort. And of the whole family, Jay was the most self sufficient, the happiest, the least complicated. The others took something away from her, but Jay always gave her something to think about.

*

One morning as Emma was eating breakfast, Jay came home from Helene’s house with a black eye and one side of his face covered in a graze that was already hardening into a bloody scab.

“God!” she said. “What happened?”

“I got mugged last night.”

Emma gaped at him.

“Where?”

“In Taksim Square.”

“Are you OK?”

“Yeah. They got my camera, though.”

“Oh no!”

“Yeah.”

“How did it happen?”

“Well, I was wasted, obviously,” he said wryly. “And I went to Taksim Square for a burger. And these two guys came up to me, and told me to give them my camera, and I said no, and then one of them fucking hit me in the face. And then they got me on the ground and they were kicking me in the ribs, in my back, everywhere. It was fucking crazy. Look at my ribs!” he said, pulling up his shirt to show her big black bruises. He seemed close to tears.

Emma tsked.

“Shit,” she said.

“So I just gave them my fucking camera with all my pictures. And then they wanted my money. And yeah, they were these big guys, so I gave them my money.”

“Don’t worry,” she said. “We’ll all pitch in and give you some cash.”

“Thanks,” he said, looking glum. “It was a really horrible experience. I feel like Istanbul has turned on me or something.”

Emma patted him on the back and he winced.

He tried to look angry, but a smile escaped him.

Jay wasn’t the same for a while after that. He was easily irritated, and he became bitter when he spoke about Istanbul, as though he knew the real city, and the others didn’t. And he looked strange without his camera always around his neck, as though he had lost a limb.

*

The family went down to the great outdoor café in Beşiktaş to sit by the water and drink tea. Jay found a couple of tables right next to the water, and *hoyed* to them, and as soon as they sat down one of the waiters came slithering through the crowds to take their order.

“*Beş cai*,” Jay said in his drawl, and the waiter looked surprised.

“*İngilizce?*” he said.

“*Hayır. American,*” said Jay.

“*Benim İngilizce,*” said Eddie. “*O Fransız. O Avustralyalı. O Mısırlı.*”

He always did this.

“United Nations, *dime?*”

And the waiter walked off laughing, just another of Eddie’s conquests.

It was a grey day. The line between the water and the sky was blurry and soft, and the seagulls seemed very white and clearly defined as they flew by. Boats went to and fro busily, small boats with fishermen standing up in the bow, tugs, rusty motorboats, and the old ferries, sedate as kings, with their grand wake spreading behind them like a train. Emma watched the Bosphorus flowing past very quietly at their side. It felt as though there were something trapped alive under the surface, perhaps all the lost dreams of Istanbul, millions of them, like ribbons of light under the water.

Kai and Eddie started playing *tavla*, and the dice rattled over the wooden board.

“Do you know why Turks drink tea so much more than coffee?” Helene asked.

“No, why?” Jay said. He was always interested in history.

“Because when the Ottoman Empire fell, they lost Mocha, so of course they lost their coffee supply...”

They were perfect for each other, Emma thought, and tuned out – she didn’t care about history today. She only cared about now, about this moment, this one moment in her life. She loved Beşiktaş. The tea arrived, steaming in the little glasses, and as she took hers, the glass wobbled and rattled in the brightly coloured saucer. There were two white cubes of sugar in the teaspoon, and as usual she passed hers over to Kai, who had a sweet tooth, and he took them from her with a smile and stirred them into his glass, dwarfed in his big hand. Emma lit a cigarette, and looked at the golden red colour of her tea, which had caught the light of the day and become translucent. The air was full of the clickety-clack of tavla pieces – the unsteady, endless heartbeat of the city, and across the water, the traffic jerked on the distant bridge like sluggish blood. It was huge, this city, crammed in on a series of hills, so dense and precipitous it looked like it would tumble off the hills if you added just one more building.

Emma thought about the great emptiness of Australia, about the wide spaces in Queensland where the grey clouds hung low over the green sugarcane, about driving for hours and hours across the Hay Plain where the highway shimmered like a silver ribbon through the emptiness, about the crack of the bush, and the tinkle of its little creeks, and about the desert, that great brown space in the centre that seemed to radiate sorrow, as though the heart of the country itself were thirsty.

There was something about living in Istanbul that dredged these memories of the country out of her, even though she had spent most of her life in the city.

She felt a tug of homesickness. Lately, she had sometimes thought she saw someone she knew from home on Istiklal, from the shape of a head, a laugh, a certain way of walking, and her heart had leapt, irrationally. But these were only the ghosts of old friends, flitting through the crowds to tease her.

She looked up and saw Eddie watching her.

“What are you thinking about, Em?” he asked, giving her a sharp look.

But she wouldn’t tell him the truth. Nobody talked about being homesick.

“I was just thinking how much I love it here,” she said.

“I told you you would never leave,” he said, looking pleased, and they smiled at each other in a way that made her feel it was just the two of them sitting there.

“Yeah, until you get mugged,” Jay put in.

“I know,” Emma said. “But I mean, look, we all walk around late at night drunk, and nothing has ever happened to anyone before. So I guess it was only a matter of time. I mean, it could happen in any city. People get mugged in Sydney too.”

“That’s true,” Eddie said. “But it is dangerous here. We should all be more careful at night. And Em you should stop walking around by yourself.”

“I’ve walked around by myself all my life. And nothing has ever happened to me,” she said. “I’m not going to change now.”

There were some things Emma was stubborn about, and they knew better than to try to change her mind.

Eddie rolled his eyes, and Kai laughed.

“Anyway,” she said. “Don’t you agree, Helene, that it’s more dangerous for the guys here than the women? I mean, men are so respectful of women here, that I think even the criminals would be reluctant to mug a girl, right?”

“You may be right,” Helene mused. “I don’t know. I’ll ask some of my Turkish friends.”

“So you guys should be the careful ones,” Emma said.

But they all knew that when they were drunk they would all do whatever they wanted.

*

One day Eddie asked her if she wanted to go away for the weekend, to a beach not far away.

“Just us?” she asked, surprised.

He grew gruff.

“If *you* want,” he said. “You’re still my best mate.”

She hesitated. One part of her was wary of the idea, and another part of her couldn’t think of anything better. But she would control things, she thought. It would be OK.

“I’d love to,” she said.

They sat at the ferry station playing cards and eating cheese and tomato *tost* while they waited for the ferry. Eddie was winning, as always, and she was feeling frustrated.

“How’s things going with Ipek?” she asked, so he would stop bragging.

“Who?” he said, hamming it up.

“Oh, not on at the moment?”

“Nah, I’ve had it with that girl,” he said, for the hundredth time. He looked down at the table, and then up at her with eyes that were brimming with laughter.

“You’re such a rogue,” she said, and it felt good to be able to joke about it, like picking a piece of glass out of her heart.

The ferry finally arrived, and Emma stood out on the back deck watching the wake spread its skirts behind them. It was one of her favourite things in the world to watch, the wake behind a boat, it made you feel that life was really moving. She thought back over the last five months in Istanbul, and about how good she had become at teaching, how confident she was the moment she stepped in to the classroom, the way the students laughed all through the lesson, the way they loved her. The birds wheeling around the ferry slowly dropped away and soon there was nothing to see but blue water. She smiled.

Eddie was inside reading some Russian book he had been obsessed with for days, and after a while, she wandered in and got them both some tea. When she found him, he read her some of the book, which was about a giant cat playing chess.

“Since when do you like reading so much anyway,” she said.

“Fuck off,” he said. Then he laughed. “Since I started reading this book I suppose!”

“It seems like a very strange book,” Emma said.

“It’s amazing,” he said. “But do you mind, I’m nearly finished now, so can you go away?”

“No, I want you to come outside with me to look at the beautiful water.”

“Oh God, you’re a pain.”

She smiled at him, and he sighed.

They stood out on the deck, leaning on the railing, not talking much. Just like old friends, she thought with satisfaction.

“It’s a bit fucking windy out here,” he said grumpily.

“It’s fresh,” she said. “It’s good for you, a bit of fresh air.”

He turned up his jacket collar.

“I’ll have a cigarette to keep me warm,” he said, pulling out his pack, and she snorted.

“You know, when I was a boy, I always thought I would be a sailor,” he said after he had lit his cigarette. “It’s funny, isn’t it? Even back then, I think I had this feeling for travel.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“My Mum always said I was being stupid. And then of course I got married so young, and the kids came along.”

It was rare for him to talk about his children. She hesitated. She was going to ask him if he missed them. But there was something about him that made it impossible.

“I always wanted to be an actress,” she said instead. “But then I started acting in plays at school, and got terrible stage fright. I used to go completely white.”

He laughed a little but didn’t say anything.

Emma felt she had disappointed him somehow.

They both looked back out at the water, at the wake that spread out further and further, until it disappeared.

The ferry pulled in at an ugly town with huge high rises along the water, and as they got off Emma felt disappointed, although she didn’t say anything.

“Don’t worry, Em, this isn’t it,” said Eddie, giving her a kind smile.

He went and chatted to an old lady wearing a headscarf, who started waving her hands in the air, and after a long time he came back across the street, twisting his mouth around, in the way he did when he was amused.

“We have to take a bus,” he said.

The bus took them down a long winding road up and down green hills, until they reached Çınarcık, a little seaside town with a long pretty beach.

Emma had thought it would take ages to find a hotel, but within minutes they heard a shout.

“You are looking for the best hotel in the town?”

A man wearing a pink striped shirt was standing in the doorway of a rundown little place, cocking his eyebrow at them.

“Absolutely we are,” Eddie said.

“Double room?” he asked.

“No,” Emma jumped in. “Two beds.”

He showed them up to a decent room with a couple of beds, nothing fancy, but simple and clean. Outside, there was a balcony that looked over the sea.

While Eddie haggled with him over the price, Emma looked around the room, feeling nervous about the beds, and wondering if she should have asked for her own room.

You will not fuck him, she swore, and pinched herself secretly on the outside of her thigh, *no matter how drunk you get*.

Night was falling and they set out to explore the town. There was some kind of fair set up on the street, with stalls and lights which hung from fragile wires in the sky,

casting orange pools over everything. The streets were packed with Turkish holiday makers, from slow stout old people to shrieking children who chased each other, weaving through the crowds like snakes.

“Not many foreigners here,” Emma said with satisfaction.

“Yes, it’s a good place isn’t it, darling?” he said.

They sat in the garden of a seafood restaurant, and ate a whole fish with lemon, and gossiped about everyone they knew. Then, after a couple of bottles of wine, they started to talk about serious things.

“Sometimes I wonder if my life is so frustrating because of me, or because it’s just life, you know, and everyone’s life is like this. You know life is suffering and all that,” Emma said. “Do you believe that you can make your life great just by trying?”

He looked at her and laughed.

“Absolutely,” he said. “My life is great.”

Did he really believe that? Possibly – it was the idea of himself that he always sold. But she wondered.

“Is it great because you’ve decided it will be?”

He looked at her and giggled.

“Yes.”

This was the kind of conversation she should be having with Jay. Eddie didn’t do philosophising. He just lived his philosophy, like some kind of simple genius.

“What’s your recipe for happiness then?” she asked.

“Just do whatever the fuck you want to do when you want to do it.”

“And what about the people you hurt in the process?”

“People make their own choices, Em. It’s not my responsibility.”

“I think that’s a terrible way to live.”

“Well, I’m happy, and you’re not, darling.”

He was selfish, she thought. It was disguised as something else, but basically he was selfish. She looked away, at a lemon tree, its leaves shining in the light, and felt tears pricking at her eyes. *Oh shit*, she thought, *now is not the time to cry*. She swallowed hard.

“Let’s go,” she said.

“Alright,” he said. “I’ll get dinner. Wait a minute.”

As he walked off to pay, she watched him, and felt that she was seeing him clearly for the first time.

When they got back to their room, Eddie took hold of her arms and pinned them back against the wall.

“No,” she said. “I don’t want to do this with you anymore.”

“Why not?”

“I just don’t want to.”

“But we’re both here. We may as well have some fun.”

“No. I want us to be friends.”

“We will still be friends.”

He kissed her, knocking her head back against the wall. She hardly felt it.

“Come on, Em.”

“I can’t,” she said, twisting out of his grasp suddenly.

She went out onto the balcony and lit a cigarette.

An enormous full moon hung in the sky, its white face pockmarked. It unsettled her. Had it been there all night, watching them?

Where was Eddie? She thought he might come out and join her for a smoke. *What we need to do is to talk it all out, once and for all*, she thought, but when she went back inside, Eddie was passed out, snoring.

She thought she’d be able to sleep, but when she put her head down, the room started spinning in a sickening way, so she got up and went out to look at the moon and smoked cigarettes, one after the other, and thought about life in a swimming, surging, slow way, while the waves crashed again and again on the shore.

Sometimes she surprised herself – she made herself a promise and kept it. She knew she would never be free of Eddie. He was the thing she flew around. But she had the strength now to keep him at a distance, to stop herself from getting close enough to be hurt again.

Eddie woke up cranky, and made her feel as though she were a nuisance. *Fuck him*, she muttered in her mind. But he perked up over breakfast – he never stayed in a bad mood for long. They ate at a simple little street café with formica benches and drank tea and ate boiled eggs, and cucumber and tomato salad with lemon juice and olive oil, and white cheese with tiny black olives. It was delicious, in the way that all breakfasts are delicious when you are on holiday.

They didn’t talk about what had happened the night before. Emma knew that they would never talk about things like that in the light of day. They were both too weak at communicating. Now they would just keep playing the game that they always played, this game where they always danced on the line of love.

Down on the beach, they sat at one of the tables put out on the sand by the café, surrounded by Turkish families setting themselves up for the day. After they had ordered tea, a boy of about twelve came wandering over. He had pale brown skin, and a long face with long dark hair falling over one eye.

“Hello,” he said. “Do you speak English?”

“Yes,” said Eddie, with his high giggle. “Do *you*?”

The boy smiled at him with relief.

“Yes, well, only a little. I am studying English at school.” He was very solemn. “And at home. You see, I want to be an English teacher one day.”

“We are English teachers,” said Emma.

His eyes grew round, and he gulped.

“Where are you working?”

“In Istanbul.”

“Ah,” he said on a sigh. “Istanbul.”

Suddenly, there was a scurry of sand behind him, and a little girl appeared beneath his arm with a squeal, her face split in a grin.

“Let me introduce my sister to you,” he said hurriedly, as though attempting to cover up a terrible faux pas on her part. “This is Ebru.”

They all introduced themselves. The boy's name was Hakan. Ebru crawled under the table, sideways, like a crab.

"How is Istanbul?" the boy asked, ignoring this.

"Haven't you been there?" Eddie asked.

"No." This was obviously a misery. "My father won't take me. He thinks it is not a good place."

A man at a table not far away was gesturing and shouting at him.

"My father. He says I am misusing your time," he said.

"No, no," said Eddie. "Don't go. We want to talk to you."

The boy smiled. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, sit down," said Emma. They waved and smiled at the father.

The boy sat down.

"How many places have you been?" he asked.

They talked for a while. It had been a long time since Emma had spoken to a child. She had forgotten what it was like, she had forgotten about innocence. It was like clean water rinsing through her, washing away walls she had built up inside herself.

"Why do you want to be a teacher?" she asked him, shyly.

He looked at her in surprise. "Teacher is a very important job!" he said.

"Yes," Emma said, her eyes twinkling. "I totally agree."

He looked at her suspiciously, and then they laughed together.

His father shouted at him again.

"I'm sorry. I must go. Thank you for your conversation."

"Good luck, Hakan," said Eddie. "I think you will be an excellent teacher."

He stood up proudly.

"*Gel, Ebru,*" he whispered, and she came out, looking dizzy, as though being under the table had been a wonderful experience full of strange delights.

After they left, Emma saw them running down to the water together, the boy forgetting himself, becoming a child again. She had never wanted children. But perhaps that was why people want them – for that opportunity to feel innocence again. And she felt herself suddenly wanting one, in her body. She looked around at all the children playing on the beach, and for the first time she thought that they were beautiful. They were so unspoiled, so clear eyed and naïve. And a small part of her mourned the loss of that in herself. Life was so sordid when you grew up.

Eddie was still reading his book.

She wondered if he ever thought about his children. He must think about them all the time. But he never spoke about them, not even when he'd been drinking.

He looked up and caught her looking at him. Sometimes his eyes were full of sadness, she thought, for himself, for her, for what they had together.

"We'll have to go back soon," he said abruptly.

"Yes," she said. "In a little while."

They turned back to their books, listening to the shouts of the children, and the steady rush and pull of the waves, marking the passing time.

The summer went on, day after day of relentless heat. Students cancelled all the time, or went away on holiday, and sometimes Emma only had to teach a few hours a week. Suddenly, teachers started leaving Istanbul, their contracts over, and there was party after goodbye party. Every time someone left, the family became closer and closer, like a group of soldiers still standing.

Eddie was always calling her.

“Hello, darling,” he would say. “Would you like to come over for a curry?”

He would cook her lunch at his place, spicy curries with salads of tomato, cucumber and onion cut very fine, to cool the palate, then he would watch sport on TV, and she would read a book.

Sometimes they would talk, but often they would just lie there, stunned by the heat. Eddie watched the cricket, and shouted at the television, in the way men did, as though they could do a much better job if it were them. They were playing for the Ashes in England, not that Emma really knew what that meant. She had never been able to understand why people cared so much about sport. To her, it seemed like a very basic kind of amusement.

“It’s funny that you love sport so much,” she said to him one day.

“Why?”

“I mean, because in other ways you’re so sensitive, with your painting and your cooking, you know.”

“I’m from fucking Manchester, alright?” he said. “Which just happens to have the best football team in the world.”

“Whatever,” she said. “It’s all the same shit to me.”

And he came over and sat on her until she screamed at him to get off.

*

Emma and Kai went to a bar in Nevizade one afternoon to play cards and wait for the others to finish work.

“You can’t play that card,” she said, sighing. Cards were never very good with Kai because he always forgot the rules.

“Oh yeah,” he said grinning at her.

A group of men sitting nearby were singing a song very sadly. Judging by their dishevelled appearance, they had been drinking for a long time.

“I wonder what they’re singing about?” Emma said.

“I think they’re Galatasaray fans,” Kai said. “My students told me they lost today to Fenerbahçe.”

“Oh right, yeah I think I heard about that too.”

Kai looked at his hand vaguely, then put down another card. She rolled her eyes.

“You can’t play that card either, you’ve still got trumps.”

“Oh yeah.”

“How much marijuana did you smoke when you were young?”

“Ha ha.”

They played for a while in silence, listening to the men sing.

“Hey, I’ve been meaning to ask you,” Emma said. “Whatever happened to that student, you know the one who let you touch her breasts?”

He gave her his goofy smile.

“Uh, well, it happened again, once, and then it just stopped.”

“What do you mean?”

“I just didn’t do it again.”

“Why not?”

He looked embarrassed.

“I don’t know. I think I just got bored.”

“Or maybe you got chicken.”

He gave her a fond look, and swiped the side of her head affectionately.

“Shutup you.”

The men kept singing, one song after another, until Emma started to get annoyed.

“God, they really get worked up, don’t they?” she said. “Do you want to go somewhere else after this drink?”

“Sure,” he said. “Where do you want to go?”

Suddenly a huge roar tunneled down the narrow street towards them, followed closely by a crowd of men chanting and waving a giant yellow and blue Fenerbahçe flag above their heads. Everybody on Nevizade stopped talking and stared.

This was Galatasary territory.

The men at Emma’s side stared in disbelief as the fans approached. One man had his glass halfway to this mouth and it hung there as though he were frozen. A few drops fell from the bottom of the glass on to the table.

As the Fenerbahçe fans drew level, without even looking at each other, the men jumped up in a quiet fury and launched themselves into the other men. Fists made contact with skin and bone, and blood started poured from one man’s nose, while other men fell to the ground and rolled around together grunting and grappling, and those still standing aimed vicious kicks at the ribs of those who were down. A big stick appeared in someone’s hand, seemingly from nowhere, and one of the men cracked it over the head of another with a sickening noise, and the man immediately started bleeding from the head, and staggered with a crash into Emma and Kai’s table. Beer sloshed everywhere.

Emma stood up and stared at the man, feeling a rush of adrenaline, until Kai grabbed her roughly by the wrist and pulled her inside, shielding her with his body.

“Let go,” she said, pushing him away and going to the door. “I want to watch.”

But suddenly the fight had melted away. Some men were huddled around the man with the bleeding head, shouting angrily.

The bartenders came out from behind the bar, warily, and stood out the front, looking one way and then the other, and talking in low voices.

“Wow,” said Emma. “That was amazing.”

She felt high. She had never seen violence like that before.

“You’re crazy, girl,” Kai said. “That was fucked.”

“You should go,” one of the bartenders said to them as he came back inside. “Maybe these men come back.”

“Right, come on,” Kai said to Emma, firmly, pulling her away.

“OK OK,” she said, shaking him off.

They walked out into Nevizade, where it seemed the whole street was still holding its breath.

Emma’s heart was beating fast.

It felt like something sleeping in the city had awoken, as though the streets had cracked open and released something angry.

Her students seemed embarrassed when she told them what had happened.

“The most crazy fans of Turkey are Fenerbahçe,” Umut said. “They go to match with hammer.”

“Yes, Fenerbahçe have crazy people,” said Volkan “But also Galatasaray.”

Emine piped up. “Teacher, in Turkey, woman always say their boyfriend you don’t love me as much as your team.”

Everybody laughed.

“It’s true! It’s very common in Turkey men love their team more than their wife or girlfriend. The Turkish men very passion about the match.”

“Why do you think that is?” Emma asked.

“Our country like to make something together,” said an older man called Erkan. “With all people, and if you go to a match, you are together. Everyone say same sentence, and you fight together. In the Western World, everybody is opposite, they are individual. But we do everything together. We say ‘To be in one heart.’”

“You’re right,” she said. “We are missing this in the West, this feeling that we are a part of something. We are all alone, really.”

They looked at her with pity, and she suddenly laughed.

“Hey, it’s not *that* bad,” she said. “Come on, let’s do some study. Did everybody do the homework? Volkan? Yes? OK, you start.”

The class went on, but in her mind the violence she had seen was still fresh. She knew she would never forget it.

*

Emma was leaving the school one day and ran straight into Eddie on the street. He caught her in his arms and laughed.

“Hi,” she said, ridiculously pleased to see him as usual.

“Hi darling, what you up to?” he said, taking her by surprise and kissing her on the lips. “I was just coming to find you.”

“I just finished.”

“Do you want to come to my house for some lunch?”

“Alright,” she said, still feeling his kiss.

It was a hot windy day, and everyone was walking along Istiklal at an angle. Emma loved Istanbul on these windy days – there was a smell in the air, a smell of the sea coming up from the Bosphorus, mixed in with all the other smells of the city – the smell of hot bread, of sweat, and of cigarettes. Istiklal Caddesi was full of its usual human traffic – it was lunch time, and the street was swollen.

They stopped in the Balık Pazarı to buy ingredients – some vegetables, little pickled cucumbers, and spices spooned out of cloth sacks, and then they went to the bakery, where the loaves stacked in the windows seemed to peer out at you like elongated, blind eyes.

Eddie had a jocular way with the sales people. They loved him. And he loved them. He loved everyone, she thought, watching him. And she felt a sudden stab of envy for all the others he loved.

They went down to his house the back way, down the little streets with the cheerful vine leaves fluttering above, and chattered about this and that, but all she could think about was why he had kissed her on the lips. What did it mean? Her heart beat nervously as they walked, light and fast.

While lunch was cooking, they lay on the floor on big cushions and smoked and watched cricket. It wasn't too bad, she supposed. It was vaguely comforting, anyway, the sound of her youth, the deep voiced commentators, the thwack of the bat on the ball, the crowd cheering faintly. There was something soporific about it, something lazy, something Sunday afternoon. The rich smell of the curry slowly filled the room.

Suddenly, Eddie reached over and put his hand on her bare leg. She stayed very still, enjoying the sensation, and after a minute, he moved his hand up her skirt and into her pants, as though it had a mind of its own. She closed her eyes, and felt herself about to come quickly, almost within seconds, he was the only one who had ever been able to do that with her, and it was psychological, not physical, it was something to do with the way he played games with her, something to do with his power. She came hard, and kept her eyes closed afterwards, as the endorphins rushed through her brain.

When she leaned over to kiss him, he pulled her up, and took her to the bedroom.

Later, as she walked home, she felt like a drug addict who had just fallen off the wagon, that all her hard work had been for nothing, and she was angry with herself for her weakness.

He just used her, she thought, like a toy. When he felt like playing with her.

She went to the bottle shop and bought two six packs of beer and then went home, ready to obliterate herself, to force herself to forget about him.

And when she opened the door, there was Jay, his nose in a book, already drinking and snacking on peanuts. He looked up at her with his intelligent eyes, and they gleamed with humour when he saw how many beers she had bought.

"Do you want to have a few beers?" she said.

"Of course," he said. "Of course, my roomie."

They had drunk all the beer, and now they were at Vera. For a while, they had been saying, "Just one more, and then we'll go home." But they had known they were lying even when they said it. Now they were at the point where they were losing the thread of their conversation, struggling to connect their ideas, but feeling at the same time that everything they said was deeply important.

"Don't you think," Emma was saying. "That everything we do is motivated by the desire for sex or love. I mean, all these men with their flash cars, and women with makeup, and the whole capitalist thing you know, when you boil it down, it all functions because of our loneliness."

"I'm not lonely."

"Yes, you are. We all are. There's this big fat loneliness that sits inside us, I don't know where it comes from, but we're all terrified of it, and we'll do anything to forget it.

That's why we drink so much, you know, and why people take drugs, or why people watch TV, or become workaholics. We're all shitting ourselves, because that loneliness is waiting for us under the bed at night."

"Yeah," he said after a second. "Maybe you're right."

"I was talking to the students the other day," she said. "About their society, and the way they all feel a part of it. We don't have that. We don't have strong families. We don't have strong communities. And I feel like it has left a big hole in us. They're less lonely here."

"True. But being a part of something means you have to conform. We trade one thing for another, right? I mean, would you want to live with your family until you got married?"

"No," she said, smiling. "It wouldn't be very good for my sex life!"

They laughed.

"Another drink?" he asked.

She looked at him and smiled.

"Alright," she said. "Just one more."

By the time they got home, they had reached the sentimental phase.

"I'm so glad you're my friend," she said. "You know, if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have survived here."

"Awww," he said. "Come over here and give me a hug."

She laughed and went and laid her head against his shoulder. It was strange but nice. It felt right, to show their affection for each other, she thought, just like good friends. But then he leant over, lifted her face, and bit the side of her lip, softly, experimentally. His beard tickled her face.

"Ouch," she said.

They drew apart, and she looked at him, something dawning on her, about all the time they had spent together and what it meant. Was Jay in love with her? She couldn't believe it. And why was this just happening now, of all days? It was weird the way men were attracted to you when you had just had sex. It was like they could sense it.

They started to kiss in earnest, like teenagers, as though this was something they had both wanted for a long time, and they couldn't control themselves. *This will help me*, Emma thought. This was the way she could finally get over Eddie, push him out of her mind. She put her arms around Jay's neck, and kissed him, and felt his hands push down her sides. She knew he would try and fuck her, and she knew she would fuck him, and she didn't care, she didn't care about anything. She felt the old thrill of recklessness upon her.

But once he had taken off his clothes, she was surprised by his body. He always wore baggy clothes, which disguised his thin frame, but now she could see what it was really like. Thin and bony. Not her kind of body at all.

Jay went down on her without any preamble, but although he knew what he was doing, she had lost the moment. She faked pleasure, doing little moans, but after a while she couldn't fake it anymore, and pulled him up towards her. Maybe if he fucked her, it would come back, she thought. But as he pushed himself into her it felt all wrong.

Their eyes finally met, and they both became self-conscious, and in the backs of their eyes there was a kind of shock, as though they had both just realised that what they were doing was a kind of murder to their friendship.

Jay stopped, said he was sorry, he couldn't keep going, and went off to the toilet, and she lay on the couch, feeling bedraggled. And the depression about Eddie came back in a great rush, as though it had just been waiting for her all night.

Jay came out and looked at her, and she couldn't hide her sadness from him.

"Sleep in my bed with me tonight," he said, and she gave him a grateful look.

"You see," she mumbled, as they fell asleep. "It's the loneliness. Just like I said."

But he didn't say anything. Perhaps he was already asleep.

She fell asleep with her back to his, quickly, with the blessed falling away that alcohol brings.

When she woke up in Jay's bedroom in the morning, it all came back to her with terrible clarity. *Helene*, she thought, and groaned. She could hear Jay in the kitchen, clattering around, and she dreaded the moment when she would have to face him. But she couldn't stay here in his bedroom. It was absolutely the wrong place for her to be. She stood up, and her head immediately started pounding.

The lounge room was strewn with beer bottles and overflowing ashtrays, and it stank. She tiptoed around, putting on her clothes, in an agony of fear that he would come out before she was dressed.

Then she went to the kitchen door. Jay looked embarrassed when he saw her, his face tight around the jaw.

"Good morning," he said, his voice awkward.

"Hi." She leaned against the doorframe of the kitchen, feeling giddy.

"What are you making?" she said.

"Just some eggs."

"Can I have some?"

"Sure."

A silence fell.

"Listen, I'm sorry about last night," he said. "It was a mistake."

"I know," she said, but even though she agreed with him, she still felt humiliated that he was rejecting her.

"We should never have done it."

"No."

"It just made me realise that I am in love with Helene," he said.

A sudden rush of anger came up inside her.

"Well, I think I'm in love with you," she said.

He gulped. "What?"

Emma wheeled around, and flounced into her bedroom, slamming the door. She wanted to kick the wall or something, but she wasn't wearing any shoes, so she threw herself on the bed instead, and lit a cigarette. Now everything was fucked.

I'll get out of here, she thought. I'll just leave. I'll go to Japan. Everybody says you can make money there...

She laid her plans, it soothed her, she had done this so many times before.

She went to meet Kai that day, in an outdoor café near his house. They ordered omelettes, and she told him what had happened and how she had decided to leave.

His jaw dropped.

“Don’t leave Istanbul!” he said. “What would we do without you?”

She was surprised by the vehemence of his response.

“Oh, I’m sure life will go on,” she said.

“No,” he said. “You mean a lot to all of us, girl. Really. We all need you.”

She felt a swell of pleasure.

“Well, I don’t really want to go,” she said, toying with her tea. “But how can I ever face Helene?”

“Don’t worry,” he said. “This will all die out.”

She looked up at his face, awkward with kindness, and thought about what a dear person he was.

“It’s all a mess,” she said. “I feel in total despair.”

“Fucking Jay,” he said, savagely. “I could kill him.”

“Well, it takes two to tango,” she said, laughing a little.

“I bet he started it, didn’t he?”

“Well, yes. But maybe it had been there for a while, you know, we spend a lot of time together.”

“Does Eddie know?”

“No fucking way. And don’t tell him either.”

Kai looked annoyed. “Of course not,” he said, frowning.

She had forgotten all about Eddie.

“Oh God, I really think it’s best if I go, it’s best for everyone,” she said.

“Uh, it’s not best for me,” he said, shyly. “You’re my best friend.”

And she felt a little guilty, because she had never thought of him that way. Jay was her best friend.

“Am I?” she said, blushing. “Thanks.”

He smiled, his eyes twinkling behind his glasses, and she felt the cords of friendship between them strengthen.

“Just stay for another few weeks,” he said. “And see how things go.”

“I’ll think about it,” she said.

When she got home, Jay was sitting at the dining table looking miserable. She could hardly look at him, she felt so humiliated about telling him she loved him. She didn’t even know why she had said it. Was she in love with him?

“What are you going to tell Helene?” he asked her.

“I don’t know,” she said, looking over his head. “Are you going to lie?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“Well, I’ll lie too, if that’s what you want,” she said sulkily. “But I fucking *hate* lying.”

Somehow, her childishness broke the strained feeling between them, and he looked at her with a rueful smile.

“What a mess, hey?” he said.

She laughed a little, but then she suddenly felt terrible.

“I think I’ll go to bed,” she said. “I’m exhausted.”

Emma lay in bed trying to sleep, but worrying instead. She had always been an awful liar. But she couldn’t tell Helene the truth. It might break them up, and she didn’t want

to break them up. That would only compound her crime. She just hoped she would be able to pull it off. Usually people saw right through her.

Later that day, Helene came around for dinner. It was excruciating. Emma felt guilty. She felt paranoid that Helene would know what had happened, and she felt false. And most of all, she felt jealous. But Helene was oblivious, smiling and lovely as always, so warm towards Emma, so fragile and transparent in her love for Jay.

As she fell asleep that night, Emma wondered if she should leave for another country. But she couldn't. She was in love with Istanbul, with the sound of the call to prayer echoing across the city, the laughter of her students echoing off the classroom walls, the old money you counted in the millions, the cats that slunk along the side of the streets, the strong tea gleaming in the little glasses, the clacking heartbeat of tavla in the streets.

She couldn't leave, not yet.

Chapter 7

Emma's friend, Rose, was coming to Istanbul for a visit and Eddie had a couple of friends coming to visit at the same time, so they decided to organise a weekend away at the beach. Eddie made all the plans as usual.

"Right. We're going to a beach called Erikli," he told them one night at the pub. "It's not far away, and I've booked us a big house which is not too expensive, and it's right near the beach."

Everyone looked pleased. It would be good to get away. The weather had been wearing them all down. Emma couldn't sleep well at night in the heat, the sheets twisted around her ankles, and she spent half her day in taxis stuck in traffic with no air conditioning, sweating in her work clothes, the cigarette smoke of the driver curling around in the back seat with nowhere to go.

"Hey, just so you all know before you meet her," Emma said. "Me and Rose were together once, sort of."

"What do you mean?" asked Eddie, and she saw his lips were pursed up in delight, and his eyes were shining.

"I'll tell you the story if you buy me a beer," she said.

In London, she had lived in an enormous share house in Clapham North, in one of many brick row houses that went on for miles, and there were ten people living there, all Aussies and Kiwis, and sometimes more dossing in the lounge for ten quid a week, all falling over each other in the mornings trying to have a shower, and all cramming in to the kitchen to eat at night. They took it in turns to go shopping at Tesco once a week, and three or four of them would have to go, so that they could load up two whole trolleys full of cheap food and then haul them back along the footpath to the house in sluggish jerks, laughing all the way. Every night someone cooked – sausages, or chicken wings, or spag bol, and they all ate together round a small table, packed in, some standing, and after dinner they would get pissed, on cheap cans of Red Stripe from the local shop.

Everyone was working hard to survive in London, except for Spike. Spike was the only Brit, a 'hard man' who was weak, and he had run the house for years, supplying everyone with drugs in order to keep his own habit going. Once he went to Amsterdam and came back with a bunch of pills that he had swallowed in a condom, but Emma hadn't wanted to have a pill that had come out of Spike's ass. She preferred not to know where her pills came from.

Spike was dead now, too many drugs.

There had always been someone to talk to in the house, someone to get drunk with, and every weekend there were pills and parties and raves in Brixton, and then the comedown, smoking joints together in the courtyard out the back. Or sometimes they all sat on the roof, watching the weak sun come up in the grey London skies. On Sunday evenings they were all too exhausted to cook so they ordered Indian, butter chicken and rogan josh, and sat crowded around the telly to watch a video.

But even with so many people around, Emma had still felt lonely most of the time. They were all nice people but it wasn't until Rose arrived that she felt she had really found a friend. Rose was exactly the kind of person Emma had been looking for, someone she could talk about the meaning of life with, someone who read books,

someone who was smart. When Emma's roommate left the house, Rose moved in and took the other bed, and within days they were talking and laughing together through the night, the conversation coming out of them in great rushes. They were both only twenty-two, still figuring themselves out.

"You know, I don't really like guys," Rose said, blushing, one day as they sat at a café, and Emma wasn't surprised at all. Rose had that kind of feel to her. Sometimes Emma had dreamed about being with a woman, and woken up feeling excited but uncomfortable, as though her mind were not her own. But when she was awake, women didn't do much for her.

"I don't want to be part of that scene, though," Rose said. "It's not me."

Everything that Rose said sounded like she was flirting. She did it with everyone, women and men, speaking in a throaty suggestive way as though she were full of wonderful secrets. It drove people crazy. Half the men in the house wanted to fuck her, Emma knew.

"I can understand that," Emma said awkwardly, although she knew nothing about it at all. "It's kind of limiting, isn't it?"

"Yes, exactly. I don't see why my sexuality should have to define me anyway."

"That's right. These days no-one cares."

"I was in love with a married woman before I left Sydney," Rose said. "But she didn't love me."

Emma thought Rose was amazing, so sophisticated and so tragic.

One night, they all went to a rave in an old disused tower, full of echoing chambers and secret places. They had taken really good pills and Emma was off her face, grinning and weaving around the place, when suddenly she bumped into Rose.

"How good are these pills!" Emma shouted, waving her arms in the air.

Rose smiled, then leaned in and kissed her, and after a shocked second, Emma kissed her back. But she hoped no-one from the house would see them.

"I love you," Rose murmured, as they were kissing, and Emma's heart sank. She ruffled Rose's hair and danced away, pretending she hadn't heard. They were in the world of drugs, where everything that was said and done was a reflection of either the deepest truths or the shallowest of desires. So maybe Rose hadn't really meant it, maybe she was just out of it.

Emma threw herself into the music, which shuddered and wrapped itself around the room in great thudding booms.

After that, nothing was the same between them. Emma became more and more curious about Rose. She was tall, with long dark hair like a curtain and big brown eyes that looked at you and seemed to know you, and when she slept her hip curved underneath the covers. While outwardly they behaved in the same way, the atmosphere in the bedroom was charged every night, and as they self consciously went through the motions of getting dressed and undressed Emma caught glimpses of Rose's round breasts slipping under a t-shirt, of her white thighs as she got into bed.

It was all forbidden and delicious, and it drove Emma crazy.

One night, Rose was talking to her from across the bedroom in the seductive way she had, and something in Emma finally snapped. She got up and walked over to Rose's bed

with a strange grin on her face, lifted up the covers and sidled into bed with her. They looked at each other for a moment, but Emma couldn't look at a girl like that, so she leant over and closed her eyes and kissed Rose, whose lips were strangely soft and whose tongue was small and darting. Emma ran her hand down the smooth skin on the side of Rose's body, but when she brought her hand back up towards Rose's breasts, Rose stopped her, like a teenage girl would.

"What's wrong?" Emma asked, frowning.

"You don't love me, do you?" Rose said.

Emma blushed. "No," she said.

Rose turned around and buried her head in the pillow.

Emma looked at her in surprise. Was Rose refusing to fuck her because she wasn't in love with her? Emma had never turned down sex in her life, and neither had any man she knew. She sighed, and went back to her own bed, and it took her a long time to fall asleep.

She found it frustrating, after that, to be sleeping in the same room as Rose. Sometimes she tried again. But Rose refused, and flirted, and refused, and flirted, until they both grew cranky with one another. They developed a bitter way of talking to each other, like an old married couple and Emma felt sure the others in the house must be able to see what was going on, but they seemed oblivious.

After a while, Emma started to fuck a beautiful, simple hearted boy whose room was upstairs, to release her frustration, and to punish Rose, if she was honest with herself, to show her what she was missing out on.

And Rose started walking around looking sick to her stomach and moping.

One day, Emma came home and found her in the bedroom drunk, and in tears.

"What's wrong?" she said.

Rose held up Emma's diary.

"I read this," she said, bitterly. "And I'm not even *in* it."

"You read my fucking diary?" Emma said.

"I had to," Rose said. "I had to find out."

Emma had had enough. Women were crazy.

She left London and went on travelling, and the whole thing became just a story she would sometimes pull out to tell people, when the subject came around. But she knew somehow she had done something wrong with Rose, that she could have handled things a different way.

One night in Sydney, years later, Emma was at the pub drinking with some friends when she saw her again. Rose was a journalist in New York now, was just back visiting friends and family for a while.

"It's really good to see you," said Emma, and it was. She looked just as good as ever. "Give me your number and we'll go out sometime."

Although Marco had given Emma sexual freedom to do what she liked with other people, she had never done anything until the night she went for a drink with Rose. In another life they could have been best friends. Emma loved talking to Rose, loved the way their minds bounced off each other, the way they made each other laugh so much. But now there was this thing between them, like a lump.

They got totally smashed together at a pub in Glebe, and then went across to the park and sucked each other's tits in the darkness. Rose had beautiful tits.

"You're the only woman who makes me feel this way," Emma said, wanting more, wondering if she could take Rose back to her house, if Marco would mind. Probably he would love it.

But Rose put the brakes on again. She had to go home, she said. That was Rose, always pulling back, coming forward, pulling back again, and it drove Emma crazy.

When she got home, she told Marco what had happened, and he smiled and said, "Good on you, Gioa."

And she had felt again that feeling of betrayal, as though she had trotted out the story of Rose just to turn him on. And now here she was doing it again with Eddie. What was wrong with her?

"So, I haven't seen her since then," Emma summed up suddenly.

"Do you think you'll fuck her?" Eddie asked, and Emma pulled a face.

"Maybe," she said, looking at him from under her eyelashes. "Dunno."

When Emma met Rose at the airport, she remembered how beautiful Rose was, with her knowing eyes and her beautiful hair. But Rose was older now, and already had the fine lines on her face of an outdoorsy Australian. They kissed self-consciously, on the cheek, and smiled at each other.

She took Rose out for *mezze* and they drank beer and reminisced. It was wonderful to talk to an Australian again – Emma felt herself lapsing into a broader accent, and using Australian slang she might never use in Australia, just for the sheer pleasure of it, of having someone around to understand it.

"So who have you interviewed?" Emma asked.

Rose listed some very famous people, but in a self deprecating manner. She had always been modest in that Australian way.

"And how's teaching?" she asked, in her slow, flirtatious way. "Do you like it?"

"I love it," Emma said. "It's the only job I've ever had where I just feel right, you know?"

"That's good. And how's everything else going?"

"I don't know. I seem to have become a professional drinker," Emma said, laughing. "And there's this guy who I'm kind of in love with, obsessed with in a way, I don't know."

Rose's brown eyes grew a shade darker.

"Are you with him?" she asked.

"Not exactly."

"Does he love you?"

"I don't know."

"How can you not know?"

"He's kind of a womaniser."

"A womaniser? Really?"

"Yeah. We were together and we had this deal, that he could fuck other people under certain conditions, but he broke the rules, so I ended it. Now we've decided to be just

friends. And we are, but every time I kind of pull myself back from him, something happens.”

“It sounds awful.”

“Well, it’s actually fucking hard,” Emma sighed. “If I were in Australia, I’d be able to just cut him out of my life. But here, you know, we’re like goldfish or something, all swimming together in this little bowl.”

Emma gabbled on about Eddie, conscious that she was setting up walls around herself, to prevent something happening with Rose, to let her see that she wasn’t available. And she was very conscious of the fact that they were not talking about what had happened in Sydney, that they were skirting around even mentioning it.

“So what about you?” she said nervously after a while. “How’s your love life?”

“Well, I’m seeing a girl now. I actually have a girlfriend, can you believe it? She’s gorgeous, she’s like a model. But she’s a little crazy. Anyway, I’ve finally started having sex with women,” Rose said, languid, peering at Emma from under her eyelids. “A little late, perhaps, but better late than never.”

Emma’s heart missed a beat. She felt herself wanting Rose, the old familiar ache.

“Really?” Emma said. “That’s great! Finally!”

“It took me a long time to accept my sexuality. I was so stupid.”

“I think a lot of people go through the same process,” Emma said, although she didn’t really know anything about it. “I wouldn’t worry.”

Back home they fell onto Emma’s bed and talked until they started to fall asleep.

“Why don’t you sleep here?” Emma said. “I can’t be bothered making you up a bed.”

In the darkness, Emma felt Rose’s hand on her arm, insistent. She took a sharp breath, she was so tired, but – yes, yes she would. She could never resist. She leant over and kissed Rose, put a hand on her soft, narrow waist.

This time Rose let her put her hands wherever she wanted, but she was passive, and lay back with her eyes closed, murmuring incoherently, as though she were asleep. Emma was disgruntled. *Rose* was the one who was supposed to know what she was doing. Now Emma would have to go down on her, and she had no idea what to do once she got down there. Well, there was a first time for everything, she thought, kissing her way down Rose’s stomach.

The taste disturbed her. It was unfamiliar, and bitter. She started licking, but after a while, she knew she wouldn’t have the patience to make Rose come. It was too unpleasant, and already her tongue was getting tired. Rose kept on with her murmuring, but it didn’t seem to change, and soon Emma lost patience with it all. It was all wrong.

“Sorry I’m not too good at this,” she said, sitting up, expecting Rose to go down on her. But Rose just turned over onto her side, and murmured, as though she were asleep. Emma felt outraged, and somehow ripped off. She stared for a while, then lay down, and fell asleep herself, into a heavy dreamless sleep.

They all met at the bus station the next day, and Emma met Eddie’s friends from London, who were big girls, friendly and jolly. Jay and Kai talked to Rose, agog with curiosity, and Emma felt proud because Rose was so beautiful and smart. But as the bus pulled out, she started feeling towards Rose what she could imagine men felt towards women the next day, a kind of distaste for something that had been *had*, and a kind of

irritation at Rose's need for reassurance, which radiated out from her like something tangible.

Eddie turned around in his seat and chatted to Rose, charming her as easily as he charmed all women.

"So Ro-ose," he said, drawing out her name. "What's it like to interview all the famous people?"

Rose had a lovely warm toned laugh. But Emma sat there, feeling nasty, and wishing Rose wasn't there so she could sit with Eddie. He was like the sun to her, and all she ever wanted to was to sit in his light.

Buses were the main form of transport around Turkey, and they were efficient and clean. One man in a red waistcoat worked on the bus just as a waiter, regularly offering tea and cake, and some lemony stuff that people put on their hands, which made Emma shudder. She had always hated anything with a smell, but Eddie loved it.

"What's wrong with you, girl?" he said, giving her a wink over the back of the seat, a wink that said it was just the two of them really, that nobody else mattered. She smiled back at him, full of sudden happiness.

Fields of yellow sunflowers rolled by, hundreds of giant black heads turned towards the sun, and fields of very green rape, and Emma sat back to watch it all swim by, feeling an enormous sense of relief to be leaving the city.

"I think I'll take a nap," she said to Rose, and closed her eyes. She didn't want to talk to anyone.

"Come and sit with me, Rose," she heard Eddie saying, and as Rose got up she felt relieved, to be left alone. She wondered what it meant, this whole thing with her and Rose. Was she bisexual? Maybe, but it wasn't ever other women she wanted, only Rose, who was so annoyingly elusive, something she could never quite catch. Maybe that was why she wanted her so much, she thought. Even now, she wanted her. She wanted her in a strange way. It was a violent kind of feeling, and Rose always wanted to be so gentle. Emma felt momentarily ashamed.

There was so much to feel ashamed about when it came to sex, she thought, so many terrible things she wanted and did, things she would never do in any other part of her life, humiliating herself, losing her pride, taking things from people, hurting people, being hurt, and all for what? For that moment when she felt she could truly connect with somebody, that elusive moment that never really came true, for she was always distant with everyone she had sex with, she always kept up a façade.

The house was perfect, with a huge outdoor balcony, and a ramble of bedrooms. Emma said she was going to go for a run down the beach to stretch out her legs and to her surprise Eddie said he would join her. They set off, and she tried to hold back to match her pace to his, but he was very slow. Finally, he stopped, and doubled over, wheezing.

"You go on ahead, Em," he said.

She laughed.

"You sure?" she said. "I can wait."

"No, go on."

"OK," she said, and took off, enjoying the feeling of one foot after the other, one heartbeat after another, the breath coming easily. She was smoking less now, and her time at the gym was paying off.

The beach was very long and flat, there were only weak little waves, and the sand was shaly. But it seemed like the best beach she had ever been to – it had been such a long time since she had been out of the city, it felt like years. You forgot, living in the city, that anything else existed. You forgot how this was the real, and the city was the construction. You forgot how it made you feel, to be in the country, like you had been wasting time thinking about all the wrong things.

A great peace washed over her.

After a while she doubled back, and found Eddie waiting for her, sitting cross legged like a buddha in the sand.

“Sit down, Em,” he said, and she did.

They sat watching the waves for a while, their sides just touching, not talking. The sun started to go down, and the water caught the light and turned gold.

Two women in headscarves came by, walking along the shoreline, the bottom of their pants rolled up, laughing together when the water hit their ankles.

“I like your friends,” Emma said after they had passed by. And she did – they were unaffected and direct, although they were not the sort of girls that she would normally be friends with.

“Yeh, I know. They’re great, aren’t they?”

“Mmm.”

“I like Rose too,” he said. His eyes were squinting in the light, and he turned and gave her a curious look, his lips pursed up, nosing around for information like a dog.

Emma didn’t want to tell him anything. She wanted him to pull her down with him in the sand, not because of anything she had done with Rose, but because he loved her for who she was. She wanted to stay there forever, just the two of them.

“I should do some stretching,” she said, jumping up, and put one foot in front of the other, falling into a lunge.

“Alright,” he said. “I’ll see you back there.”

And she nodded in a businesslike way, to cover up the quick pain that sliced into her so easily.

That night they all sat around playing drinking games on the balcony, making crude jokes and telling tall stories. Helene hadn’t been able to come, so Jay had gotten himself disgracefully drunk, and he was telling the English girls about how they had such big breasts because of the hormones in English chickens, and everyone was laughing. The drunker she got, the more Emma felt the weight of her secret about Rose pressing against her, bursting to come out. Would she be betraying Rose if she told Eddie? *But Rose has a girlfriend in New York*, a voice inside her reasoned. *And she doesn’t have to know what happens with Eddie.*

Emma stood up, slowly, so no-one would notice, and walked past Eddie, bent over his ear, murmured, “I fucked Rose last night,” and kept walking, down to the dark kitchen for a beer. It was a lie, of course, to say she had fucked Rose. What had she actually done to that still, lifeless murmuring body?

He followed her, as she had known he would, and when they got down to the dark kitchen he grabbed her, shoved her against the wall, unzipped himself, pulled her undies to one side and pushed himself inside her under her dress. She pulled her breath in sharply with pleasure.

“Not here,” she said. “Let’s go down to the beach.”

“I don’t want to go to the beach,” he said, and she realised he wanted people to know what was happening. For a minute, she was torn, trying to decide what to do, whether to stay or not, but then she heard footsteps on the stairs, and a voice, Jay’s, saying “Jesus,” in mingled disgust and humour, then more faintly – “I think they’re fucking down there.”

Poor Rose, Emma thought. She felt herself being pushed against the kitchen wall with the force of him. But Rose would understand. She knew what it was like to be in love.

In the middle of the night, Emma woke up and heard Rose shifting around in her bed.

“Are you OK?” she asked.

“I’m fine,” came the response.

Emma felt guilty. Now that she was sober, she knew that she had been cruel. Again. Her head was pounding and she gulped down some water.

“Listen,” she said when she had finished drinking. “I’m sorry about tonight. It’s not exactly what I planned.”

“Whatever.”

“Really. I’m sorry.”

“Why should I care what you do anyway?”

“Right.”

“But you know, it’s funny you told me Eddie was so confident.”

“Why?”

“Because I think he’s really insecure.”

“Really? What makes you say that?”

“Well, I mean, how many women does he need to fuck?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Emma, he was fucking that other girl in his room when we arrived. And then he fucks you on the same day.”

Emma felt the truth of it sinking into her like something poisonous.

“I know,” she lied.

“I don’t know why you think he’s in love with you.”

“No,” Emma said, feeling crushed. “I know he’s not.”

“And just so you know, I don’t love you anymore either. So there’s no need to worry about me or my feelings.”

“OK,” Emma said.

Emma was surprised at how disappointed she felt to hear that. Rose had always loved her.

“Goodnight,” Rose said.

“Goodnight.”

Emma turned around and faced the wall, and hot tears slid slowly down her cheeks, thick like glue. She stuffed the covers in her mouth, so Rose wouldn’t hear her crying.

They all spent the next day down at the beach. Emma lay on her back in the water and floated, remembering the years of floating at the beach at her grandmother’s house, another flat sea, but on the other side of the world. Floating in the sea was something private, a moment between you and the soft bowl of the sky. Time seemed to slow right down, to become something elastic, something that stretched and spread into threads,

spun by the light. The sun shifted in the sky fraction by fraction. Further down the beach, the boys were playing American football and their shouts came to her muffled, as though from a great distance. Emma wished she could stay out floating forever, away from all human interaction with all its messy problems. But after a while she felt she was getting burned, so she went in to put on some sunscreen, and lay down with the English girls and Rose, smiling at them awkwardly.

“Look at Kai coming out of the water,” one of them said, as Emma sat down. “He’s like James Bond, isn’t he?”

“Do you think so?” Emma asked, surprised.

“Oh yeah, he’s hot,” she giggled, and wiggled suggestively so her breasts looked bigger in her bikini. She was the one Eddie had fucked. Emma felt a stab of pure jealousy and looked away.

Kai ran and joined the other boys, throwing the ball and laughing, and she saw that it was true. He had a classic, almost perfect body, tall and well defined. Funny she had never noticed before. It was Eddie who she had always watched. She watched him now, running with Jay to try to catch the ball, both of them laughing, so strong and sure of themselves. Eddie’s arms lifted up into the sky, and he jumped up with a surprisingly graceful leap, catching the ball, easily, in one hand, and shouted triumphantly.

Chapter 8

Ramazan came and the students started to fast between dawn and dusk. Although many of them had told her they weren't religious, they all fasted, or said they did.

"Why do you fast if you're not religious?" Emma asked curiously.

"Although we say not religious, we are still Muslim," said Funda.

"And it is not just religion," Emine said. "It is our culture."

"It is very nice tradition," said Umut. "In the finish. When we all family eating together. We have big feast."

Everyone was weak and tired in class, and all the smokers stopped smoking and became irritable and morose.

"Come on, guys!" she urged. "Wake up!"

"But teacher, we are hungry," they said, resting their heads on their hands and looking dreamily out of the windows.

Emma didn't see anyone except tourists eating in the restaurants during the day, and at night the pubs were nearly empty. After a couple of weeks, Jay and Helene went away on holiday to Bulgaria, and Eddie started spending all his time with Ipek. Even Kai was busy, with Ayşe, his latest girl.

Istanbul seemed to have closed up, like a giant butterfly pulling its wings over its body.

*

Kai had taken pity on Emma one Friday night and invited her over to have drinks with him and Ayşe. But although he had tried to make Emma feel welcome, Ayşe had flirted with him outrageously the whole night until Emma ended up feeling so uncomfortable she had made her excuses and left early.

I should have just gone to the movies by myself, she thought glumly as she walked home.

As she walked, a cold wind whistled down the streets. Autumn was creeping in now, and all the heat had blown away, down the Bosphorus and out to sea. The streets around Kai's house were narrow and steep, and the tall apartment buildings rose up high on either side of her, the windows like closed eyes, concealing the hum and shadows of family life, of TV, music, laughter, arguments, the smell of cooking.

Emma felt shut out of the city, shut out of life. She was never going to be a part of this city, she would always be an outsider.

On the corner, there was a tiny shop, its blue *Efes* sign bleeding into the night. The owner was sitting on a stool inside watching a little television mounted on the wall, and the blue light of the television fell onto his skin, and flickered there.

"*Merhaba,*" he said as she came in.

"*Merhaba,*" she said. "*Marlboro istiyorun.*"

As he passed the cigarettes to her, he looked at her with heavy, knowing eyes, and gave her a sly smile. Emma looked back at him coldly, and walked out, slapping the pack against the palm of her hand.

A knife edge of anger slid across her melancholy.

She should probably eat something, she thought. She was a bit drunk. There was a restaurant nearby which was always crowded and had good food. But as she went in, it

was nearly empty, of course, she had forgotten about Ramazan. She sat at a table in the corner, and ordered a plate of spinach with yoghurt – it was one of the only things on the menu without meat, and she didn't feel like meat. You got sick of meat in Istanbul. It was all anyone seemed to eat. She pulled out her book, but after a few sentences her mind trailed off again.

There was a time when she would have been fine being alone like this, in the old days, before she had come to Istanbul, before the family. But now, she thought ruefully, she was used to always having the boys around. Her food arrived and she dipped her fork in the spinach and yoghurt, one bitter, the other sour, her cutlery clinking into the silence.

As she was walking home down Istiklal, she felt a tap on her shoulder, and turned sharply, but it was just the beggar girl who sold napkins. Emma bought a pack from her – you always needed them for the toilets anyway, and the girl smiled and swanned away, and for a moment Emma vaguely felt like following her, just so she wouldn't be alone. She passed a CD shop playing mournful Arabesque music that swelled and soared into the night. Tonight, it suited her mood perfectly.

She hadn't felt like this for such a long time, so alone, so *single*.

Life was different when you were single, more intense, more beautiful, more raw. You saw more. You noticed more. The world pulsed with meaning. But at the same time you hurt more. You felt more. She had felt so jealous of Ayşe tonight, so hurt not to be wanted.

I'll show her, she thought tearfully. *Kai's my family*.

Istiklal Caddesi was heaving – to walk down it was like being part of a giant river, and the faces of the people flickered by like leaves trapped in its current. She would just keep walking, that was all, up and down, to be a part of humanity for a while, to feel people's bodies brushing against hers, the city's only intimacy.

*

Emma had nothing to do the next day, so she decided to be a tourist. She would go to the Blue Mosque – it was free, and she was pretty broke until she got paid.

She had stupidly hoped to be left alone as she walked there, but as soon as she hit the touristy streets in Sultanahmet, voices started calling to her. Men stood in the doorways of their shops, smiling sadly, and calling out *Hello madam. Hello! Madam!*, as though by not acknowledging them she were breaking their very hearts, but she looked ahead, with a glazed look, as though she were thinking about something deep, and couldn't hear them. It started to spit, and the rain hit the dust, leaving dark spots, like blood, and she walked a little faster.

A thin dark man appeared, and hovered around her with a desperate smile, as persistent as a mosquito.

“Hello, beautiful lady, I know you yesterday!” he cried in a singsong voice. “Hello!”

She smiled and kept walking, but his voice continued to follow her up the street, sadly, but growing ever fainter. “Hello *lady* you want carpet? Apple tea?”

A little sigh of satisfaction escaped her when she saw the mosque, rising up in the air like a wonderful gold balloon. She wondered why she hadn't bothered to come before. It was a touristy thing to do, that was why.

“Madam you need guide?” They suddenly came from everywhere, men and boys, all clamouring for her attention. “Excuse me excuse me!”

“No, thank you,” she said, feeling tense. She was terrible at this, at saying no. She wasn’t tough enough.

One or two were more persistent, following her all the way to the entrance.

“No money, madam!” they cried. “For friendly!”

“No, *thank you.*”

Once inside she felt safe from it all, and peace enveloped her. The light was dim, but hundreds of yellow light globes hung from the ceiling, glowing, and from the little windows shafts of light fought through the gloom.

She stood by herself amongst a group of Japanese tourists with clicking cameras. Some of them turned to look curiously at her and she felt conscious of the fact that she was a woman alone.

She looked around at the windows of the mosque and at the great arching ceiling. It was such a large space and so uncluttered by furniture and had a different feeling to a church, a freer feeling, as though the mosque were the heart of God and not a place built by men.

Not that she knew much about religion. *A fairy tale*, her father had scoffed as they were growing up, *a fairy tale to make people feel better about things. A load of rubbish.* When she was a teenager, she had tried praying for a while, whispering secretly in her bedroom, but at heart she had felt that no-one was listening to her and that all she was really doing was playing an elaborate game of pretend. And so she had dropped it, in the end. But sometimes she felt that the world was too beautiful to be an accident.

She looked at the men praying up the front of the mosque, and wondered if they really felt they were communicating with God as they went through the ritual of standing, kneeling, bowing, again and again, like a slow dance. How did it feel, she wondered. Did it make life easier? Did it make you feel less alone?

Watching them was hypnotic, but after a while she began to feel voyeuristic. The men weren’t the tourist attraction, she told herself, and decided to leave.

Outside, it was pouring, the rain so dense it was white. The bushes with their dark glossy leaves bent under the weight of it, and the stone paths were slick and shiny. Emma stood waiting under the shelter of the verandah, and listened to the clatter on the roof, like rice pouring into a giant metal bowl.

A sudden feeling of dislocation washed over her, and she thought, *What am I doing here? I don’t belong here.* It had that feeling, Istanbul, of being something so old and secret you felt that you were trespassing on a grave.

But soon the rain eased, drawing away like a giant silvery curtain, and the feeling left her as suddenly as it had appeared, like a mist lifting.

*

It was *Cumhuriyet Bayramı*, the Turkish Republic Day, and Eddie and Emma were on a ferry going to the other side to watch the parade with Kai and Ayşe. The ferry was full of people holding little red flags, and the atmosphere was charged. A group of children ran upstairs, then ran downstairs, then ran upstairs again, crowding into the empty spaces, and it was so full that the *cayci* couldn’t get through properly. He shouted at them and

they dispersed, giggling. As the ferry drew further out, Emma looked back to see that the whole city was dappled with flags, rich red flags with the white crescent moon and star in the centre, some of them enormous, draping whole buildings, like giant sheets. She had never seen anything like it.

“Amazing, isn’t it?” Eddie said.

“It’s freaky,” Emma said, smiling.

She was happy to be spending time with Eddie, just the two of them. She wanted to tell him how much she had missed him lately. But it was the kind of thing she never said to him.

He knew anyway.

“So what’s the deal with Kai and Ayşe?” he giggled. “Do you think old Kai is getting serious?”

“I hope not,” Emma said. “She kind of annoys me.”

“I think she’s cool,” Eddie said.

“I suppose. She’s alright.”

“A bit jealous, Em?” he said, with a sharp look.

“Yeah right,” she scoffed. “Why would I be jealous?”

“I don’t know,” he said, pursing his lips thoughtfully. “You two have become pretty good friends.”

“I’m good friends with all of you,” she said.

Eddie looked at her for a second, then brushed the back of his hand against her cheek.

She looked out over the water, back at the city, smaller now, the flecks of red like ragged clothing, while against her will her heart beat louder inside her chest.

The parade was on the Asian side, where the wealthy lived, and the streets were full of designer names, but Emma thought it was totally soulless. Everything was new and modern, and looked much the same as any other city, or perhaps uglier.

But today thousands of people were lining the main street, all holding little red flags, and the air hummed with restrained excitement. Kai and Ayşe were waiting at a bar with a good view over the street, and Ayşe gave Eddie a hug and a kiss, and welcomed Emma politely, as usual.

She was a blonde beauty, a little past her prime, but still striking, with a firm jaw and high cheekbones.

“So, what does the Turkish flag mean?” Emma asked her to make conversation as the boys went off to get drinks.

“Some people say that Atatürk saw the reflection of the moon and a star in a pool of blood during a battle.”

“Which battle?”

“At Gelibolu, you know? Gallipoli.”

“How interesting,” Emma enthused.

“Yes.”

A silence fell.

“Have you been there?” Ayşe asked.

“No. I’m not all that interested in history. Have you?”

“Yes, of course. I went many times, when I was a child. Most Turks have been on holiday in this area.”

Somehow Ayşe always made her feel like a tourist, with her proprietary air. It irritated Emma, perhaps because it cut close to the truth, that she would never belong.

“I’ll have to go, one day,” Emma said, with an awkward smile, and looked around for the boys, who were just coming back with the beers.

Kai sat down next to Ayşe and she noticed the gentlemanly way he had with her. He was quite courteous really, she thought, especially compared to Eddie, with his graceless teasing.

“Uh, so, did you see all the flags on the way over?” Kai said to Emma.

“Yeah.” Normally she would have made some comment about overt nationalism, but she didn’t want to offend Ayşe. “Amazing.”

She took a long sip of her beer. Emma loved the feeling of drinking during the day – you got drunk so quickly, and it was always such a high. The day seemed full of possibility.

After a little while, a huge roar came from the crowd outside, and everyone in the bar rushed out onto the street to watch the parade. First came a cavalcade of roaring motorbikes and expensive cars honking, with little flags on the bonnets.

“Who’s in the cars?” she asked Ayşe.

“It is military people,” she said. “The top military people.”

Then came a group of children playing in a band, followed by an open truck packed with people dressed in red, dancing and waving, and on the street were more people, thousands of them, all in red, following the truck. A man shouted through a megaphone, and the crowd reacted with wild cheers. All around them, people waved little flags. A mother standing next to them passed one to her toddler son, and he waved it too.

“What’s the man saying?” Emma asked Ayşe.

“Oh, he is saying good things about Turkey,” Ayşe replied.

But soon, it was over. The truck drove on, and they heard the shouts and cheers grow more and more faint in the distance.

Emma was disappointed and a little sickened by the whole thing.

But she turned to Ayşe and told her it had been wonderful.

Ayşe had arranged to stay with Kai for the whole long weekend, so they all went back to the European side together, and went to a bar they knew where they could sit outside, because it was a beautiful night. They were all pissed, except Ayşe.

“So, shall we have a pill tonight, what do you think?” Eddie said suddenly, looking pleased with himself.

“A *pill*?” Emma said.

“Yeah.”

“Where from?”

“From my pocket.”

“What, have you got them on you now?”

“Yeah. I found a dealer.”

“I don’t know,” she said weakly. “I kind of wanted to leave that part of my life behind.”

“I’ll have one,” Kai said enthusiastically. He had never had one before in his life, she knew, and had always wanted to. But then he looked uncertainly at Ayşe.

“I won’t,” Ayşe said, looking uncomfortable but trying to act cool. “But you go ahead.”

Eddie looked at Emma.

“Come on,” he said. “You know you want to.”

Emma grinned. She had known from the beginning she would say yes. She could never say no to drugs, especially not when she had been drinking all day.

“I do,” she said. “I do want to.”

“That’s my girl,” he said.

They dropped the pills, and went straight to a club. At first, Eddie danced with Emma but after a while, he grew tired of trying to dance arm in arm with her, so he went and grabbed Ayşe from Kai, and Kai and Emma danced together well, as they always did, facing one another, and grinning. Then after a while, Emma felt the pill coming on.

“I’m going for a walk,” she said to Kai, the words feeling thick in her mouth.

“I’ll come with you,” he said.

“No,” she said, quickly. “No, that’s OK. I always go for a walk when my pill is coming on. I need to be by myself. I’ll be fine, don’t worry.”

She turned and walked away out of the club, feeling her heart rising up and fluttering in her chest. As she walked, she swung her arms, a little too hard, and put one foot in front of the other. There was always a strange moment for her when a pill came on, where she realised that something was inside her body that would have an effect on her for hours to come and there was nothing she could do about it. And a little part of her always tried to fight it. But as the pill got stronger, she started to feel very essential, as though all the external parts of her had been stripped away, and she was just Emma experiencing sensations one after the other, a wave of fear and then a wave of strength, a wave of sadness and then a wave of excitement. She felt utterly brave, as though nothing in the world could touch her, and she walked down one small side street after the other, wearing too little clothing for the weather but feeling warm. Soon the waves of feeling moved all the way up her body, and into her mind, and she felt herself click into the drug. And suddenly her mouth was pulled into a uncontrollable smile and she was pilling. She turned back towards the club. She wanted to lose herself in the music, to dance and dance, for hours.

In the early morning, they went back to Emma’s house, and sat around raving, while Ayşe looked on, smothering yawns.

“Do you want to sleep in Jay’s bed?” Emma asked her. “He’s gone to Bulgaria.”

Ayşe looked uncertainly at Kai. But he showed no sign of wanting to go home.

“OK,” she said.

“I’m not sure about the state of his sheets,” Emma said. “I hope it’s OK.”

“It will be fine,” Ayşe said, and disappeared.

“I think I’ll crash out too,” said Eddie after a little while. “Can I crash in your bed, Em? You coming to bed?”

“No, not yet,” she said. “But feel free.”

Emma and Kai stayed up talking together. They had flipped over into that supremely silly state that sometimes happens on the tail end of drugs, telling each other made-up stories, and dissolving in fits of giggles. Kai was enjoying himself so much she didn’t

want to leave him alone on his first pill, even though Eddie was in her bed. He looked at her with surprised eyes, and laughed with his mouth open wide.

A few times, Ayşe came out of the bedroom to go to the bathroom, and Emma wondered if she was sleeping at all. They smiled at her beatifically when they saw her, and wondered what to say. It was always that way when you were pilling and you had to talk to someone who wasn't. It was very difficult.

Finally, dawn broke, and they became quieter, and drank a few beers for the comedown, and lay back together on the sofa, and talked about Istanbul.

"How long do you think you're going to stay here now?" he said. "Do you still want to leave?"

"I'm not sure," she said. "Some days I feel like I'm in love with Istanbul, and that I never want to leave, and I think about sending to Australia for my books and staying here forever. But sometimes it's really hard, and I get so frustrated, don't you? With the traffic, and the language, and there's no trees anywhere. And the culture is so different. I mean, I couldn't believe that parade today," she said. "All that flag waving. We'll never be like that in Australia."

"Oh yeah? Why not?"

Emma thought for a minute, peeling at the label on the beer bottle.

"I think you have to live in a place for a long time to feel that passionate about it, you know?" she said. "You have to have a history, and wars, and people who have died defending the soil. And I think you have to feel that you could lose it all if you weren't careful. We don't have any of that."

They sat in silence for a second.

"Who put all these lines around the world anyway?" Kai said. "Who decided that people have to stay inside or outside the lines? I mean it seems kind of crazy to me."

"I know, isn't it?"

"I don't even feel like I have a country," he said. "I don't belong anywhere. I don't belong in Egypt and I don't belong in America. I just feel kind of lost all the time."

"That must be hard."

"Yeah."

"But here we have the family," she said. "And you belong with us."

"I know. And that's so important to me, you know? You guys are all really important to me."

"You're important to me too," she said.

Ecstasy always made you say the nicest things.

They smiled at each other, and the smile went on for a fraction too long.

Emma suddenly registered with a little shock that Kai wanted to be with her.

"So do you like ecstasy?" she said.

"Yeah," he said.

They heard noises and then Eddie shuffled out of the bedroom and laughed at their bleary eyed state.

"You two look like dog's breakfasts," he said.

"Did you mention breakfast?" Kai said, grinning.

Then Ayşe came out of Jay's room, smiling uncomfortably, her hair all messed up on one side.

"Good morning," they all said to her, politely.

“Good morning,” she said, looking as though she didn’t understand where she was.

“I think we need to get these two some breakfast,” Eddie said. “Do you want to come down to the shops with me?”

“Sure,” she said. “I’ll just wash my face.”

After they left, Kai pulled Emma gently over onto her side so she was lying next to him. They stared at each other for a second, listening to the other’s breathing, and when he kissed her, she kissed him back.

“What about Ayşe?” she said, breaking away.

“I know,” he said. “But really there’s nothing serious between us, and I’ve told her that. It’s just sex.”

They hesitated. Emma wondered if she was just sex too.

Then Kai kissed her again. It was a good kiss. She hadn’t kissed anyone for too long.

“Oh my God,” Emma said. “How long do you think it’s going to take them to get breakfast?”

“Not long probably.”

“Shit.” They kissed again, keeping an ear out for the door.

“This is so wrong,” Emma said. “We shouldn’t be doing this now.”

“No,” Kai agreed.

All too soon, they heard the key in the door and pulled apart, leaned nonchalantly against the wall, but Emma felt that her position wasn’t entirely natural.

“Have we got a great breakfast for you guys!” Ayşe said cheerfully, and as she bustled around, Emma watched her and felt despicable. What was wrong with her? She had never done this before, taken another woman’s man, and now here she was doing it again. But they were her men really, she thought to herself, devoted to her, and they were her family, and it was all mixed up and so tight that it was like something that she could do nothing about, that had been destined from the start, from the night when they had all sat around that table at the bar and she had looked at all of them and loved them all.

After everyone left, Emma crawled into bed, and when she woke up it was five o’clock in the evening, the sky already streaked with red light. It was always a sad moment to realise you had slept the day away, like you had lost a part of yourself. She looked out the window, feeling hazily as though something had changed, and then suddenly the recollection of the night before snapped into her mind, and she bit her lip.

What have I done? she thought, and felt a sadness sweep over her.

Eddie had invited them over to watch a movie at his house, so Emma dragged herself out of bed and into the shower, and as she stood there under the running water, her mind dwelled for a while on kissing Kai. It had surprised her that there had been such strong chemistry between them. She felt a sexual tug at the thought of kissing him again, and it was very strong and intense.

Emma looked at herself in the mirror through the shower window, and ran her hands over her hips.

Was Kai the right thing to do?

He cared about her, she knew, and drugs or no drugs, there was no way that he would have started anything with her unless he was deadly serious. He had been furious with Jay for sleeping with her that time.

And Kai was safe. He would never cheat on her. He would be rock solid.

He would be the opposite of Eddie, she thought. And the idea appealed to her.

Then she thought about how ridiculous it would be, if she got together with him. She would have been with them all.

Well yes, it was ridiculous, but there was something alluring in it, in the idea that they all wanted her in that way. That meant something. She felt suddenly full of sexual power.

Emma smiled at herself in the mirror, then pulled a face.

When she arrived, Kai gave her a secret smile, and her heart gave a little leap.

“Hi Em,” Eddie said, giving her a kiss. “How you holding up? I’ve got a lovely curry for you.”

“Fantastic,” she said. “I feel like shit.”

Eddie fed them, and they watched the movie in the dark, a stupid comedy, and she felt a little dirty as the drugs sweated out of her skin, but then as she drank beers the pill came back on and she felt good again. She was very conscious of Kai the whole time, of his physicality, and she was conscious of Eddie too and of all the sex the two of them had had in this room.

It was almost unbearable.

“I think I’ll go home soon,” she said shortly after the movie ended.

“I’ll walk you,” Kai said.

“Oh come on, guys, it’s early yet,” Eddie said, in his wheedling tone.

“No, I really am exhausted, I hardly slept,” Emma said.

“Yeah, me too,” Kai said.

“Oh, bollocks to you then,” Eddie said sulkily, as they were leaving. “I don’t know what’s happened to you guys recently. No staying power whatsoever.”

And they both laughed, a little falsely, as they went down the stairs.

“That was weird, last night, with Ayşe there,” Emma said to Kai after they had been walking for a while. “I felt terrible this morning.”

“You shouldn’t have. I told you, there’s nothing serious between us.”

They walked along Istiklal Caddesi in shy silence, and after a while, it started to rain, and Kai opened up his little umbrella, and pulled Emma in underneath with his strong arm around her, treating her like a woman who needed protecting. It had been so long since someone had been like this with her, it felt good. Emma peeped up at Kai and smiled, and he looked down and kissed her. It was a good kiss.

“I don’t know, Kai,” she said. “Is this a good idea?”

“I think so.”

“It’s just that you’re the best friend I have here now,” she said.

“I know. You’re mine too.”

“If I lose you, then I’m really going to hate my life here. So I don’t want to do this unless you’re serious.”

He looked at her with surprise. A smile broke over his face.

“I am serious,” he said, and kissed her again, in the rain, on Istiklal Caddesi, and the water poured down over the black umbrella, and splashed onto their shoulders.

“Do you want to come up?” she asked shyly when they reached her door.

“Absolutely,” he said, with a broad smile.

“But,” she looked at him, uncertainly. “I want to take things slow with you.”

“OK.”

In her bedroom, Emma pulled on her pyjamas in a chaste way, with her back turned, and they crawled under the covers together. But when they started kissing, everything seemed right, and suddenly she didn't care what happened. How had she had this man under her nose for so long and never really seen him?

When he tore her pyjama top off her, the plastic buttons showered over the floor, and she cracked up with surprise. She felt brave with him, like she would do anything.

In the morning, they were full of their new secret, and laughed about telling the family – how surprised they would be!

Jay was back from Bulgaria this morning – they could hear him moving around.

“I'll just go outside, and say hello, and leave,” Kai said.

“OK.” Emma laughed. “He's going to freak right out.”

“And I think I should be the one to tell Eddie,” he said.

Emma baulked. Surely she should be the one to tell him? But what reason could she give? Eddie wasn't her boyfriend anymore.

“OK,” she said, looking at him askance. He didn't look at her, but stood up and started getting dressed. He did have a beautiful body.

“See you later,” he said, and held Emma's head in his hands as though it was the most precious thing he had ever seen. She had almost forgotten what it felt like to be treated this way.

Hard parts of her cracked open.

Later when she came out, smiling, she was surprised to find Jay with an awkward look on his face.

“What's going on?” he said.

“I don't know yet,” she said. “But oh come on, Jay. Be happy for me. It's not just a fuck. It's serious.”

“OK. I'm happy for you,” he said, but she could see he wasn't.

“I told Eddie,” Kai said that night, as they lay in her bed, drinking red wine. “He was fine.”

Emma felt it as a great hurt.

“Was he?” she said, and hid her face in her wine glass. “Good.”

An awkward silence fell.

“Well, I guess you need to tell Ayşe,” she said.

“I know. And Elif.”

Elif. His flatmate. That was definitely going to cause problems. She and Elif had always gotten on quite well. But Emma wouldn't worry about that now. She was so happy.

She leant over, and kissed him.

“Put down that wine,” she said.

Later, he looked at her with anguished eyes, and said, “I don’t know what’s happening to me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know these feelings.”

“What feelings?”

“I don’t know, I think I’m in love with you,” he said breathlessly. “But I don’t know. I’ve never been in love before.”

“What? How can you be thirty-four years old and never have been in love?”

“I just haven’t.”

She felt immensely flattered, that she was the first person he had been in love with. It was so romantic. Maybe he was the one she had been waiting for.

“Really?”

“No.”

“Well, me neither,” she said. “But I’m only twenty-nine.”

She realised he was waiting for her to say the same thing, that she was in love with him. But she wasn’t yet and she didn’t want to say it without meaning it.

“So how long have you been in love with me anyway?” she asked.

“Maybe since I met you, actually,” he said. Things fell into place, about the way he had always treated her with such respect and care. So many things he had done, sweet things, looked different now, in this light.

She blushed and smiled, but underlying her pleasure an uneasiness was swimming through her. She pushed it away.

Kai was curled against her as they fell asleep, and when she woke up he was still in the same place, holding on to her as though he would never let her go.

Chapter 9

They were at the pub again, a huge group of teachers, and they were all wasted, clinking their glasses and blowing smoke above their heads, singing along to the songs and pounding on the table and talking over the top of each other, their words lapping one over the other like waves.

Emma was so happy tonight – it was the first time she and Kai had been out as a couple, and she felt proud to be with him. She kept looking over at him, secretly watching him. She loved the way he looked when he laughed, almost as though he were in pain, and she loved the dark slashes of his eyebrows across his face, the strong line of his jaw in shadow under his cheekbones. They had fallen into such a sudden intimacy, his long dark legs wrapped around hers in the night, his hand in her hair when she woke up. And every day now, she carried around the strong feeling of fucking inside her body, and when she thought about it her heart lifted up and gave a kind of catch, in the same way it did when she was afraid.

There was such contained violence in the way they fucked – they fought each other, grappling and swiping and biting, like children do. He pinned her down, and she twisted away from him, and scratched at him until his body was covered in marks, and he slapped her face, not hard, but not soft either. No-one had ever fucked her like this before and she loved it, encouraged it. Allowed it, looked up at him with eyes that taunted him, or refused to look at him when he wanted her to. It was the only way they could express the appetite they had for each other, but anger ran through it too, like a thin, dark vein of blood, or like a heartbeat, the heart the size of a fist, jerking and shivering in its sac of skin. Underneath it all, sometimes, while it was happening, she caught herself feeling suddenly anxious, as though there were a part of her very far away that was desperately trying to tell her something. But she ignored it. Things were too exciting.

When she woke up, he was looking at her, and when he woke up, he found her looking at him. They walked on the street together as close as they could, pulling each other in fiercely, their fingers pressing through the layers of fabric to find the shape of each other.

Eddie came back from the bar and fell down next to her, slopping the beer in his glass.

“How are you, darling?” he said.

“Fabulous,” she said. “How are you?”

“I miss you,” he said.

Emma gave a nervous laugh.

“Shut up,” she said.

Jay started telling everyone at the table a story.

“The other day I had a class in Suadiye, and I had to get there by *dolmuş*...” he was saying.

Emma leant back to listen, and Eddie pushed up against her, leaning all his weight on her.

She shot him an annoyed look, and shuffled away.

“So, while I was waiting for the *dolmuş*, just standing there quietly minding my own business, this guy comes up to me and asks me for a light...”

Eddie came closer again, and draped his arm around her. She pulled away with a little jerk. What the hell was he doing? Had Kai noticed? He wasn't looking at her, but his face was tight, and she could see a muscle twitching in his jaw.

“So, in effect, he had just told me to fuck off, but of course I wasn’t exactly sure!” Jay continued. “And I didn’t know whether to retaliate or smile, so I just stood there looking like a dumbass.”

Everybody started laughing, but Emma didn’t know what the joke was.

“Em knows all about fucking,” Eddie said in her ear. “Don’t you darling?”

She stood up abruptly.

“Toilet,” she said, and smiled at everyone as she wriggled past.

She stood in the toilet, breathing slowly. She didn’t know what she had expected from Eddie. She had hardly thought about him since she and Kai had got together. But now she felt the old weakness for him coming back and gripping her around the heart.

She sighed.

She had thought that she was free.

When she came out, she went over to Kai, and pressed his shoulder.

“Shall we go?” he said, and she nodded.

As they left, Emma gave a general wave to everyone, instead of her customary kisses, so she wouldn’t have to kiss Eddie.

“Why didn’t you do anything?” Kai said to her as soon as they were out on the dark streets.

She looked up at him in surprise.

“I did. I moved.”

“After a while.”

How unfair, she thought. Anger bubbled up inside her.

“Oh my god,” she said loudly. “You’re acting like it was my fault or something.”

“You’ve always been like this, Emma,” he said. “I’ve seen it. You have no idea how to handle men.”

“Yes, I do.”

“No, you don’t. Remember that time the guy in that bar was hitting on you and you couldn’t make him go away?”

“I felt *sorry* for him.”

“That’s ridiculous. Why should you feel sorry for some guy just because he’s hitting on you?”

“I don’t know. I always do.” Emma thought about it. “I just think it must take such courage to approach a girl, I don’t want to hurt their feelings.”

He snorted.

“So you feel sorry for Eddie, is that it?”

“No, of course not,” she said. “It just took me by surprise.”

They walked along in silence. Kai was very rigid and withdrawn.

“Anyway, let’s not fight about stupid Eddie,” she said, desperately.

He unbent slightly, looked mollified. She tucked her hand into his arm, and pushed against him, relieved. And soon he kissed the top of her head.

But in a way, she thought secretly, she was pleased that Eddie had done it. If he had been completely fine, it would mean that he didn’t care. And she knew why he was playing up – she should have been the one to speak to him, not Kai. But of course, like

everything Eddie did, he had had to play his feelings to the public arena. Like that time he had fucked her in the kitchen.

She would have to speak to him, smooth things over.

When they had first got together, she had gone home to spend some time by herself in the mornings. But Kai didn't like it, didn't understand it.

If you really loved me, why would you want to spend time by yourself instead of with me? he said. And there was an unspoken implication that she was really going home to see Jay. So she stopped. After all, it didn't really matter that much to her, and she felt she needed to prove to him that the time she had slept with Jay meant nothing.

It was terrible to start a relationship with someone who knew everything about your past. It was so complicated.

The next morning, they had their usual Turkish-style breakfast of cucumber and tomato salad, feta and scrambled eggs in silence.

"So," she said, once they had finished. "I think I need to speak to Eddie,"

"No, I think I should," Kai said.

Emma let a silence fall. She knew it was better not to rush these things with Kai. Their cutlery clinked on the plates.

"I think it's better if I do," she said after a while. "He needs to hear it coming from me. I think that's why he's playing up."

He frowned. "Alright," he said. "What are you going to say?"

She gave an impatient sigh. Why did he have to ask? Couldn't he trust her?

"I'm going to tell him that I'm with you now, and that he has to accept that."

"Well, OK," he said. "If you think it will help."

But it was clear he didn't think it would make any difference.

She was waiting for Eddie in a café hidden away on the 6th floor of a building, looking out through the warped glass of the windows, out over the ramshackle, multicoloured apartments that jostled for space down the hill, satellite dishes sprouting from the rooves like a dirty white fungus.

She had a book open in front of her but she couldn't really concentrate on it. She and Eddie had often come here together because he was great friends with the owner. It was immensely popular with students, but at this time of day most of the tables were empty and it was a little forlorn and chilly. She hadn't taken off her jacket or her scarf, and she wrapped her hands around her little glass of tea for warmth.

There was a scuffle in the doorway, and Eddie appeared. He smiled at her from across the café and she realised how much she had missed him.

"Hi," she said, standing up when he came over.

They kissed awkwardly on the cheek.

"You warm enough?" he said with a giggle.

"It's freezing!"

"Ah, bloody pissweak Australians."

She laughed as they sat down.

"So what's up, Em?" he said, lighting a cigarette.

There was so much she had planned to say to him. She had prepared a speech in her mind overnight, and had honed it word by word on her way over.

Eddie, you and I have some kind of love together, something strange that doesn't fit in to any category. But did you really think I would go on like this forever, taking the scraps of your affection? You've treated me badly, and I've always forgiven you. Now I've found someone who loves me, who really loves me, and I need you to support me, to help me, to truly be my friend.

But it sounded ridiculous now that she was sitting here, absurd, and melodramatic.

"I need you to start treating me differently now," she said.

His eyebrows pulled together darkly. "I'm not doing anything," he said.

She stirred her tea, and felt waves of hostility coming off him. "Well, Kai gets jealous."

"Really?" He looked up keenly.

"Yeah." Now she felt like a traitor. But it was true, she realised as she said it. Kai was a jealous person.

"Ok, Em. I'll be careful," he said, insolently, with a touch of disdain, for Kai, and for her – for being with someone like Kai.

A wave of irritation swung over her. She had buggered it up. And he didn't understand at all, not really, he didn't see that he had done anything wrong. She looked at him, his silly scarf, his red jumper, his strange eyes, and wondered again what it was about him that drew her. Half the time she wanted to kiss him and half the time she wanted to smack him across the face.

*

"So Emma," Çiğdem said one day, smiling. "From next week, you will not be teaching at ISKI anymore."

"What?" Emma stared at her.

"No, we need you to teach at a different company. So Marie will be taking this class after next week."

"Oh no," Emma said, feeling upset. "Is there any way to change that?"

"Why?"

"I don't know." Tears pricked at her eyes.

Çiğdem gave her an indulgent smile.

"They are your favourites?" she said.

"Yes," Emma said, blushing.

"I'm sorry," she said. "But I cannot change this."

"OK." Emma walked off, feeling devastated. She had been teaching them for eight months now. They had passed through three levels, and even the weakest student could communicate on a basic level. They were like her children, and the thought of not seeing them every week was painful to her. She had had so many classes come and go since she arrived, but ISKI had been her first class and the only one that she had been with for so long.

On Wednesday, as usual, she took a taxi out to the company, feeling miserable at the thought of saying goodbye. But when she arrived, they were all smiling.

"Teacher, today we will not have class," Neşe said. "Today we will have party."

“Really?” Emma said, smiling.

“Yes. We will have party on the balkon to say goodbye to you, our best teacher.”

“On the balcony,” Emma said, automatically.

“Balcony,” Neşe echoed, and everybody smiled.

They took her into the kitchen and gathered around her, looking mysterious. Then they pulled a cake out of the fridge. It had her name on it.

“This cake is for you,” Gözde said, handing it to her, and smiling with her heavily painted lips.

Emma felt like crying.

“Thank you everybody,” she said, looking around.

“And it is a card for you,” said Nazmi, handing her a card.

Emma opened it and it was full of messages.

“Thank you teacher,” said Neşe. “We learn a lot with you.”

Emma felt tears pricking at her eyes.

“Let’s go out on the balcony,” she said.

They all got up and went out into the late autumn sunshine, and looked out to the water in the distance and to the blue sky beyond it.

Everyone stood around eating cake and drinking tea and laughing, and then the tea man came out with the pot, and they all had more tea and smoked cigarettes.

“I’ll really miss you guys,” she said.

“We will miss you too,” Metin said. “For us, you will always be our first teacher and our best teacher. This is very important in Türkiye.”

Emma remembered the first day she had taught them, when they couldn’t say a word of English, and as she listened to them now talking away, she felt enormously proud.

Becoming an English teacher was the best thing she had ever done, she thought, and she smiled across at Neşe.

“I think you love us?” Neşe said. “Teacher?”

“Maybe,” Emma said. “Maybe a little bit.”

*

Emma and Kai had been coming to this restaurant for lunch all the time recently, to sit in the late autumn sun at the rickety wooden tables in one of the laneways. Down on Istiklal people rushed by in a kaleidoscopic blur, but here it was peaceful, a calm spot hidden away in the city. It was a cool day and the smell of cold, damp stone was in the air, but Emma was wearing her new black winter coat and the weak sun soaked into the coat and warmed her bones. She reached over for Kai’s hand and pressed her fingers hard into his palm, and when he smiled at her, she lifted up his hand and bit down on his thumb.

She had bought the coat with Kai the day before. He had chosen it – it was not something she would have chosen, but it was elegant, and suited her very well. She liked the proprietary way he had stood behind her while she looked in the mirror, the way he had put his hands on her shoulders, the weight of them. He had a way of treating her like a wife, like a woman he owned. She liked it. She liked the feeling of being taken care of.

The waitress came out with their food. She was sweet and pretty and wore a green headscarf tied under her chin.

“Buyurun,” she said, smiling as she put the plates down.

Emma had ordered her favourite meal, *mantı*, Turkish ravioli covered in a slick of yoghurt. She eyed it with delight. When Emma ate, it was always too fast and in a kind of rapturous state. She loved food. The only reason she hadn’t put on too much weight in Turkey was because of how much she smoked, she was sure.

“So, come over for dinner tonight,” she said, after she had her first mouthful.

“What do you mean?”

“We’re going to cook a special dinner.”

“Who?”

“Me and Jay, of course.”

“Oh well, thanks a lot for inviting me,” Kai said.

She looked up swiftly.

“What are you talking about?”

“Thanks for checking with me first to see if I was free.”

There was a small silence. The *ting ting* of the tram sounded in the distance as it trundled by.

“Why wouldn’t you be free?” Emma asked, feeling confused.

“I might have other plans.”

She laughed. “You being serious?”

He looked at her coldly across the table, and she stopped laughing.

“What?” she said.

“So, who’s coming?” His voice was distant, and polite.

“Just the family of course.”

“And when did you decide all this?”

A wave of nervousness passed through her. “This morning. Look, what the fuck is the problem?”

“Please don’t swear at me.” He was speaking to her as though he hardly knew her.

“What are you talking about? You swear all the time.”

“There’s a difference.”

She expelled air from between her lips in a long rush. “Whatever.”

A kind of fear was welling up inside her.

“I don’t get it, what’s the problem?” she asked.

“If you don’t know what the problem is, Emma, then I can’t help you.”

The feeling welled up more and more, until her throat felt swollen.

“Well, I don’t know what the problem is,” she said, and tears pricked at her eyes.

He took a mouthful of his food, and sneered at her, as though he could see right through her, and he didn’t like what he saw.

“You’re in a relationship now, Emma,” he said.

“What, so that means I can’t make plans with my flatmate?”

“It would be nice if you would ask me first.”

The man who sold the strange whistles started walking up the alleyway, whistling the same strange tune he whistled every day, like a half man, half bird. The tune swooped and nosedived, as familiar to her as the city itself now.

She took a deep breath, wavering. Something important was at stake, but what was it? Something about her *freedom*. But what was more important – to be free or to be loved? It was so good to be needed by someone, to be with someone who wanted her around all

the time, not like Eddie, who had always made her feel like she was intruding on his life somehow. It had restored her faith in herself.

“OK,” she said, quietly. “I’m sorry.”

“That’s OK,” he said, and then gave her a smile, just like the old Kai, and she felt relaxed again.

*

When she got home, Jay was busy cooking. He hadn’t had the faintest idea how to cook when she first met him, but he had become quite good over the months. Eddie had been teaching him.

“Hey, what are you making?” she said, leaning against the doorframe.

“Well, a kind of stew, you know, for the cold weather and all.”

“Oh excellent,” she said. “Can I do anything to help?”

“No, that’s OK,” he said, stirring.

They fell into a silence.

“So, how’s it going with Kai?” he asked.

Emma was pleased. At least *someone* was showing an interest.

“Actually, I think I’m in love with him,” she said, smiling.

He looked at her sideways.

“But you said you were in love with me not so long ago,” he said.

Emma felt a strong slow humiliated heat creep up her cheeks.

“I know,” she said.

They looked at each other awkwardly, and Emma wondered if they would ever get their friendship back the way it was again.

“But I’ve been thinking about that, you know,” she continued. “I think it was just because you’d always been there for me, you know, you were the one thing I could rely on.”

“And this time is different,” he said.

“Yes. This is different,” she said.

He cocked an eyebrow at her.

“This is real love,” she said, feeling furious, and flounced back out of the house, slamming the door behind her.

She went down the Balık Pazarı and stormed out the back way, into the sad ugly alleyway that ran along parallel to Istiklal, full of the rubbish from the shops and restaurants. But if you kept going there was an underground car park, and from the top of the car park you could look out over a highway and over the grey sprawl of Istanbul, stretching for miles.

She lit a cigarette, drew back on it hard and blew the smoke out in long angry streams. It wasn’t her, it was them, she thought. They were the ones who had started it, all of them. And how dare Jay embarrass her like that? Wasn’t it bad enough that he had put her in that position, without bringing it up again and throwing it in her face? She supposed he was just trying to be a friend, but really! Sometimes men had no idea.

Slowly, as she smoked, she calmed down.

Was Jay right? she wondered. Did she really love Kai? When she thought about him, a rush of emotion swept over her, affection for the way he seemed to be lost in the world,

and the way he loved her so violently, and lust, of course, that was a part of it all, she lusted after Kai in a way she hadn't with many men. She felt a kind of constant hunger for him.

But then, when she thought about Eddie, she felt a different kind of pull, something deeper, a kind of admiration for his ballsiness, his wit, his utter disregard for what other people thought of him.

And then when she thought about what she had lost with Jay, the ease of their conversations, the companionship they had enjoyed together – maybe she loved them all, she thought, just in different ways, for different reasons.

But if she loved them all, did she really love any of them in the way you were supposed to? Wasn't true love supposed to be just for one person?

Anyway, out of the three, it was Kai who loved her, she thought. Maybe too much, but that was better than not enough.

Hundreds of cars below crawled past in a haze of smog. In every car was a person, with a life separate from hers, all of them toiling every day just to try to survive. And out there in the sprawl of the city were millions more. And in the world billions.

And all of them wanted this simple thing at heart, to be loved by someone.

*

Kai complained one day that Eddie and Jay were treating him differently.

"What do you mean?" Emma asked.

"It's like I'm not their friend anymore."

"You're just being paranoid."

"It's not me," Kai said furiously. "They're the jealous ones!"

"I don't think so."

"What, do you think I'm imagining it?"

"Maybe you're just misinterpreting it."

"What are you talking about? One of them is your ex-boyfriend or whatever he was, and the other one is your best friend that you fucked."

"Yes, I know," she said. "But it didn't mean much. And they're both our friends more than anything."

"They're *your* friends, Emma."

She looked at him, shocked.

"We're a family," she said.

"We used to be a family," he said. "But they don't like me now."

She didn't believe that Jay and Eddie would really behave differently to him out of jealousy. She thought it much more likely that he was the jealous one, that he was making the whole thing up so she would stop being friends with them, so he could have her all to himself. He always seemed to create problems when she spent time with other people.

"I'll speak to them," she said.

"No!" he said explosively.

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"I don't know," he said, sulkily.

Emma knew what he wanted. He wanted her all to himself. She felt it more and more, that she was being wrapped up tighter and tighter in his web. But she told herself there was nothing really wrong with that. She was safe there. He would always take care of her.

*

Emma still met Melek every week for their lessons but now, rather than charging her, Emma practiced speaking Turkish with her after each English lesson.

They had become friends.

Today they were in Ara, a fashionable café named after a famous Turkish photographer, full of his black and white photos of Istanbul. Emma liked to go there for the omelettes and for the exquisite service. It was the kind of place where you could stay for hours and nobody minded.

“So canım. How is life?” Melek asked her, as always.

“I don’t know,” Emma said.

“Why?”

“Oh, I’m just not sure if I should be with Kai. He’s so different to the man who was my friend. It’s like I’m with a totally different person.”

“Strange.”

“I know. He was so easygoing when he was my friend, and so supportive of me, and so funny and silly. And now he’s always serious, and possessive and I don’t feel like he’s my friend at all.”

“Hmm. Maybe it will come back, your friendship?”

“Yes, that’s what I hope. That this is just a teething period.”

“What is teething period?”

“You know when a baby gets its first teeth?” Emma said, opening up her mouth and pointing.

“Oh yes, that this is the difficult first time but it will pass,” Melek said. She was always so quick to understand.

“Yes.”

“Maybe,” she said, giving Emma a thoughtful look.

Or maybe not, Emma thought. She stirred her coffee and licked the froth off the spoon. This was one of the few places where you could have a latte in Istanbul. It was always a treat.

“And how is Eddie?” Melek asked.

“I don’t really see him anymore.”

“So you are not in love with him then?”

“No,” Emma lied. She felt that the more she lied about it to people the more it would be true. “I think we were just meant to be friends.”

Melek nodded.

“And why don’t you see him anymore?”

“Oh it’s Eddie’s fault really. He won’t behave differently around me so Kai gets upset, and I don’t know, it’s just not working. It makes me really sad actually, that they can’t be adults about it.”

“I think maybe people cannot be adults when they are in love,” Melek said, and her dimples appeared.

“I guess you’re right!” Emma said, smiling back. “And how about you? What’s happening with your boyfriend?”

“Yes, he has slept with somebody. He told me.”

“God! Are you OK?”

“Yes,” she said, calmly. “This is what we planned.”

“Did he go into details with you?”

“Yes, he told me everything.”

“Wow. You two have an amazing relationship.”

“I know,” she said, then smiled. “Now it is my turn. I have been afraid, but now I am not. I want to know everything.”

“I want to know everything too,” Emma said. “Let’s both become the wisest women in the world.”

“What is wise?”

“Oh, well, the noun is wisdom,” Emma said slowly, trying to think of the best way to explain it. “It’s a kind of knowledge you can only get from experience, I guess. And then you use that knowledge to control your own behaviour.”

“Hmm. Yes, I know. We say *irfan*. Old people have this, correct?”

“Yes, that’s right!”

“I think I am not very wise,” Melek said.

“You are much wiser than me!” Emma said. “I feel like I’m always doing dumb things.”

“Don’t worry Emma,” Melek said, suddenly serious. “I think God has you in his hand.”

Emma looked at her and wished it were true.

But lately she felt her life was like a wheel, racing down a hill.

*

Winter arrived abruptly one day, with icy winds that cut through the air like knives. It was so strong that hats were whisked away, the birds down at the water flew off course, and the little trees on Istiklal bent over, as if in pain.

“I can’t believe how cold it is,” she said to her students.

“This? This is not the true winter yet!” they said, full of mirth. “Soon, you will feel what is cold.”

To their dismay, Jay and Emma discovered that the central heating in their building simply didn’t work. They sat around shivering, and complaining, trying to soak up the heat from the little heater they had, but after a couple of days they had had enough, and simply decamped – Jay to Helene’s house, and Emma to Kai’s, only coming home in the morning for fresh clothes. The apartment started to feel like a place of decay. Mould grew up the tiles in the bathroom, and if you opened the fridge you were likely to find something unidentifiable in the corner somewhere.

Kai’s place was deliciously warm and Emma would have been happy to spend all her time there if not for his flatmates, Gül and Elif. Elif was always sitting in the corner of the lounge room, gazing intently at Kai with her white face, and giggling at him in a

mocking way, as though she thought nothing of him at all, but of course she did. It was all very awkward.

“You know Elif is in love with you, don’t you?” she asked Kai one night.

“No, she’s not,” he said.

“You have no idea, do you? And I’ll bet Ayşe was too.”

He looked glum.

“How did she react when you told her about me?”

“Mmm, she wasn’t too happy.”

“You can’t just fuck girls without them falling in love with you,” she said. “Maybe one or two times. But not a lot.”

His flatmates were both small, slight girls, with delicate, refined features and thick straight hair, Elif’s dark and Gül’s light – the kind of girls who always made Emma feel too tall. This was the first time they had lived away from home, and the living room was always littered with little coffee cups, lipstick around the rims, and tiny ashtrays crammed with butts, while in the kitchen dishes teetered in great dirty piles.

Emma had always had a friendly relationship with both of them, but now they both became frigidly polite to her, and she felt the full force of their hatred, their twin moon faces looking up and gazing dispassionately at her whenever she walked into a room.

“They hate me,” she said.

And Kai didn’t argue. It was true.

To avoid the girls, she started to go straight to Kai’s bedroom when she arrived and to stay there all night. If she needed something from the kitchen Kai got it for her. They fell into a habit of doing everything in bed, of eating takeaway food, drinking red wine, smoking, fucking, and listening to music. Crumbs fell into the bed, the room reeked of sex, and their lips were always stained with wine. It was childish, and indulgent, and real life seemed to have been put on hold.

Sometimes when they got to talking, she couldn’t help comparing their conversations to the conversations she had had with Jay and with Eddie, and to feel disappointed. Kai wasn’t a deep thinker like Jay and he wasn’t entertaining like Eddie. There was nothing he was passionate about, nothing special he knew about, and he didn’t read.

But there was something exotic about him, something elusive. She loved listening to him talking in Arabic, the strange sound of it, the guttural sharpness of its consonants. Sometimes she asked him to talk to her in Arabic while they were fucking, and she imagined she was with a totally different man. Sometimes he had long phone conversations in Arabic with his mother or his brother or his ex-wife, and she would listen and try to pick out the common words so that she could ask him what they meant. Afterwards he always seemed angry and he told Emma that they were all trying to make him feel guilty about his daughter.

One day, she had been looking in Kai’s wardrobe for a pair of socks she could borrow when she had come across a picture of his daughter. She was gorgeous – hair curling around her face, chubby cheeks and dimples, and she was laughing at the camera. Emma had held the photo in her hand, staring for a minute, then dropped it quickly back in the drawer, as though it had burned her fingers.

Kai told her he would take her somewhere beautiful in Egypt, perhaps to Dahab, to smoke joints and dive.

“But I don’t smoke marijuana anymore,” she said, and ran her hand along the inside of his thigh.

“Well, I’m pretty sure they have beer there.”

She smiled. “What else are we going to do?”

“I’ll take you to ride horses in the desert.”

“Really?”

“Yes. It’s the most beautiful thing to do in the world.”

“And camels?” Emma asked, growing sleepy. The room was warm and cosy.

“Sure. If you want.”

Sometimes, when both the girls were out in the morning, Emma came out of her self-imposed exile. It was a beautiful apartment, with big windows facing over the spires and rooftops of Istanbul, and on a sunny day the living room was flooded with the kind of warm light that made you want to curl up in it and sleep. And sometimes she did, she lay down in the sun, and Kai would come and lie on top of her, and she would scream in an agony of delight and fight him, but of course he would always win, and he would pin her down and slap her face lightly, in an echo of the way he would slap her at night.

*

One Sunday, Melek called her and asked if she could come over.

“Of course,” Emma said, surprised. “I’ll see you soon.”

It was unusual for Melek to call her out of the blue like this. Emma wondered what was happening.

When she arrived, Emma kissed her and took her into the kitchen to make tea for them both.

“So what’s going on?” she said.

Melek suddenly began crying.

“What’s wrong?” Emma said, surprised.

Melek cried as though it hurt her to do it, screwing up her face and stretching her mouth. Emma guessed that Melek didn’t cry very often.

“What is it, *canım*?” she said again, putting her hand on her arm.

“It’s Eddie,” Melek said, finally.

“What?” Emma stared at her.

“I’m very sorry,” she said.

Emma felt a wave of jealousy roll over her.

“You slept with him,” she said.

Melek nodded through her tears.

“When?” Emma asked. She couldn’t believe it. She had only introduced them a week before, when Melek had come to a party with her.

“Last night,” Melek said.

“And why are you crying?” Emma asked.

“He made me feel –” she waved her hand in the air.

Emma remembered the first time she had slept with Eddie, the way he had treated her, and a great wave of sympathy washed over her.

“I know,” Emma said. “It makes you feel rotten, doesn’t it?”

She stepped towards Melek and gave her a hug.

This was about her and Kai, she thought. This was his revenge. And he had used Melek, who was so innocent, and so dear to Emma. She felt furious.

I'll kill him, she thought.

Melek pulled away, her face streaked with tears.

“I don't think I want to do this open relationship anymore,” she said, still sobbing. “I don't want to.”

“You have to be tough to do it,” Emma said. “You can't expect men to treat you with any kind of respect.”

“No. I will tell my boyfriend to finish this,” Melek said. “Now I know I love him so much. I feel like we are crazy to think of this idea.”

Emma poured out the tea.

“Yes, it doesn't work,” she said.

Eddie would always be alone, she thought, and he would end up a lonely old man.

She stirred the sugar savagely through the tea.

And although she told herself it wasn't Melek's fault, she knew she wouldn't see her again.

Chapter 10

Her friend Christopher, intellectual, perpetual student and technology geek, was coming to stay for a week in Istanbul. The only thing that saved Christopher from being a complete nerd was his ongoing drug experimentation. He had flown to Cambodia specifically to smoke opium, to Mexico to try peyote, had lived in Amsterdam for years. Christopher was the only person Emma knew who had actually put pain killers in the oven to extract the codeine.

She had slept with Christopher, once, a long time ago, but they had been on a pill, and so it didn't really count. They had been friends of a kind for years, not great friends, but they were important to one another. It was not the first time he had come to see her overseas, and when you were always travelling, the friends who visited became important. She wondered if she should tell Kai that she had slept with Christopher, but decided almost immediately that it would be a terrible idea. Kai would become jealous, she knew, and she wanted everything to go smoothly.

"Yikes," Christopher said, as they walked out of the airport. "It's cold!"

"Yeah, it's been freezing," she said.

It was good to see him, his familiar face, but they had always been a little awkward together. He wasn't good at small talk.

"How has life in Sydney been?" she asked.

"Oh yeah, pretty good actually. I bought this huge telescope."

"Right."

"Oh, I almost forgot," he said, and bent over his bag for a second before pulling out a video camera.

"I'm going to film everything," he said, switching it on, and pointing it at her face.

A part of her recoiled at the idea. There was something dreamlike about her life here, and recording it would make it real. She felt uneasy at the thought.

*

"You're not wearing that, are you?" Kai said, as she got dressed to go out that night.

"Why? What's wrong with it?" she said. It was a top she had often worn to go out.

"It's a bit low cut."

"What?" she laughed. "I don't even have any boobs."

"Well, I don't know why you want to wear it tonight," he said. "We're only going to a restaurant."

"OK, OK" she said, gritting her teeth. "I'll change."

The last thing she wanted tonight was a fight, with Christopher sitting outside in the living room.

The three of them went to their favourite *meyhane* with Jay and Helene, hidden away upstairs at a place down a laneway. When they arrived, the owner came out personally to greet them and fawn over them, and seated them with smiles at their favourite table. They ordered mezze and wine, and sat back to listen to the guitarist who sat on a stool in

the corner singing a sad Turkish song. Emma loved live music, loved how it made her feel she was really living.

“Emma, where is the Eddie?” the owner asked as he poured out more wine, looking at the door as though he expected him to come in at any minute.

“Oh. He’s not coming tonight,” Emma said, blushing and avoiding Kai’s eyes. Eddie hadn’t come out with them much lately. He kept making excuses, crying off. And since his adventure with Melek, Emma was glad not to see him. She wanted to kill him. She looked at Christopher and thought about the unseen tangle of relationships that lay beneath what he could see.

“I love living here,” she said to him. “It’s like living in a fairy tale.”

“Yeah sometimes,” Kai said. “Sometimes it’s more like a nightmare.”

“What do you mean?” asked Christopher curiously.

“Well, you know, it can be kind of tough,” Kai said, laughing. “The traffic, the city, it’s not easy.”

Christopher nodded, then turned back to Emma.

“So, why do you think it’s like a fairy tale, Emma?” he said. Emma wished Christopher was the kind of person who was good at faking interest. She could see Kai felt snubbed.

“Well, there’s the water all around you,” she said. “And the ferries, and all the passageways and tunnels to get places, and everywhere is secret and mysterious, and there are places to eat like this restaurant. I don’t know. It all seems kind of marvellous.”

Kai snorted, as though she were talking rubbish.

“She’s right,” said Jay. “There is something about this city that is magical. But it’s hard to define.”

“Yes,” Helene said. “It’s just something in the air.”

“Well, I’m looking forward to seeing it all,” Christopher said. “When are we going to get started, Emma?”

“Tomorrow, if you like,” she said.

Emma could sense Kai sulking rather than see it. She was always so afraid of doing something wrong that she had become hypersensitive to the slightest change in his mood. His hand was dangling by his side, and she picked it up and squeezed it, but he didn’t squeeze it back.

After dinner, they took Christopher out to Madrid.

“Hey!” they heard as they arrived. “Who’s your new friend?”

It was Gerard, standing outside, smoking a cigarette.

“Oh God, he smells fresh blood,” Emma muttered to Christopher. “Do not be getting into a conversation with this guy.”

“Nice suit,” Christopher whispered back..

“Hey Gerard,” they all said, and swept by him into the bar.

All the teachers were there at one of the tables in the corner, including Eddie. He looked up when they arrived, then looked away. Then he looked back and gave Christopher a searching look.

“Hi,” he said, standing up. “I’m Eddie.” He may as well have been announcing that he was the king.

“Hey!” came a voice from behind them. “I’m Gerard! Where are you from?”

“Australia,” Christopher said.

“Oh yeah? Another Aussie, hey? Nice to meet you. What was your name? Christopher? Hey Christopher. You get called Chris? No, just Christopher. Right on. I’m from the States, but I’ve flown all over the world, not to Australia, but I’ve been to the mid East, Asia, you name it –”

“Yeah yeah, with the CIA, we know,” Eddie said, catching Emma’s eye and smiling. For a second it was just like old times. Then she gave him a look that said she didn’t want to know him, and he looked away.

“Everyone this is my friend Christopher from Sydney,” Emma announced firmly to the table and they sat down amidst a chorus of hellos.

After they were kicked out of the bar, they all decided to go to a club to carry on.

“I think we should go home,” Kai said in her ear, as they walked along.

“No. I don’t want to,” Emma said. As usual, she was determined to keep drinking now, she didn’t want the feeling of being drunk to end. “You go if you want to.”

She could feel his glare through her skin.

“I’ll wait for you,” he said, and her heart sank. She missed the freedom she had had when she was single, to stay out until whenever she wanted, to go wherever she wanted.

The club was dark and the music was blaring, and there were people dancing everywhere. Faces loomed at you in the flaring blue light, then disappeared.

“Do you want to dance?” she shouted to Kai, smiling.

“No,” he said, tight lipped. “I’m not in the mood.”

“What a surprise,” she muttered.

They found a table, and she turned to talk to Christopher and Jay, who were talking about some philosopher she had never heard of. Normally, she would have settled down to enjoy a long drunken conversation with them, but she couldn’t do that now, with Kai sitting so solemn and disapproving beside her. She may as well go home, she thought angrily. She couldn’t have a good time now anyway.

“Well, I’m in trouble,” she said in a low voice.

“Why?” asked Jay.

“Oh, because I don’t want to go home,” she said, pulling a face.

“He seems kind of pissed off with you or something,” Christopher said.

“Oh, he’s always like that,” Emma said, rolling her eyes comically to make it seem less important. But she was embarrassed. “I don’t even notice it anymore.”

They giggled.

“Anyway,” she said. “I’d better go, it’s not worth it. Sorry Christopher. I’ll see you tomorrow. I hope the apartment’s not too cold for you.”

“It’ll be fine,” he said.

“OK,” she said, turning to Kai. “Let’s go.”

They walked home in sulking silence.

All she felt was anger towards him, roiling and broiling around inside her, and when they got home, she got into bed, and went to sleep without saying goodnight.

In the morning, Kai said, “Did you have any idea what was going on last night?”

“What are you talking about?”

“All those guys wanted to go out and pick up, and you had to insist on going with them. Even your friend Christopher didn’t want you there.”

Emma's face went hot. "Well, fuck them, they can pick up if I'm there."

"No, they can't, Emma. You don't know anything."

She felt confused. The guys had never cared if she stayed out with them before, but then she had never really seen them pick up either. Was Kai just saying that to make her feel bad about not wanting to come home with him? She never knew whether she could believe him or not. So many things he got angry about had never mattered before.

"I didn't even notice there were only guys left," she said.

He gave her a disgusted look, the one that said she was lying.

"Anyway, why didn't you tell me this last night?"

"I think it's best if you go out with your friends, and I go out with mine from now on," he said.

"Oh no," she said.

"What's wrong with that?" he said, and she could hear the satisfaction in his voice.

"We're supposed to be a couple. I don't want to go out without you."

"That's right," he said, smiling. "We are supposed to be a couple."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You hardly spoke to me at the bar last night."

She stopped to think. She had talked to other people, of course, but had she ignored him? It was all a blur.

"Listen, I may not have been sitting on your lap the whole night, but I was *with you*."

"God, you're really crazy, aren't you?"

"Don't say that," she said, starting to cry. "Please don't say that."

Perhaps I am crazy, she thought.

And somewhere in her mind, a gate creaked open.

"Don't cry," he said.

"I can't help it," she said, and it was like a trigger. She cried even harder, squeezing up her face as sobs jerked at her chest.

His eyes softened, and he moved over to her side of the bed, and put his arm around her, and rubbed her back.

"Come on, stop crying," he said. "Come on now."

"Promise me we can still go out together," she said.

"I promise," he said, rubbing and rubbing, and kissing her cheeks.

Eventually she stopped, her sobs petering out like a dying motor. She felt sated and weak and hollow all at the same time. He could do anything he liked with her now.

She looked up at him tearfully, and he leaned in and kissed her, and pushed her down on the bed.

Emma and Christopher went off together around Istanbul over the next couple of days. Christopher wanted to see everything, and Emma saw places she had never seen before – the palaces, the cisterns, and the Princess Islands, and she fell even more in love with the city every day. How old Istanbul was, with its crumbling walls and giant mosques, its aqueducts, and the ancient sewers that honeycombed beneath the city. And even though nowadays boxy little yellow taxis poured exhaust fumes over the palaces and techno blared from the shops, you really felt that underneath it all nothing had changed, that it was all just lying there sleeping and waiting, like a giant serpent with one eye open,

watching her while she walked around explaining everything to Christopher, and laughing at her presumption.

Everywhere they went, Christopher filmed, and Emma grew used to having the camera pointed in her face. But you weren't really natural in front of the camera, you were always performing slightly. When he played the video back at the end of each day, she watched it with secret avidity – she wanted to know what she looked like through other people's eyes. But she hardly recognised herself. She looked so happy and contented, laughing away all the time.

Well, it's what we all do, she thought. *We all pretend, we all hide our shameful unhappiness.*

Kai hinted to Christopher that the whole thing was narcissistic, by refusing to let anyone film him, and looking at the camera with disdain. Emma could see how much Christopher disliked him and she felt humiliated, that Kai wasn't making more than the barest effort to get along with him.

"Come on, Kai," she would say, pointing the camera just to the side of him. "It can be a beautiful memory for us some day."

But he would just continue what he was doing without looking up, saying, "Don't film me, Emma."

Christopher and Emma went to the ancient cistern, an echoing chamber full of hundreds of marble columns and still water. It was an eerie place and they were the only tourists in there. In one corner there were two giant heads of Medusa, one upside down, one sideways, with columns coming out of their heads like necks.

"What was the story with Medusa again?" she said.

"She was so beautiful her sister got jealous and turned her into a monster," said Christopher. "And if you look at her you'll turn to stone."

"That's right."

Emma looked at the snakes curling out of Medusa's head, and shivers went down her spine. There was so much jealousy in her life at the moment.

Christopher turned on the camera and swept it slowly around the strange space, around the Medusas, and then around to rest on Emma.

"So," he said. "Tell me about your life in Istanbul."

"Well," she said. "What would you like to know?"

"OK. For example, what's the best thing that has happened to you here?"

Emma thought back, over everything that had happened, and to her embarrassment, tears came to her eyes.

"Can you turn off the camera?" she said.

"Sure," he said. "Hey, are you OK?"

"You know, it's strange to have you here," she said.

He looked startled. "Why?"

"I have such a different life now."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. This city is so intense, and I'm really wrapped up with the people here. And you come, and suddenly I see how strange it all is."

"But you're still the same person," he said, putting the camera down on the table.

"Am I?" she said, eagerly. "Do I seem the same?"

“Yeah,” he said, laughing.

“I don’t know. I feel like I’m losing sight of myself.”

“I think that always happens when you travel.”

“No, it doesn’t,” she said.

“Well, you can always leave, I guess,” he said.

“But I can’t,” she said. “I feel, I don’t know, I feel like I’ve fallen down the rabbit hole.”

He snorted. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Well, you know, I need to find the right bottle to get out.”

“Sounds silly to me,” he said gently.

“It’s Istanbul,” she said. “It’s done something to me. You know, I know it sounds crazy, but sometimes I feel like the city is sucking me in.”

“Maybe you need to take a holiday,” he said. “You’re probably just tired.”

“I guess you’re right,” she said. But she knew it was more than that.

The water lapped quietly at the edges of the stone.

*

She asked her students at the hotel what they felt about Istanbul.

“I am in love with Istanbul,” said Tuğba. “But Istanbul can be hard place to live.”

“Why?”

“Everything. It’s a metropolitan city.”

“Always the living in Istanbul hard because the people always have a rush,” said Can.

“Life is really hard.”

“Yes,” said Pinar. “In Turkey, people have to care about their children’s education, their children’s lives.”

“I know a family,” Tuğba said. “And they have three children and they live one house, and that guy get 500 and they pay 300 for rent, and so they have 200 for he, his children, and his wife. Five person, only 200 and they have to live one month, and electricity and everything.”

Emma thought guiltily about what the teachers made, which was double that, and the way they all complained they didn’t get paid enough.

“We have too many story about people dying because they don’t have money,” said Kaan.

“People come from the villages every day,” Can jumped in. “People say Istanbul’s ground and soil is from gold. They think Istanbul has lots of chance for them.”

“Istanbul has lots of chance but not enough for fourteen million people,” Tuğba said.

A quiet student called Fulya piped up. “I love Istanbul but I think it is sad place.”

“Why?”

“Maybe Istanbul’s history, because a lot of things happened. We lost too many soldiers, we lost too many wars. I think sometimes you can feel it.”

“What do you mean?”

“For example, in autumn, when the weather is not sunny, and you are in Dolmabahçe Palace, and you look at the sea and mosque on all sides – at the time you can feel something.”

The other students all looked at her in surprise, nodding in agreement.

“The ferry’s horn is a very sad song,” she said.

Sometimes, as Emma slept by Kai’s side, she thought she could hear the ferries in her dreams, crying out over the dark water.

*

“Wake up,” Kai hissed in her ear the next day.

“What?” she said, frowning and grumpy. She hated being woken up.

“You have to see this.”

“No,” she said, and curled under the covers, trying to catch the thread of her dream.

“Come on.”

He took her by the hand and led her out to the lounge room, with its big bay windows.

“Oh,” she said on a sigh.

She had only seen snow once before – it was just like she remembered, but then nothing like it. It fell on such a grand scale, blanketing everything so thickly, and yet it was so fragile, and rested so lightly on the thinnest of things – the edge of a gate, the side of a leaf, the spokes of a bicycle wheel. It amazed her to see the world transformed, so white and clean, and the strangeness of the light falling on it, the brilliance of it, halfway between day and a moonlit night, did something to her, changed her.

She stood with Kai by the window, watching it fall, and it was so beautiful that she felt inextricably bound to him for being the one to see it with her. She would never leave him, she thought. She might try, but if ever she left him, she would be breaking her last tie with Istanbul, and with everything that had happened to her here.

“I want you to get a divorce,” she said, and it felt as though the words were coming out of her mouth by themselves.

“A divorce?” he said.

“Yes. If we’re going to travel the world together, I’m not going to travel around with a married man. It would make me feel cheap.”

He pulled her closer and hugged her hard, and Emma looked at their reflection in the window, and loved how they looked – one dark, the other pale. Their bodies were ghostly in the glass, and the snow fell in great flakes right through them.

It was a Saturday. Jay and Helene brought Christopher over for breakfast, and later, when the snow had stopped, they all went for a walk. It was so quiet outside, as though the snow had soaked up all the noise, and everything was clear and glittering. The snow felt strange under Emma’s feet, squeaky and soft and hard all at the same time. She pressed up against Kai, and linked her arm through his, and they grinned at each other. It was one of the good days, she could already tell.

Christopher walked along behind them, secretly recording Kai and Emma, the happy couple, and she felt that by being recorded in this way, they *would* be a happy couple, that they might exist like this forever, walking through the snow.

They walked all the way down the hill to the park by the water, and here there were great expanses of untouched snow, marred only by the forked footprints of birds. In the distance, the mosque rose, a white dome against the even whiter sky.

“Oh, it’s so beautiful,” said Emma.

“It’s like the beginning of time, isn’t it?” Helene said, and they smiled at each other.

Emma wished Eddie was with them too. Even though she was angry with him, there was a big hole in the family where he usually was.

“I want to make a snowball,” she said. “I’ve never done it before.”

She bent down and made a snowball, and was surprised at how wet it was, and then she threw it at Christopher, and laughed at the surprised expression on his face.

“There’s something you should know about snowballs, Emma,” Christopher said, leaning over. “You see, the thing is, you can’t throw one without getting into a snowball fight.”

Emma laughed, and suddenly they were all bending over making snowballs as fast as they could, and then snowballs were flying, and everyone was screaming, and Emma felt so happy she wanted to cry, and she realised how long it had been since she had felt this way.

Too long.

“Did anything ever happen between you and Christopher?” Kai asked that night when they were lying in bed.

Her heart gave a jerk. She thought about lying, but she knew she couldn’t. She was always so terrible at it.

“Well, we slept together once, but it was *ages* ago, maybe ten years ago,” she said, and she yawned slightly, to show how insignificant it was.

Kai’s face darkened.

“You could have told me,” he said.

“I haven’t thought about it for years,” she lied. “We were on a pill. I can’t even remember it, actually.”

“Oh sure.”

“What is this, you don’t trust me? You think I’m going to fuck him again?”

“No, it’s got nothing to do with that, I just don’t know why you lied to me.”

“I didn’t *lie* to you. I just didn’t think it was important,” Emma huffed. She felt stress rising up inside her, like steam pushing against a lid. “It’s not important to me.”

“That’s convenient.”

She couldn’t bear a fight now. It had been such a perfect day.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I honestly didn’t think about it. He’s more like my brother than anything else. It was just a drug fucked thing a long time ago. I’m really sorry I didn’t tell you.”

“Like your *brother*. Well, that’s crazy.”

“Don’t tell me I’m crazy,” she said.

“OK, Emma,” he said coldly.

“I’m not crazy!”

“Fine.”

She punched him on the arm.

“Stop being so cold! I can’t stand it!”

“Don’t hit me, Emma,” he said, superior.

“Oh my God,” she said. “I can’t stand it.”

And she started crying out of frustration, and anger, with herself. She should have told him, she hated to lie, what had happened to her? What kind of relationship was she having with Kai, that she had to lie?

He watched her for a while, and then pulled her close to him, holding her so tight she thought he would crush her.

The problem with Kai was that he didn't know what to do with his love, she thought. He didn't know how to turn it into something beautiful. But she felt the strength of it underneath everything, under all the fighting, all the things he said to her. It was white hot, and she felt it was eating him up, bit by bit.

In the morning, as she stepped out into the heavy falling snow, she suddenly felt like she needed to speak to Marco, to get some perspective on things, to try to remember herself before all this, before she left Sydney, when she had been strong. She thought about the delight Marco had always taken in hearing about her sex life, the way he had encouraged her to find her sexuality. *If it was Marco, I would have told him about Christopher in a flash*, she thought. *Or Eddie, I would have told him too.*

She stopped to call Marco from a phone box, feeling almost afraid that Kai would catch her. It was totally irrational, but sometimes she fancied he knew what she was doing all the time, like God. It really wouldn't surprise her if he suddenly appeared behind her, saying *Who are you calling, Emma?*

It took a long time to punch in all the numbers on the calling card, and all she got in the end was Marco's voice message. It was still the same message, the same message she had listened to so many times, his voice going up on his name and falling down in a humble way at the end. For some reason, that surprised her. She hung up the receiver on its metal cradle, and stared out through the glass at the snow pounding down.

On the other side of the world it was summertime. Perhaps a thunderstorm was building up in Sydney, the kind where the sky grew darker and fuller all day, slowly, and the humidity built and built until it reached screaming point, until the whole city went quiet for a few ominous minutes save for the rumble of thunder. And then would come the blessed rain, blustering through the afternoon, clattering on the rooves, belting the harbour, and tearing the frangipani flowers from the trees until the streets were littered with their bruised wet corpses and the air was thick with the smell of steaming asphalt.

As she walked across Istiklal Caddesi, the red tram came trundling by, weighted down with snow, dark faces in the gloomy windows. It was always in the cold European winters that Emma felt homesick. It was a cold that got into the marrow of your bones, that got into your blood.

*

Christopher left and Emma and Kai went through a good patch, where they didn't go out drinking much. They went to the movies or bowling, or read books in Kai's bed, and Emma started to relax, to feel that there was nothing to worry about.

"I've bought my ticket," Kai said, smiling broadly one day.

"What for?"

"To go to Cairo."

She stared at him, confused.

"To get my divorce," he said, impatiently.

Emma had almost forgotten. She looked at him, and suddenly everything seemed very serious.

“Wow,” she said. “When are you going?”

“Next week.”

She gulped. “So soon!”

“Yeah, well I just want to get it over with,” he said.

“OK.” The photo of his daughter flashed into her mind, unbidden, and she felt guilty.

“I’m just thinking of your daughter,” she said.

He looked at her seriously.

“Listen, Emma, I’d be doing this anyway, you know. Maybe not right now, but sometime soon. You’re not breaking up my marriage.”

“I know.”

“Are you having second thoughts about us?”

“No, no, of course I’m not,” she said, giving him a hug. But a kind of panic swept over her, for the big events that she had started with her little sentence.

He went to Egypt, and for days she heard nothing from him. She grew more and more worried, but there was nothing she could do. She had no way of calling him, and didn’t even know the names of his parents, nothing. It struck her that if something had happened to him, she would have no way of knowing.

“I haven’t heard from Kai for days,” she said to Jay. “I’m getting worried.”

“Oh, he’ll be fine, Emma,” Jay said. “Don’t worry.”

But she couldn’t sleep. She alternated between worry and fury, and somehow the two feelings got all mixed up.

On the fourth day, he called and woke her in the middle of the night.

“Where have you been?” she said. “I’ve been worried out of my brain.”

“I’m outside your house right now!” he said, sounding excited.

“Jesus,” she said, and rolled herself out of bed.

“Hey! I got my divorce!” he said, as she opened the door.

“Shhh. Jay’s asleep,” she whispered crossly. “Come into my room.”

“It’s so good to see you,” he said, kissing her. But she wouldn’t kiss him back.

“Why didn’t you call me?” she said.

“I just couldn’t,” he said. “So much has been going on. Oh my god, you wouldn’t believe what I had to go through. I lost everything in the end, the house, all my stuff. But I got my divorce. I’m free now!”

Emma felt as though she were sinking. He had given up everything.

“I don’t understand why you couldn’t make one phone call,” she said. She knew that she was spoiling the moment, but she didn’t care.

“Well, I’m sorry.”

A silence fell.

“Look, I’m really tired. You woke me up,” she said, getting into bed. “Why don’t we talk in the morning.”

“OK,” he said. “Can I sleep here?”

“Of course.”

He took his clothes off, and got in beside her.

“I love you,” he said, and ran his hand down her side.

“I love you too,” she said tonelessly, so he wouldn’t expect to have sex with her.

But as soon as she closed her eyes, she wished she hadn't been so cold with him. He had done a big thing for her. He really loved her. Not like Eddie, she thought. But at the thought of Eddie, she felt a pang.

God, she thought, I shouldn't have asked Kai to get a divorce. Somehow, she had brought the real world into something that had been a fairytale. And now that he had actually gone and done it, here she was thinking about Eddie. Well, she wasn't so despicable that she would let it affect the way she behaved towards Kai. She would be even more loyal to him now, to make up for her weakness.

She turned over in the bed, and put her arms around him, and after a second, he took hold of her hands, and squeezed them.

Chapter 11

A Turkish artist friend of a friend had gone to live in New York, and he wanted to sublet his apartment in Istanbul, cheap. Emma jumped at the opportunity to live alone with Kai. She was sick of skulking around Kai's house all the time – it made her feel ridiculous. At first Kai wasn't too keen on moving, but she put her heart into persuading him.

“Just think,” she said. “We could save so much money and take little holidays.”

“Just think,” she said. “We'd be able to walk around naked everywhere.”

“Just think,” she said. “We could fuck in the kitchen.”

And he capitulated.

The apartment was in Kuledibi, down near the Galata Tower, not far from school, an area of old streets that wound around like snakes up the hill. It was a primitive little flat, and absolutely jam packed with junk and paintings. The only form of heating was a thin pot belly stove which was smack in the middle of the living room, and the kitchen was tiny, with a single gas ring hooked up to a gas tank. But they liked it. The sunlight streamed in through the big windows in the living room, and you could hear birds, and the children playing in the street down below.

It was a Saturday night and Emma was packing. It didn't take long. All she really owned were her clothes, plus a few books. It was all she ever really had. She thought it was all she would ever have, that it signalled a kind of purity in her. She looked around at the empty bedroom and remembered the day she had moved in, how Jay had modelled his leather pants for her, and how they had laughed together for the first time.

Jay was sitting at the table in front of his computer, frowning, a beer by his side and a cigarette burning in the ashtray. He had been drinking steadily since the afternoon.

“Hey,” he said, as she came out. “How's it going?”

“All done,” she said.

They looked at each other. Whenever they looked at each other now, there was the knowledge that they had had sex, and that they were lying about it to Helene. Emma wished she could take that night back more than anything. But one good thing had come out of it. It had made Jay realise what he wanted. He and Helene were very close now, and Emma was glad of it.

“You want to have a beer with me before you go?” he said.

“Nah,” she said. “I better get going. I'll come back for the rest tomorrow.”

“Well OK, roomie,” he said, standing up. “Good luck with everything.”

He took a step towards her, and they hugged, awkwardly. She hoisted her backpack up on her shoulders.

“Bye,” she said.

On the move, again, again, she thought.

And then she went out of the door, down the long flight of stairs.

Emma and Kai spent days cleaning up the new place. No-one had lived there for months and it was filthy with dust and grime. They scrubbed and scrubbed until their hands were raw, and buckets of dirty water littered every room. Then they painted the

whole apartment white, but they painted the bedroom blue, because they ran out of white paint. Emma made curtains out of cheap fabric, sewing the seams by hand one long day. But she didn't mind – she loved sewing, she loved the rhythm of it, loved the feeling of making something. On the last day, they went down to the Eminönü markets and bought some cheerful rugs to cover the dark floorboards, and some pretty plates and cups.

They put most of the artist's junk into a tiny storeroom, and all the paintings, but they hung a few on the walls. They were dark, weird paintings, with flecks of yellow and red.

“And where shall we put Eddie's painting?” Emma asked when they were finished.

“Do you really want to put it up?” he said.

“Why? Don't you like it?” she said.

“It's OK,” he said.

“I'll hang it here,” she said, and put it on a wall in the kitchen, where they wouldn't see it all the time. It was still the best present she had ever had, and she loved to look at it, the strange blue light of it, like the walls of the old apartment.

Every morning at 4am an ear-splitting call to prayer blasted through their window, so loud it felt as though the loudspeaker were set up on their actual windowsill. The first time it happened, Emma almost jumped out of her skin. Now, they still both woke up, and groaned, and stared at each other, bleary eyed in the faint dawn, before curling up into one another again, Kai enfolding her, one heavy leg over hers, his hand on her belly.

Apart from the early morning wake-ups, Emma loved everything about the new apartment.

Living there made her happy in a way that living in the Balık Pazarı hadn't. Here she was living among normal people, and it was satisfying to be known by them, to be nodded at on the street. The neighbours moved up and down the stairs slowly – they were comfortably middle aged, with thick waists and benevolent smiles and kind eyes, and at each apartment door was a collection of slippers and shoes worn into the shapes of their feet, each with their own character.

“*Abla, abla!*” the children shouted at her on the streets when their ball twisted down towards her. *Sister, sister!*

And she kicked the ball back clumsily, smiling.

When you needed a new gas tank for the stove you waited for the aygaz man, who drove a little truck around the streets playing the special aygaz song through a speaker – *ay-gaz!* – and then you ran down the stairs and waved him down. There were many little trucks that went through the streets, all selling something, fruit and vegetables, or bread, and there were also the *hurdacılar*, who made their living from gathering and selling junk, constantly walking the streets with a wooden cart. You might find anything on one of their carts – an old rotary phone, a lampshade, a vase, or just an old piece of twisted metal. All the men with carts had their own special call, and you could hear the calls from the window of the apartment, loud if they were nearby, but faint if they were far away.

One day, the gas man came, and Emma spoke to him in Turkish and asked him some questions about his family, feeling proud that she could hold a conversation. But after he left, Kai seemed consumed with anger.

“Do you always have to try and make friends with *everybody*?” he said.

“I’m not making friends,” Emma said, fighting down her irritation, and trying not to start a fight. “I’m just being polite.”

“Right,” he said.

“You’re just jealous of my Turkish,” she said, laughing, but she knew it wasn’t that at all. Absurd as it seemed, he was jealous of the gas man.

One night Kai and Emma ventured upstairs from their apartment for the first time, and discovered there was a door at the top of the stairs.

“Is it locked?” said Emma, whispering, in case they were doing something wrong.

Kai pushed at it, and it gave easily, and on the other side they found a rooftop with an amazing view – you could see all the way out over the Bosphorus, to the Topkapı Palace, and to all the mosques lit up and shining in the darkness along the shore, the minarets black along the skyline of the hills. Below them, the boats rocked gently in the water, and far in the distance the great container ships hovered on the horizon.

“We can have parties out here over summer,” Kai exclaimed.

“Yeah.” *If we have any friends left*, she thought.

She went and sat on the wall and lit a cigarette.

“Can you please get down from there?” he said nervously.

“No,” she said. She felt always controlled by him, and every day it became tighter and tighter, restricting her.

“Come on Emma, it’s dangerous.”

“It’s not dangerous. It’s a thick wall and I can lean my back here. Come and see the view from here.”

He fumed. “Only if you get down.”

She realised that if they weren’t going to have a fight she would have to get down, and sighed.

“OK,” she said.

As she got up, she pretended to fall, just a little bit, and all the colour drained out of Kai’s face.

“That’s not funny,” he said.

“Sorry.”

He stepped forward and wrapped his arms around her tightly and she felt his heart beating in his chest. He loved her. And she didn’t love him. But would she ever love anybody? Maybe she didn’t have the right kind of heart.

Out on the water, a ferry blew its horn, and the sound echoed out further and further into the stillness of the night.

*

A few weeks had gone by at the new house, and Emma was on her way home, past the cheeky shoe shine boys who congregated at Tünel with their wooden boxes, their brushes and their rags, past the man with the cart who sold the fake Marlboro cigarettes, and down the music street that wound down to the water. She didn’t know the real name of the street, but they always called it the music street, because there were so many shops that sold musical instruments. The windows were full of guitars and violins, and also

strange Turkish stringed instruments, with swollen bases, or elongated necks, the wood glowing under the showlights.

She didn't feel like going home, so she stopped at the Galata Tower and bought a cup of hot *sahlep* from a man with a huge copper urn balanced on a cart. She loved *sahlep*, the milky creaminess of it, and she loved to sit and drink it on a seat under the shadow of the tower, and watch the night come in. She never really wanted to go home.

Lately, life seemed to stop when she walked in the door.

She already knew it had been a huge mistake to move in with Kai. They fought all the time now. He was always sniping at her, about washing the dishes, about taking her shoes off, about leaving things around the house. And he was obsessively clean. When he cleaned the bathroom he was in there for an hour, scrubbing away. Kai kept things pushed down, pushed down hard, and all locked up. It was only now that she lived with him that she realised how much there was going on with him, how tightly he was wound up, how little he really told her.

She missed Jay, more than she had thought she would.

As she sat there bundled up in her coat and scarf, the light drew back from the sky, and the bricks of the tower turned silver in the twilight. It got dark so early in the winter. She felt all she wanted to do was to hibernate, from the weather, and from everything, to wrap herself up and disappear for a while.

A shiver swept over her and she realised how cold she was. She would go home and have a few drinks. She drank less now without Jay, but the way she drank had changed. It was something less fun now. Now she drank to escape, to numb herself.

"*Iyi akşamlar*," she called to the *sahlep* man as she stood up.

"*Iyi akşamlar*," he said, smiling.

The last light of the day dwindled as she walked home, then disappeared.

*

The streets were quiet this morning, and the sun was pouring in through the lounge room windows in great silent yellow shafts. Emma had drunk so much the night before that she had woken up feeling numb rather than hungover. It was a heavy kind of numbness. It weighed her down.

She was expecting Jay and Helene and Eddie any minute now. They were coming over to see the house, and she was trying to clean it up. She was excited about seeing Eddie. She hadn't seen him for ages, and she couldn't believe he had agreed to come and see the new place.

Kai was in the shower, and the water was trickling and splashing against the tiles. It was a soothing noise. At times like this, she could pretend to herself that everything was perfect between them, that they were just a happy couple getting ready in the morning. But they had had a disgusting night. She didn't want to remember it, but it kept creeping in, piece by piece, back into her consciousness.

They had been at Şahika, one of their favourite bars because of its beautiful old armchairs and sofas, drinking beers and making desultory conversation. Then it had started.

"Hey, I've got some gossip for you," Kai said.

"Oh, what?" Emma said, excited.

“I think Jay’s cheating on Helene,” he said.

Her face dropped. “How do you know?”

“I see it when we go out without her. You’re not always there, you know, Emma. He’s always hitting on girls.”

“But have you actually seen him kissing another girl?”

“Not exactly.”

His eyes were flushed with the guilt of the tale teller.

“So it’s all in your mind.”

“What are you defending him for, Emma? He cheated on Helene with *you*, for God’s sake.”

She felt the conversation sliding out of control. It always started this way.

“OK,” she said, and took a sip of her beer, lit a cigarette, looked out of the window.

Better not to say anything.

“What? So now you’re not talking to me?”

“You’re just always so negative.”

“I tell the truth, Emma. You’re the one who lives in a dream world.”

“No, I don’t.”

He snorted. “You think all these people really like you? You think they’re your friends?”

“Yes, I do.”

“They don’t give a shit about you.”

“Oh, like you’re the expert on friendship.”

“You’re blind, Emma. Like when Eddie was fucking Lise. You really didn’t know? *Everybody* knew, in the whole school.”

Tears pricked at her eyes. Why did she always have to cry? It infuriated her.

“Thanks for bringing that up,” she said.

“I just think it’s strange that you think it’s more important to defend someone who isn’t even your friend, than to believe what your own boyfriend is telling you.”

Because I don’t trust you, Emma thought. *Because you’re so possessive you’d say anything to turn me against my friends.*

“I believe that when you see the good in people, you bring out the good in people,” she said. “And if you’re always looking at the bad, then those people can become bad. Including me.”

The waiter came over and picked up their glasses. Emma averted her head so he wouldn’t see her crying.

“*Başka bira ister mısınız?*” he asked. Would you like another beer?

“*Evet,*” Kai said. “*İki.*” Yes, two.

They were silent until the beers arrived. Emma felt a rising sense of frustration. Now the night would be ruined. She reached out and put her hand on the back of his neck, but he didn’t turn.

“So we don’t agree about some things,” she said. “It’s not the end of the world.”

But Kai wouldn’t let it go.

“You think you have this superior knowledge about goodness?” he demanded. “You think the way you behave is good?”

“It’s not a competition, Kai.”

“You’re so desperate for people to like you, you don’t want to see what they really are.”

“I’m not *desperate* for friends,” she said. “I have plenty of great friends in my life. If anyone is desperate for friends, it’s you.”

“You’re sick, Emma.”

“What do you mean I’m sick? What are you trying to imply? That I’m mentally sick? Fuck you.”

He just looked at her, with a fixed smile.

“I have friends, Emma. And I haven’t slept with any of them.”

She picked up her bag.

“See you later,” she said, and walked out of the bar, tears streaming down her face, into the darkness.

She plunged into the back streets, twisting and turning around one street after another, switching off her phone when he tried to call her, fuming, and swearing to herself that she would go home and break up with him, that she was worth more than this. But then she thought about what he had said about her fucking her friends, and she knew it was true, and she started to hate herself and to think about how worthless she was. And she thought that if that was true, maybe everything he said was true. Maybe she was mentally sick. The thought scared her.

Depression hovered at the corners of her mind these days, like a great dark moth beating its wings. She felt empty all the time, especially when she was with Kai. But she needed him.

If she was sick, she needed him to tell her what to do.

When she got home, Kai was sitting in the living room drinking a beer, and smoking.

“Sorry I was gone so long,” she said.

“I don’t know why you always have to go running off when we’re having a conversation Emma.”

“I was *upset*.”

“Whatever.”

“You were sitting there telling me I was crazy, for God’s sake.”

“No, I wasn’t.”

“So you don’t think I’m mentally ill?”

“That’s what you said, not me.”

She started to breathe heavily.

“I need you not to judge me,” she said. “I’m just feeling quite weak at the moment and I need you to support me.”

“I don’t judge you, Emma.”

She couldn’t bear his coldness, and she started to cry.

“You were right about everything,” she said. “I don’t understand myself. I’m sorry.”

And he put his arms around her, and hushed her like she was a child. And she let herself be comforted, as always.

The water in the bathroom still splashed and trickled. She wished Kai would hurry up. He was probably intentionally taking his time, as some kind of protest. It was the worst time for everyone to be coming around, but she had invited them days ago.

There was a knock on the door, and she answered it to find the three of them there, their faces all muffled up under hats and scarves. A wave of affection welled up inside her, and tears pushed at her eyes.

“Hello there,” she said. “It’s good to see you guys.”

“Let us in. It’s cold as a witch’s titty out here,” Jay said.

“Oh yes, sorry, come in, come in,” she said. She kissed them, one by one on the cheek, with smacking noises.

“Hey, it’s great,” Helene said, looking around, with her beautiful smile lighting up her face.

“Yeah,” Jay said. “What a bargain.”

“The streets aren’t usually this quiet,” Emma said. “All the children must be at the mosque or something. It’s usually a lot noisier.” She felt nervous. Why did she feel nervous?

“What’s this pot belly like?” Eddie said. “Does it work?”

“Not really,” Emma said, giving him a laughing look. “We had a bit of a catastrophe the other night. You should have seen us – smoke everywhere!”

It had been awful. Emma had run around opening up all the windows, and then she and Kai had fought about the best way to fix it, and he had grown furious with her and they hadn’t spoken for the rest of the night.

“They’re all like that, the old ones,” Eddie was saying. “I’ve got a heater you can have if you like. I don’t use it.”

“That would be great,” Emma said. “We’ve been pretty chilly here. We’ve only got one little heater.”

Kai came out of the bathroom in a towel. He did have a great body, she thought, distractedly.

“Oh. Hi guys,” he said, in the awkward distancing way he had with them now.

“Won’t be a second.”

They sat down in the living room with glasses of Turkish tea, the steam curling into the air, and plates of biscuits. Kai was taking his time in the bedroom, Emma thought darkly. She hoped he wouldn’t embarrass her.

“Did you hear that Tony’s mum’s got cancer so he’s leaving?” Eddie said.

“Yeah,” Jay said. “That sucks.”

“But did you hear about what Hassan said to Tony when he said he was leaving?” Emma said.

“No, what?” Eddie said.

“Well, apparently he said that sometimes you had to put the company before family.”

“Oh my God,” Helene said, looking shocked. “Did he really?”

“Yes, imagine, putting the principles of the Easy English company ahead of your sick mother.”

“He’s deluded,” Jay said.

“Yes!” Emma said, giggling.

A silence fell, and they all stirred their tea.

“Actually, he’s started calling me gorgeous,” Emma said in an attempt to start the conversation again, but lowering her voice because she knew Kai would be pissed off.

“Ew,” Jay said, rolling his eyes.

“You’ve always been his pet, Emma,” Eddie said.

“You’re in,” Jay said.

“Oh lucky me,” Emma said, grinning. “But what about his girlfriend, or whatever she is?”

“Oh that whole situation is bizarre. How old you think she is? She must be twenty years younger than him...”

They gossiped on, about all the usual things, but underneath Emma wasn’t relaxed. It was the first time they had all been together for ages, and she wanted it to be perfect. The fact that Eddie had come over was a big step. But where was Kai?

“Kai!” she called.

“Coming,” he said from the bedroom, and she smiled awkwardly at the others.

“Would you like some more tea?”

“Actually, I can’t stay long, Em,” Eddie said. “I’ve got to do my shopping.”

“Already?” she said, and she felt her face stretching into a tight smile as she tried to hide her disappointment. “But you’ve only just got here!”

“Uh, we’ve actually got to get going too,” Jay said. “We’re going to see a movie. Hey, why don’t you come with us?”

“Oh, thanks. But I can’t,” she said, looking towards the bedroom.

“Alright then,” he said, and she thought he was relieved.

Emma’s face was still stretched into the same smile as she said goodbye. Nothing was the same anymore. Nothing would ever be the same again. She felt humiliated. But on the other hand she was almost glad they were going. She felt drained, and her hangover was starting to kick in. It was going to be an evil, poisonous one. She could already tell.

“Come around and get that heater, guys,” Eddie said, just as Kai appeared. She wished he hadn’t mentioned it.

“What heater?” Kai said after they had left.

“Oh, he wants to give us a heater. Isn’t that nice?”

“Why?”

“Because I told him the pot belly wasn’t working well.”

“Did you have to tell everybody about that?”

“Well, actually, *he* asked *me* about it.”

“Whatever.”

Emma felt she was walking on quicksand in these kinds of conversations. It was impossible to get her footing, impossible to say the right thing. The shower was dripping in the bathroom. *Drip. Drip. Drip.* It seemed very loud. Perhaps it was broken. Or had he just not turned off the taps properly?

She dragged her mind back.

“Sorry, I don’t understand. What’s the problem?”

“Nothing.”

She took a deep breath, scrambled for the best thing to say.

“OK,” she said. “I’ll tell him not to worry about it.”

“Well, you might as well go and get it now that you’ve organised it.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes,” he said, irritated. “It’s too late now.”

“Do you want to go instead of me?”

“No, why would I?” She seemed to have infuriated him even more. “He’s your friend, not mine.”

The following day, in the glare of an overcast afternoon, Emma walked down through the little streets towards Eddie’s house, thinking about all the times she had walked these streets before. When was the last time she had been here? Months ago. But nothing much had changed. The only difference was that the streets were muddy now, from the rain, and the clothes strung from the windows hung forlornly, dripping with great cold splats onto her head and shoulders.

A blue curtain billowed in the wind against the white sky, and she had a sudden sense of the beauty of the world, a heightened sense of clarity, and all the edges of things became sharper, and more beautiful. Red flowers dangled under the weight of water, edged in light, and a drop of water trailed down a window, following its own slow, mysterious path. Happiness came to her with a sudden certainty, and she knew it was connected to the way she was living in the moment.

She passed the bottle shop, with its beer fridges out on the street, and the old man who worked there nodded at her, recognising her. She smiled back.

When she arrived at Eddie’s house, she rang the doorbell, and craned her head up towards the window. She couldn’t wait to have a good chat. She felt she desperately needed to be with someone that didn’t think she wasn’t crazy, a friend, someone who would make her laugh.

“Hi, Em,” Eddie said, sticking his moonshaped head out of the window. “Watch your head.” And the keys thumped down near her feet. But when she looked back up, smiling, he was gone.

“Be with you in a second,” he called from the bedroom as she let herself inside.

“No worries,” she said, sitting down on the sofa.

Something was playing silently on the TV, and she looked up. On the screen, a woman was sucking at a man’s cock with great gusto and enthusiasm. She had very red lips, and her eyes were open and shining.

“Check this out,” he said, coming out of the bedroom.

“I don’t want to watch this,” she said, colour rising up in her cheeks. Porn had always vaguely unsettled her, embarrassed her. Whenever she saw it, she felt as though she had inadvertently walked into a stranger’s bedroom while they were having sex.

“Why not?” he said.

“I don’t like it.”

“Wait. Watch this bit.”

“No. Turn it off.” Her voice rose anxiously.

He turned it off, and they stood there in silence. She felt hugely disappointed, and looked away so he wouldn’t see the hurt in her eyes.

“So, do you have that heater?” she said.

“Yeah, I think it’s under my bed,” he said. “Just give me a second.”

As she walked home, carrying the heater awkwardly on her shoulder, depression washed over her in waves. Eddie would never be her friend again, she realised. And why was she still taking the heater? She should have walked out of there in a huff. A

number of alternative scenes played through her mind, and in each one she said something more and more fabulous. She sighed, and kept walking. She never said fabulous things.

Kai would be waiting for her at home. Of course she wouldn't tell him what had happened. Things were bad enough already.

"Hey," she called, as she let herself into the house, a little nervously, because of the heater.

"Hey!" he said, and his voice was sleepy. "I'm in the bedroom. Come in here, girl."

He was in a good mood. Her heart lifted and she smiled. She went into the bedroom and just his face was poking out from the covers.

"Come under here with me," he said.

"OK," she said, and took off her clothes. He looked at her, and she stood facing him, naked. She had never been ashamed of her body.

"What are you looking at?" she said.

"You."

"Oh."

He sat up, and reached forward, took her hips in his hands, put his face against her belly. But while he was fucking her, images of Eddie and of the movie kept rising, unbidden, into her mind.

*

Kai was going out with the boys, and Emma was going to stay home by herself and read a book in bed. At first she had been irritated that the boys wanted to go out by themselves, they hadn't all been out for ages. But then she was pleased Kai was going. There was a big group of them, but Jay and Eddie would be there, and she hoped it would be a good opportunity for them all to bond again.

"What time are you going to be back?" she asked.

"Oh, not too late, I guess," he said.

"OK, have a good time," she said. "Don't pick up any other women, will you?"

"Ha. I'll try not to," he said.

He came home at eight o'clock in the morning, too awake to be only drunk, grinning and trying to hug her.

"Did you take drugs?" she said.

"Yeah!"

"Go away," she said. "You stink of alcohol."

"Ah, come on, beautiful," he said.

And she relented and gave him a hug, smiling secretly. It was hard to be in a bad mood with someone who was pilling.

"How was your night?" she said.

"Great."

"Where did you go?"

"Oh, just to the usual places," he said. He always loved to be evasive.

He started pawing at her breasts, and she laughed at his clumsiness.

"Go and brush your teeth at least," she said.

It was a little galling, she thought when he had gone, that he had had such a good night without her, and she felt a stab of jealousy. But she was glad that he had had a good time. Surely he and Eddie and Jay would have made up if they had taken a pill? Hopefully the family would be back together soon. She fantasised about the good times they would have, the card games they would play in the house, all together again.

The next morning, the water in their street stopped working.

“Fucking Istanbul,” Kai said, groaning. “I feel like shit. What are we going to do?”

“I don’t know. Shall we have a shower at someone else’s place?”

“Whose?”

“Well, I don’t know. Eddie lives the closest. Or we could go over to Jay’s place, I suppose. It’s up to you.”

Kai frowned for a while.

“No, not Jay’s,” he said. “Call Eddie I guess.”

She was pleased. This must mean they were friends again.

But he put his arm around her possessively as they walked into Eddie’s house.

“Hey, guys,” Eddie said. “Who’s going first?”

“Me,” said Emma, flashing a smile at Kai.

“Well, I guess you *are* a dirty girl,” Eddie said.

A silence hung in the air, for a split second, and to break it, Emma laughed half heartedly.

“I won’t be too long,” she said to Kai, and he looked at her and smiled, but really there was no smile in his eyes.

As they left, she felt the anger in Kai bubbling away beneath the surface, festering away, and turning more and more rotten. They walked together up Istiklal Caddesi, holding hands, not speaking. The crowds swarmed around them with all the chatter and bustle of the morning, but a well of silence spread around Emma and Kai. They pretended that they had nothing to say, and when they got to the school, they kissed each other on the lips, and Emma held Kai for a little longer than usual, until he pulled away.

*

“What do you love about me?” Kai asked her one night as they lay in bed. But she couldn’t put her finger on any one thing.

“Um, I don’t know,” she said.

“What I love about you is your eyes, your laugh, your smile.”

He waited expectantly.

“I just love *you*,” she said. But she knew she didn’t. Sometimes now she didn’t even really like him.

He sneered at her. “You don’t even know why you love me, do you?”

“Oh come on, you know I’m not very good at this stuff,” she said.

And he turned his back to her, put his face to the wall.

The only time she was happy now was when she was teaching. Sometimes she wished she could teach all day, just so she wouldn't have to think about the rest of her life. The classroom was a safe place, a place where the rest of her life was suspended.

“Teacher!” they said. “Do you have boyfriend?”

“Teacher, where do you like better, London or Istanbul?”

“Teacher, do you know Atatürk?”

“Teacher, you like Adana kebab? Teacher which kebab you like the most?”

Her students were so dear to her. She loved to watch the moment when they understood something for the first time. After class their faces lingered in her mind, and sometimes they appeared in her dreams, like flowers opening.

Chapter 12

It was the *Kurban Bayramı*, and Emma took a bus ride with Jay and Helene out into the suburbs to watch what went on. Kai hadn't wanted to come. He had seen it all before in Egypt.

"So what's the story again?" Emma asked Helene, as they pulled out of the bus station.

"Well, the animal is killed in memory of Ibrahim. It is the same story in Christianity, that he loved God so much he would sacrifice his son. So they sacrifice their best animal."

"Yeah, that's interesting," Jay said. "It has to be a good animal, without any flaws, or it's unacceptable."

"And then they give half the meat to the poor, and they keep half," Helene said.

"That's nice," Emma said.

"Wait until we get there," Helene said with a wry smile. "It doesn't seem that nice."

The suburbs outside the centre of Istanbul were grey and depressing, old buildings made of concrete and plaster and unpainted bricks, all different and jumbled together. But today, there was colour in all the streets, the redness of blood running down the gutters. Emma shivered when she saw it, and had a bad feeling, a kind of premonition, but she shook it off.

Don't be silly, she told herself.

After a while, Helene spied a group of people through the window.

"Let's get off here," she said.

They got off the bus and joined the excited crowd standing around three men. A cow was led in, kicking and jerking, and was wrestled down onto the ground, its eyes rolling in its head. It took all three men to hold it down, and then one of them ran around in front and slashed at its throat with a knife, and blood spurted out in a high arc for a long time. Everybody in the crowd cheered as the big body twitched, and then fell silent.

"Jesus Christ," Emma said.

"I can't watch this," Jay said, and turned away.

But Helene was fine. She had grown up in the countryside.

"We should be able to watch it," Emma said. "We eat meat."

"Yeah, I know," said Jay. "But I can't. I'm going to take some photos somewhere else."

One of the men put his finger into the blood of the animal and then touched a spot of blood on the foreheads of the children who were standing around, and the children looked at each other solemnly, and then ran away screaming and laughing.

Then the men led in another terrified cow, and the whole process started again. Blood ran into the street and pooled in the cracks, and everywhere were the severed necks of sheep and the shiny organs of cows.

Emma thought it was one of the most disgusting things she had ever seen.

But everybody looked so happy. It was a day of great thanks.

*

Tony's going away party was at a club on the top floor of a tall building, and it seemed like the whole expat crowd was there that night, looking out over the panorama of Istanbul while the music pounded around them.

Emma was staying glued to Kai's side. She never wandered off without him anymore at parties. And if she spoke to someone else, she made sure to hold his hand, or to catch his eye.

"Emma gets that thing done to her eyebrows," Jay was saying.

"What thing?" asked Carmen, a new young teacher from Ireland, turning to Emma.

"Oh, they shape your eyebrows using a piece of thread, and they vibrate it somehow, I don't know, I can't really see. All I know is that it hurts like hell! I get tears in my eyes!"

"Why do you get it done then?" asked Robbie.

"I don't know. Maybe I'm just a little masochistic. And it looks fantastic afterwards," Emma said. "See?" And she wiggled her eyebrows.

"That *does* look pretty good."

"I *know*. And it's cheap. All that stuff is cheap here. There was one teacher, what was her name, that little American girl?" she asked the group at large.

"Holly," said Eddie.

"Yeah Holly," Emma continued. "She used to get her hair blow dried in a salon every day because it was so cheap."

"Not *every* day," said Jay. He had had a crush on her at the beginning.

"Well, you know what I mean," Emma said.

"They do waxing here too, don't they, Em?" Eddie said suggestively.

She felt herself blushing in the darkness.

"Yes, of course," she said, frozen. He had always loved her Brazilian.

A small silence fell.

"Hey, remember that time of my first haircut?" Jay said.

She smiled at him, gratefully. "Yeah, that's right," she said, laughing. "Jay went to the barber, and when he finished, the guy started giving him a full head massage with cologne."

"Including my ears," Jay said.

Everybody laughed.

"I'm going to get another beer," she said to Kai. "Do you want one?"

But he said no with a frown.

"*Bir bira istiyorum,*" she said to the bartender. One beer. "*Ve bir tequila.*" And a tequila. To calm her nerves. She tossed it off and felt the crushing rush at the back of her head. She had already been drunk, but now she felt drunk and alive.

When she got back, she saw Kai watching her closely as she lowered herself carefully onto a stool.

Robbie came over to her, looking morose.

"How's things, Robbie?" she asked.

"Oh, not so good," he said, unsurprisingly. He was always depressed about something.

"Why, what happened?"

"Oh, I went home with this Turkish guy the other night, and I really liked him, but then I woke up in the morning and he had disappeared. And he had stolen my wallet."

"Oh my God!" Emma laughed. "Sorry, I shouldn't laugh. That's awful!"

They fell into conversation. The longer they spoke, the more she could feel Kai getting annoyed with her for being away so long. She kept casting anxious glances his way. But she couldn't brush Robbie away when he was telling her a sad story like this one.

After a few more minutes, Kai came over.

"Hi Robbie," he said. "Sorry to interrupt."

"No problem."

"Uh, I was wondering," he said, turning to Emma. "Do you want to go after this one?"

He always wanted to go home early these days, except when he was out without her, she thought, remembering the other night.

"Already? No! Let's dance the night away, hey?"

"I'm not really in the mood."

Suddenly she felt fed up with him, with all his controlling bullshit.

"OK. Well, why don't you go home then, and I'll stay?"

Kai looked at her, furious because she had said it in front of Robbie.

"OK, Emma," he said, and turned around and walked away.

What a baby. She felt a sudden rush of freedom, but it was tainted. She wouldn't be able to enjoy herself now, knowing there was a fight to come. Well, she would stay out late, so late that when she got home he would be asleep.

"Fuck him," she said to Robbie, and Robbie laughed, nervously.

The rest of the night passed in a blur. She and Robbie joined the teachers who were dancing, and she danced off alone, into the crowd, falling into the music. And someone brought her another beer, and then she danced some more. And then Tony was leaving, and she hadn't spoken to him all night, and so they sat down together for a drink, and she told him how much she enjoyed his company, how she hoped they would stay in touch, and he became sentimental in a way she had never seen him before, and then they both became sentimental about Istanbul. Then a whole group of teachers moved on, to Cambaz, and she started to dance by herself, lost in the music.

Someone caught her hand, and she looked up and saw Eddie.

"Do you want a pill, Em?" he said, and she saw that he was grinning, pilling off his face.

She considered for a moment, thought about the night Kai had gone out and taken a pill without her.

"Absolutely," she said, and he slipped a plastic bag into her hand.

This pill wasn't like the last one. It was much stronger, and within an hour, she was sitting on the dance floor with her back against the wall, her jaw loose.

Eddie came and sat down next to her.

"How you going, Em?" he said.

"These pills are pretty smacky," she said, and her voice sounded strange. Talking to someone wasn't making her feel any better, she thought. She stood up abruptly.

"Think I'll go for a little walk," she said.

"Alright," he said. "Be careful."

She thought about getting her jacket from the cloakroom but it was all too difficult so she plunged out into the cold air wearing nothing but her t-shirt, and the air felt good against her skin. She lit a cigarette and the cigarette felt like the best cigarette she had ever had. Beyond that, her thoughts didn't move. She walked and walked through all the

familiar streets, her arms swinging, a smile spreading over her face. She didn't see many people. It must have been very late.

After a while, she turned a corner, and saw a strange light at the end of the street, orange and dancing. And as she drew closer, she saw that it was a house on fire.

"Wow," she said under her breath. "Holy shit."

There were lots of wooden houses in Cihangir, and you heard about them burning down, but this was the first time she had seen it happen. A group of people were gathered out the front, watching, and they all seemed quite calm.

It must have been deserted, Emma thought, drawing up behind them.

The fire suddenly flickered and rushed up the wood, licking the air, and a great crackling noise erupted as the whole thing became a beacon in the night. Emma felt the heat of it on her skin, and smiled. What a beautiful thing fire was, she thought, and sat down on the opposite side of the street to watch. She felt things changing inside her brain, that the chemistry of the drug was adapting to the happiness she was feeling, and she felt happier and happier. Happiness was so easy when you were pilling.

Why couldn't she feel this happy in real life? She must make some changes, she thought to herself. It had all gone on for long enough, and she was miserable.

The fire started to die down a little. There were still about twenty people standing there in front of her, just watching.

Where's the fire brigade? she wondered vaguely. *How long have I been sitting here? Minutes or hours?*

The whole thing was actually kind of weird, she realised.

Her phone rang. It was Eddie.

"Hello?"

"Em, you alright? You've been gone for ages!"

"Yes, I'm fine."

"Why don't you come back?"

"Alright."

If he had suggested she go home, she would have. She had lost the capability to think for herself. She turned around and retraced her steps, back to the club, and when she got back in, it was so warm and the music was so good, she wondered why on earth she had ever left.

Eddie saw her arrive and came over to her, pushing his way through the crowd. He threw his arms around her, and hugged her hard.

"We've been worried!" he shouted over the music.

"Where's my beer?" she shouted back.

He gave her a smile and their eyes met, full of laughter.

"I love you, Em," he said.

She laughed, and he leaned in and kissed her.

And what there was in the world, the swarming music, the faces of the people around them like flowers in the coloured lights, her own heart beating – everything came together into one moment, as she kissed him back.

They pulled apart and looked at each other.

"Oh dear," she said. "This is no good."

"Don't worry, Em."

"I love you too," she said.

“You’ve never said that to me before,” he said.

“I was too afraid to.”

He pulled her over to a booth in the corner and they started to kiss again.

“I saw a fire,” she said, suddenly remembering.

“What? Where?”

“In Cihangir. It was beautiful. A whole house was on fire.”

He looked at her, and smiled.

“I saw that once too,” he said.

“It was the best,” she said. “It was like a sign.”

They kissed again. She felt a great sense of relief.

“Do you know, it’s been really bad for me,” he said. “To see you with Kai.”

“Yeah, you kind of expressed that,” she said, and he laughed.

“I’ve been thinking hard about this, Em,” he said. “I’ve been an idiot. I don’t want to be with anyone except you. I really miss you.”

“I really miss you too,” she said.

Jay walked by and stared at them.

“Oh my God, am I seeing what I think I’m seeing?” he said.

“I don’t know,” Eddie said, with his silly giggle. “What are you seeing?”

“Are you guys *friends* again?”

“Yes,” Emma jumped in, feeling relieved that he hadn’t seen them kissing.

Jay gave a slow smile.

“Good,” he said. “That’s good.” And then he walked on, weaving slightly.

“You know, I can’t kiss you now,” Emma said. “There’s too many people around and it’s not fair to Kai. I need to talk to him first.”

“You’re right.”

They looked at each other.

“Let’s dance?” Emma said with a smile.

“Yeah!” he said.

And he held out his hand to her, and pulled her out onto the dance floor. She felt a great smile come up in her and once it slid onto her face she couldn’t make it go away.

Emma woke up the next day to the sound of Pink Floyd, who she hated. It reminded her of a group of dumb boys she had hung around with in high school who had sat around in backyard sheds smoking bongos all day. And Kai knew she hated it.

God, she thought, I don’t want to get up and have this conversation. She wondered if she should wait until the next day, when she was feeling normal. But then she would have to wait to see Eddie again. And she missed him already. She rolled over on her side and thought about kissing him, savouring it. It had been so right. Suddenly, for the first time in her life, she knew with absolute certainty that she was in love. There was nothing she wanted to change about Eddie, she loved him exactly as he was, with all his flaws. And it was such an unselfish feeling. All she wanted was for him to be happy.

So this is love, she thought, pleased. This is what it’s all about.

All she had to do was talk to Kai and her new life could start.

She groaned and stretched and rolled herself out of bed sideways, her feet landing with a thump on the floor.

“You’re playing my favourite music,” she said, laughing half-heartedly as she came into the lounge room.

“Hello, Emma,” Kai said. “How nice to see you.”

“Hi.”

“Uh, I was wondering. Do you think you could possibly try to put your clothes away, as I have asked and asked you?”

Normally she would have responded with something sarcastic, but now she just felt sorry for him.

“Yes, OK,” she said.

This wasn’t how she had planned the conversation would start. Well, she would just plunge in, tell him the truth, and then leave.

“Listen, Kai,” she started. “I have to tell you something.”

“What?” he said, giving her a tired look.

A knock fell on the door, and they both looked at each other in surprise. Nobody ever knocked on their door.

What if it was Eddie, Emma thought, come to stake his claim? She felt terribly nervous. Was he that dumb and pigheaded?

“I’ll get it,” Kai said, and unfolded his long body from the sofa.

She heard the door opening, and then low voices. It sounded like *Jay*, she thought, but Jay wouldn’t just pop around, would he?

Kai came back in and with him it *was* Jay. God, he had bad timing for an unannounced visit, she thought. But, in a way, she was glad he was here. It would delay the inevitable.

Jay is so dear to me, she thought fondly, and then realised she was still piling a little bit.

“Hey,” she said, looking up and smiling. “This is a surprise! How’s it going?”

“Hey,” he said.

He had a strange look on his face. She guessed he was pretty hungover.

“Sit down,” she said. “God. *Mi casa su casa*. Do you want some tea or something?”

Jay swallowed, and looked at Kai, who was still standing. Why didn’t Kai sit down? He always had to make people feel so uncomfortable, she was sick of it.

“Uh, Emma,” Kai said. “Jay has some bad news.”

“Oh no,” she said. “What’s happened?”

Jay swallowed again.

“Emma,” he said, and he looked suddenly appalled.

“What?” Emma said. “Jesus, you’re freaking me out.”

The two men just stood there, looking at her. She started to feel uneasy.

“Has something happened to Helene?” she said.

“No, she’s OK,” Jay said. He looked at Kai. “Maybe you should tell her.”

“Tell me *what*?”

“Eddie’s dead, Emma,” Kai said gently.

She laughed, uncertainly.

“What?” she said. “Are you guys fucking with me?”

But they were still looking at her.

“No,” Jay said, and she noticed his eyes were rimmed with red.

For a second, all she could think about was breathing, getting the air back into her lungs.

“What happened?” she said in a kind of gasp.

“He got into a fight with someone on the street who pulled a knife,” Jay said.

As Emma digested the information, a slow wave of anger rolled over her. Why was Eddie always so stupid like that? Then she realised he was dead and it didn't matter.

“Oh my God,” she said softly.

Kai looked awkward. He wasn't even upset, Emma realised, and then she realised how much he had disliked Eddie. “I'll leave you guys,” he said, and went into the bedroom.

Emma looked at Jay.

“Do you want a hug?” Jay said, and she nodded.

Jay sat down next to her and pulled her into his arms, and they stayed that way for a while. He smelled of sweat and, faintly, of alcohol. Bad feelings were turning and twisting through Emma's body, threatening to break out. She felt she had to stop them.

He broke away from her and took out a pack of cigarettes, his fingers trembling slightly.

“Do you want one?” he said.

“Yes please,” she said.

They lit cigarettes, and Emma felt it calming her, but the bad feelings were still there, twisting through her like persistent worms.

“Did they catch the guy who did it?” she asked.

“No.”

“Fuck.”

“I have to go to the hospital,” he said. And suddenly a great wild hope leapt up inside her, that if Eddie was in the hospital, he couldn't be dead. Maybe he was just in a coma?

“Why?” she said.

“I have to identify the body,” he said. A muscle twitched at the side of his face, and she realised how hard he was trying to control himself.

An image of Eddie's body flashed into her mind, a mix of plumpness and muscle, and she felt again his hand on her hair as he had kissed her the night before.

She got up and ran into the kitchen, and vomited into the sink, sharply, once.

“Are you OK?” Kai said, coming in as she was washing her face. His voice was soft. But she didn't want to be anywhere near him. He made her feel sick again.

“I have to go with Jay to the hospital, to identify the body,” she said in an automatic voice, walking around the kitchen so that Kai wouldn't touch her. For some reason, he couldn't touch her.

“OK,” Kai said, watching her move. “I'll come too.”

“No,” Emma said. “No, I don't want you to.”

And there must have been something in her voice because he didn't argue.

“I'm coming with you,” she said to Jay as she went back into the lounge.

He stood up.

“OK.”

They walked in silence out of the door and down the grimy stairs with the shoes lined up at the doors, and then up the music street, the instruments gleaming behind the windows, then up to Istiklal, into all its usual flurry and bustle. The shoe shine boys shouted at them from their spot at Tünel and waved their brushes.

“Is he at the German hospital?” she asked. The German hospital was the best hospital, the one where all the foreigners went when they were sick.

“No, he’s at another one. It’s on the other side of the road, they said.”

“Do we have to go straight there?”

“Why?” he said, turning and looking at her.

“I need a drink,” she said. “A scotch or something.”

He looked at her for a moment.

“Yeah, that’s a good idea,” he said.

They went to the nearest bar they could find, and sat down. The waiter came whooshing up to them with a smile.

“*Ne istiyor misiniz?*” he said.

“Do you have scotch?” Jay said in English, and the waiter looked puzzled.

“Scotch *varmi?*” Emma said.

“Scotch?” the waiter repeated, looking more confused.

It all felt like some bad dream.

“I think this place is too small for that,” Jay said slowly.

“Yeah maybe you’re right,” Emma said.

“How about *raki?*” he said.

“OK.”

“*Iki raki,*” he said to the waiter, who looked relieved.

“*Iki raki,*” he repeated. “OK.”

And he whooshed away again, and reappeared shortly afterwards with the drinks.

She and Jay drank them down fast, and then sat there feeling the alcohol spread through them. Emma wondered vaguely why she wasn’t feeling anything, why she wasn’t crying. The world seemed strange, full of sharp details, the frayed cuff of Jay’s shirt, the lines on his face that must have always been there but she had never noticed before, the way his mouth had a hungry look to it. She was still coming down from a pill, she reminded herself. Or maybe she was in shock. Wasn’t that what happened to people who heard about a death? But if you were in shock would you be thinking about being in shock? Her brain felt like it was moving very slowly, struggling to make her thoughts connect.

“Does the school know?” she asked, feeling as though the words were being dragged out of her.

“Probably,” he said. “The police called me because I was the last number in Eddie’s phone. Luckily Helene was with me. She translated and told them to go talk to Hassan about all the legal stuff. We’ll have to go there after. I think she’s there now.”

“God,” Emma said, slowly. “Hassan. He’s going to be unbearable.”

“Come on,” Jay said, putting some money down on the table. “We’d better go.”

The hospital was in Cihangir, and they took the back streets to get there. It was a bright sunny day and the streets were bustling and full of life as always, men sitting outside their shops and smoking, the women throwing down baskets for the grocers to put their vegetables in and shouting and laughing with each other across the street from their windows. It confused Emma. She felt that the streets should be silent, that everything should be still. She sweated and felt her mind processing everything very strangely, as though the world were being played in slow motion. The faces of people on the street

loomed at her and seemed ugly, and the roar of the cars going by made her want to flinch each time.

Should she be talking to Jay? she wondered. But she couldn't think of anything to say. They walked along together in silence.

Inside, the hospital reception was very basic, with shiny linoleum floors and nothing else but a few blue vinyl chairs. In the corner, there was a woman sitting behind a desk with a cheap wood veneer.

"*Merhaba,*" she said as they approached. She had frizzy hair that was escaping from her ponytail, and a small mole on her cheek that Emma noticed and then couldn't take her eyes off.

"*Inglizce biliyor musunuz?*" Jay said.

"A little," the woman said.

"We are here to identify the body of our friend," Jay said.

"I'm sorry. I didn't understand exactly. Your friend is here?"

"Jesus," Jay said under his breath. "No. I mean, he is dead."

The receptionist's face softened.

"Oh, I understood," she said. "You are here to look at the body?"

"That's right," Jay said. His mouth tightened at the sides.

"Please sit down," she said. "Someone will come to help you in a short time."

After a few minutes, a doctor came. He had dark hair cropped very close to his head, an intelligent face, and sad eyes. Under his white jacket, he was wearing a shirt with a dirty collar.

"Are you family?" he asked.

"No," said Emma. "We're his friends, we work with him. We're English teachers together."

Then she shut up suddenly. She realised she should be using the past tense.

"Please follow me," said the doctor, leading them to the lifts.

When the lift doors opened, they stepped into an enormous lift, big enough for two stretchers, and Emma imagined Eddie lying on a stretcher in this lift, with the life coming out of him. Alone. A great wave of guilt washed over her, for leaving him the night before. She should have stayed with him instead of going home. That was what she had always done in the past, took him home when he was too drunk to get home himself. Why had she left him last night, on the night when he was most in danger?

The lift doors swished open.

The doctor's feet made no sound as he walked down the bright, quiet corridor, but the heels of Emma's boots were clicking. And Jay's were squeaking. The corridor seemed to go on forever. Finally the doctor stopped.

"It is in this door," he said.

Another man appeared, some kind of medical attendant in a blue coat, and the doctor spoke to him in Turkish that Emma couldn't understand.

"I'll do it," Emma said.

"It's OK. You stay here," Jay said. "I'll do it."

"No. I want to go in by myself first," Emma said. "I want to say goodbye. Do you understand?"

"OK," he said, reluctantly. "I'll come in in a minute."

“OK?” said the attendant, one hand on the door.

“Yes,” Emma said.

The room was much bigger than she had expected, a great echoing space, and it was very cold, the kind of cold that sunk into your bones. And the smell was so rotten she wanted to stop breathing.

Lining the walls were dozens of stainless steel drawers gleaming in the light, each one like a bright eye, she suddenly fancied, watching her. The attendant crossed the room and went to one of the drawers and pulled it out slightly. After a moment of non comprehension, she realised it was a set of feet framed by a sheet, the toes mottled and purple.

Her heart thumped around in her chest.

The attendant looked at a yellow tag on the toes, shook his head slightly, and then closed the drawer again.

For perhaps a minute he went on, rattling through the silence, pulling out drawer after drawer. Each time there was a yellow tag on a set of toes, some darker, some lighter, some smaller, some larger, all in various stages of decay.

Emma felt like she was going to be sick.

Finally, he stopped opening drawers, and pulled one out to its full length.

That’s him, she thought as she crossed the room. She could tell just by the shape of the body under the sheet.

“*Iyyim misiniz?*” the attendant asked, holding the edge of the sheet aloft.

He had hair on the back of his hands, curling black hair.

“OK?” he said again, in heavily accented English.

“Yes,” she said, nodding.

And he pulled back the sheet, and uncovered the face.

“Yes,” she said. “That’s him.”

“*Iyyim misiniz?*” the attendant asked, holding the edge of the sheet aloft.

He had hair on the back of his hands, curling black hair.

“OK?” he said again, in heavily accented English.

“Yes,” she said, nodding.

And he pulled back the sheet, and uncovered the face.

“Yes,” she said. “That’s him.”

But it wasn’t really. It was nothing like him. It was like a bad imitation of him. Eddie’s eyes were closed, and his lashes lay on his cheeks. He had such long lashes, like a girl’s. But most people didn’t see that because of his glasses. What had they done with his glasses, she wondered. She wanted them, felt suddenly it was very important that she find them.

Jay came up quietly beside her, looked at Eddie, and blanched.

“Jesus,” Jay said.

Emma leant over and kissed Eddie on the lips. His lips were firm and hard and cold.

“Oh God,” Jay said. “Sorry. I think I’m going to be sick.”

Emma felt like she had been pulled out of a trance. Jay looked green. And she noticed the smell of decay again, thick in her nostrils.

“Come on,” she said, and grabbed his hand and pulled him outside, back into the bright light of the corridor.

“Jesus,” he said and leaned against the wall. Sweat shone on his forehead.

“Let’s get out of here,” she said.

“Where’s the guy?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “I don’t care.”

Once they were out in the street again, breathing in the fresh air, Jay fell down on a wall and sat with his head in his hands.

Life in Istanbul went on around them as normal, cars hooting their horn, the air warm. A fly buzzed around a banana skin on the ground. Emma focused in on it, and the sound became louder in her ears, until she couldn’t hear anything else. It soothed her.

They went together to the school, where Helene was waiting for them in Hassan’s office. Hassan looked full of self importance and Helene looked drawn and tired. Subtly, she rolled her eyes at Jay and Emma.

“Hello, Emma. Hello, Jay,” Hassan said, casting a kindly glance on them that infuriated Emma. “We have spoken to Eddie’s family.”

A wave of jealousy passed over Emma. *They* were his real family, the people sitting in this office.

“Is his mother coming here?” she asked.

“No,” Helene said. Her face held some kind of secret in it.

“Why not?”

“She passed away,” Hassan said. “Some months ago.”

“What?” Emma and Jay looked at each other in surprise.

“Did Eddie know?” Jay asked.

“Yes. We have just been talking to his brother. He said he spoke to Eddie and told him at that time.”

“When exactly?” Emma said.

“It was in September.”

September. That was when Eddie had asked her to go away with him to Cinarcik, Emma thought. But he hadn’t said anything. He hadn’t told her.

She remembered him standing on the boat that day, talking about when he was a child. And the way he had wanted to have sex with her that night. A great lump rose up in her throat.

“So who’s coming then?”

“No-one is coming,” Hassan said. “The body will be flown back to England.”

No, she thought. *That’s not right*. Eddie should stay with her in Istanbul. But there was nothing she could do now, no claim she could stake. She was just some girl that Eddie had slept with, she supposed.

“Oh OK,” she said, and her voice cracked.

Her hands were trembling in her lap. She stared down at them.

“Are you OK, Emma?” Helene asked.

She stood up suddenly, and left Hassan’s office.

All the office staff outside put their heads down when they saw her and pretended not to be watching. She walked past them, and went to the lifts and pushed the button and waited, hoping desperately that no-one would try to talk to her.

The numbers above the lift changed too slowly, from G to 1, 1 to 2, 2 to 3, and then finally the doors opened with their usual clank, and she stepped inside and jabbed at the close doors button more times than she had to until they slowly closed.

It wasn't until she got out onto Istiklal Caddesi that she started to cry.

It felt as though a dam deep inside her had suddenly broken and wave after wave of pain were being released. She cried for everything, for the whole year she had had in Istanbul, for the loss of Jay's friendship, for all the awful things that had happened with Kai, and finally for Eddie, who she loved and was never going to see again.

She felt like she would cry forever, like it would never stop. As she walked, people stared at her. Some women stopped and looked at her with concern in their eyes.

But soon she was swallowed up by the crowds, just another person in the giant swarming city.

Chapter 13

Everyone left after Eddie died.

The first to go was Kai. After the visit to the hospital, Emma had closeted herself in the bedroom, refusing to come out, refusing to eat, refusing to talk. It was the first time in her life that someone had died, and she didn't know what to do with herself.

She spent hours turning the events of that night over and over again in her mind, trying to find a way she could have changed things – if only she had taken him home, she thought, if she had at least stayed with him a little longer, if she had simply steered him down another street. Or if she had set a better example, for all the boys.

Although she could hardly sleep, she felt strangely awake, her heart beating too fast, she felt, and too lightly in her chest. Whenever she slept she had the same dream again and again, that she was looking for something, a dream she woke up from suddenly, sweating. As the sweat cooled on her body, she lay in the darkness and tried to remember Eddie when he had been alive, but every time she tried the image of his body under the sheet appeared instead, his dead eyes, and his firm cold lips, as though her mind would not allow her the comfort of remembering him any other way. She wanted to talk to him, all the time, about how she was feeling. He was the one who would have been able to help her, the one who would have been strong for her, the one who would have nurtured her. And he was the one who was gone.

There were so many things she wished she'd told him when he was alive, about how when she was with him she felt that the world was more exciting, about how much she admired his big heart, his way of charming the world, the confidence he had in himself to be different, about how he had shown her a way to be free. But most of all she wished she had told him she loved him, all the time.

When she thought about that, there was a feeling in her throat, a feeling of constriction, as though someone were pressing on it.

Days passed like this, with her mind going around in the same painful circles over and over again.

But finally one dark morning, having given up on sleep, she went and sat on the windowsill and waited for the dawn. After a while, the call to prayer blasted into the street, the man's voice cracking on the high notes, and soon afterwards the hue of the sky softened almost imperceptibly from grey to blue and the buildings on the street came into focus. Emma imagined all the people in her street, and all the millions of people all over the city getting out of bed, bleary eyed, washing their hands and feet, unrolling their mats over the carpet, and then going through the slow rituals of prayer in their living rooms, a slow dance that would be repeated endlessly around the world, one following the other, as the sun tracked its way through the sky.

The world would always go on in its relentless way, she thought, and she was insignificant to it, her troubles not even of the tiniest importance.

It was time for her to start again.

After the sun had come up properly, she came out of the bedroom and there was Kai, lying under a blanket on the sofa.

When he saw her, his eyes lit up and he stood up and came towards her, his arms outstretched.

But she turned aside, avoiding him, and reached for one of his cigarettes from the coffee table.

“I’m sorry,” she said, lighting it and inhaling. It was the first cigarette she had smoked for three days, and tasted awful and fantastic at the same time. “I can’t.”

“Why not?” His face filled with familiar anger.

“I don’t love you,” she said, and in her voice was sympathy and sadness, but also a kind of hatred, which she hadn’t planned.

He sat down very suddenly, and started to spread his hands out on his legs, over and over, as though he were trying to smooth the fabric out.

“OK,” he said after a minute. His hands started up again. “Are you sure about that?”

“Yes.”

He looked down at his hands and clenched them.

“And did you ever love me?” he asked coldly, but underneath it his voice was trembling.

“Maybe,” she said. “Maybe at the very beginning. But you killed it.”

“I know,” he said, and sudden tears welled up in his eyes.

His eyes were yellowish. He must have been drinking a lot, she realised.

“But really it’s always been Eddie,” she said. “I think you know that.”

A dark look travelled across Kai’s face.

“He was bad to you Emma.”

“I know,” she said. “But I still loved him.”

They looked at each other hopelessly.

“OK. Well I guess I’m leaving,” he said, and went into the bedroom.

She heard him pulling his suitcase down and coat hangers rattling, and she knew by how long it took him that he wanted her to stop him, but she only sat in the living room, smoking cigarette after cigarette, and waiting.

After a while, he came out, went straight to the front door, put his suitcase down on the floor, opened the door, and paused, as though he were still waiting for her to say something. She looked at his broad shoulders, at the hairs that curled at the base of his neck, and for a moment she wanted to lay her hand there. Then he opened the door, and walked out of her life forever.

Emma always hoped it was back to his daughter.

Jay and Helene were the next to go.

Before they left, Emma had met with Jay in a café that had been one of Eddie’s favourites, the kind with tables and stools low to the ground where men sat around playing tavla and smoking all day long.

The owner brought out their tea, the little glasses rattling in the saucers in his big hands.

“I’m sorry about your friend,” he said in Turkish. “He was a very good man.”

Emma felt the sadness clutch at her.

“Thanks,” Jay said, and Emma tried to smile.

“So, how are you doing?” Jay asked after he left.

“I don’t know,” she said, tears welling up at the back of her eyes. She felt they were always there these days, just waiting to come out. “I know it’s really weird, but I miss the family. I keep thinking if I had the family behind me I would be able to stand anything.”

Jay gave her a thoughtful look.

“You know,” he said, slowly. “I don’t think the family ever existed, really.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, we were all just friends of yours, me and Kai and Eddie. We never really had a friendship between each other. You just brought us all together.”

She stared at him.

“Do you mean that?”

“Yeah. It was really only you who believed that whole family thing.”

Emma bit on her cuticle, and looked away.

“I mean, we’d never be friends in real life, me and Kai, or Kai and Eddie,” he said.

“So you don’t think this is real life?” she said.

“Of course not. This is a total dreamland. I mean, we live in this place where no-one can see us, our friends, our families, all they see is the stories we choose to tell them. That’s why we travel, to escape from reality. I mean, everyone here is running away from something.”

He was right, she thought. That was exactly why she travelled, to take herself out of reality. She wanted her life to be like a story, and even if it wasn’t, she could always *tell* people it was.

“And this life here is all temporary,” he said. “None of us were ever going to stay here forever, not even Eddie, I’d guess. And in a few years, you and I won’t even speak. Oh, we might write for a year, but then it will become more and more sporadic, and soon it will drop off altogether.”

She knew it was true. She thought about all the people she had met around the world, and how she hardly spoke to any of them now.

“But don’t you think that the friendship we’ve had is kind of special?”

“I think it’s the kind of friendship you would expect from people who were always wasted,” he said.

“OK.”

She looked away, and felt a lump in her throat.

You will not cry, she ordered herself, and bit on her lip until she felt blood.

She twisted her tea glass around on its saucer, trying to think of something she could say to charm him, to make him laugh, to turn him back into the old Jay, but her mind was strangely blank.

She shivered.

It was chilly in the laneway. Winter was coming to an end, but the afternoons were still suddenly cold when the sun disappeared behind the buildings.

“I’m cold,” she said.

“Yeah,” he said. “Maybe we should go.”

And they drank their tea down quickly, while it was still too hot, and stood up to leave, their shoulders hunched against the wind.

Helene came over to Emma’s house a few days later.

It was so good to see her. She brought with her all her calmness and wisdom, and of course she and Eddie had been very close. They had been friends for a long time, from before Emma and Jay had even arrived in Istanbul.

Helene and Emma talked together, quietly, and laughed about Eddie, the way he always danced on the table when he was drunk, his love of bad pop music, about his marvellous curries and his stint on the Turkish cooking show.

Then they lit cigarettes and fell silent, each holding their own memories.

“Eddie and I got back together that night, the night he died,” Emma said. It was the first time she had told anyone.

A giant sob grew inside her but wouldn't come out. It happened all the time now. She didn't know why. It felt like a balloon that wouldn't burst.

“I told him I loved him,” she continued. “And then he fucking died.”

Helene gave her a half smile.

“At least you had the chance to tell him, I suppose?” she said.

Emma laughed bitterly.

“I think I've always loved him. Since the first day I met him. I just didn't want to, you know? Because he was such an *asshole* to me.”

Helene patted her hand, as hot tears welled up in her eyes.

“And I did all these stupid things,” she said. “To try to deal with it.”

“We all do stupid things,” Helene said.

Emma looked at her, at her kind thoughtful face, and was suddenly sick of lying to her.

“Helene, I slept with Jay one night,” she said.

Helene pulled her hand back as though it had been burnt.

“What?” Her face was pinched and confused.

“I'm sorry. I can't keep lying. About anything.”

“When did this happen?”

“Before I got together with Kai. But honestly Helene, it didn't mean anything. We were so drunk. And I only did it because I was in love with Eddie. If that makes sense. And Jay stopped it, because he was in love with you. ”

Helene stared at her, her mouth open.

“I've felt terrible about it ever since,” Emma said, nervously. Now she wished she hadn't told her.

Helene looked away.

“I'm sorry,” Emma said. “I'm so sorry.”

“Why couldn't you leave him alone?” she said in a low voice. “You had them all eating out of your hand. Why did you have to take the one that was mine?”

“I'm sorry,” Emma said again, helplessly.

Helene stood up and gathered her bag and her jacket, her movements jerky.

At the front door, she turned.

“You know Emma, if you really want to be loved, you need to start to love yourself,” she said, before slamming the door.

The next day Jay and Helene were gone. They didn't say goodbye, and she wasn't surprised.

After everyone left, teaching was the only thing that kept her going for a while. When she was in the classroom, she could forget the rest of her life. She asked for more and more classes, and told herself she needed the money, but if she was honest with herself it was because she was hungry for her students' affection.

She didn't tell them what had happened.

Sometimes she laughed for a bit too long at things they said, and they looked at her in a puzzled way, and sometimes she forgot what she was teaching, and stood at the blackboard, frozen, for a second. But most of the time she taught better than she ever had.

When she wasn't teaching, she spent hours preparing for class, as she had never done before, cutting up slips of paper, making quizzes, and reading up on grammar. At first the other teachers had tried to talk to her, but after a while they had left her alone. She didn't want anyone around. Their happiness grated on her.

Emma took down all the other paintings in the apartment and moved Eddie's painting of the *fesleğen* plant to the living room, where it caught the late afternoon sun.

She liked to look up at it when she was reading, at the strange light of it.

She spent her weekends walking around the narrow streets of Istanbul. She sat on the doorsteps of the ancient churches, climbed the old steps that were etched into the hills of the city, and wandered the smallest alleys she could find, as though she might somehow lose herself if she tried hard enough. Everywhere she went, she felt the city watching her, playing with her. Some days it would show her something stunning, a giant rusted bell set against a blue sky, a cat sunning itself on a wall amongst a mass of white flowers, or a hidden square with a tree in the centre, the roots straining at the cobblestones. Other days it was cloudy and grey and she came to dead end alleyways covered in graffiti, rubbish banked up against the walls, or barbed wire strung across the tops of the fences. Every time she walked down Istiklal Cadessi, the whistle man was there somewhere, whistling his mournful tune.

This was the really dirty trick of life. That no matter how much you loved, or wanted, or needed something, no matter how you lived your life, in the end it was all out of your control; cells dividing and multiplying in milliseconds, stars spinning through space, a billion grains of dust blowing away in a single wild gust of wind.

One day she walked the warrens of the Balık Pazarı, past the teetering piles of books gathering dust downstairs, and upstairs past the fishmongers crying out with their deep voices, past the nut man who was busily serving customers, and past the spice shop where Eddie had always bantered with the salesman. Another day she went down Nevzade, past the bar where she and Kai had seen the fight that day, back when they had still been friends. Another day she went to Eminönü, and walked around the water to where the ferries stood rocking in the wind, remembering the time she and Jay had first gone there together, and how passionately they had argued about what were the best kinds of books to read.

There were so many different kinds of love.

One day, about two months after Eddie's death, she took a ferry to the very edge of the Bosphorous, alone, and walked up the hill and looked out over the Black Sea for the first time.

It stretched out forever, a darker rippling mirror of the sky.

She hadn't had a drink since the one she had had with Jay before going to the hospital. She didn't think she would ever drink again. The smell of it would always be wrapped up in her mind with the night they had been out at the club and with the smell of that terrible room where they had kept Eddie. And she knew that it was time to stop, that it was the only way she could get better.

Every day, she felt her mind becoming clearer and clearer, like a fog was lifting.

One night she went up on the roof of the apartment and sat and smoked and looked at the giant mosques squatting on the shore of the Bosphorous. They had an air of guardianship, she thought, as though they were watching over the city, protecting it. While she sat there, the call to prayer suddenly rang out, from mosque to mosque, from shore to shore, in a wailing circle around the city until it seemed the whole city was full of wailing and echoing, as though the whole city were in mourning for something that could never be found again.

After it finished the echo of it still hung, shivering, over the water.

A feeling of great peace swept over her.

Lately, her mind had stopped its incessant wheeling, its sifting through the past, its anxiety about the future. Instead, it was still. It was only concerned with now, and the beauty of things now. She had realised that if she was ever going to find happiness it would have to be within herself, and that she had to be content with things as they were now, and not just to be content but to find joy, as Eddie had. She felt herself growing strong in a way she had never been before, and the strength grew like branches into all the parts of her. It was a strength that told her she was good enough to expect a better life, that she deserved happiness, that she wouldn't put up with being treated badly by anyone anymore, and that she wouldn't change herself again for anyone. She would be herself, pure and free, and if they didn't like it, at least she would like herself.

It was getting warm now. Soon there would be another summer, with a whole new round of teachers arriving, ready to have their own adventures.

It was time for her to go.

She stood up and took one last look at the view, at the bridge lit up in the distance, at the tumble of buildings that looked as though they might fall off the hills, at the fisherman's boats gliding through the water. A ferry nearby blew its horn, once, and the sound bounced through the air. Then it started to move away from the wharf, seagulls crying in its wake, their undersides bright and white in the darkness.

Emma stood up, then went back down the stairs to the apartment, plans already forming in her mind.