Selim Özdoğan

translated by Ayça Türkoğlu and Katy Derbyshire

52 Factory Lane

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I

It’s quiet.

Much quieter than Gül had imagined.

You can get everything there, they’d said – her mother-in-law, her stepmother, the neighbours – *and it’s all much better than here*. That’s why Gül had only brought her cardboard suitcase with her.

She’d boarded the train in Istanbul, a noisy city where everyone seemed to have something to do, where the voices of street vendors mingled with screeching train brakes, the braying of a donkey with the rattle of a carriage overtaken by a car.

This must be what it’s like in Germany, Gül had thought, *just not as many animals, and even more people*.

At the stations where she’d had to change, she’d been afraid of not finding the right train and getting lost in some unfamiliar place. This last station is so small that Fuat, standing on the platform, looks taller than she remembers him, though he’s lost weight – there’s nothing left of the belly he put on in the army. In fact, it’s the opposite: his cheeks are sunken and even his hair seems thinner now.

Gül clutches at him, relieved that someone is there to hold her, someone who knows the way. As she feels his body, her mind wanders back to the image of Ceren crying

as she said goodbye at the foot of the stairs in her in-laws' house.

Fuat's mother Berrin was holding her, a child of almost three kicking and screaming as her tears flowed and she scratched at her face and grabbed at her head, tugging out tufts of hair while Berrin tried to get a grip on her little arms. Ceyda, who will soon be six, stood next to her grandmother, seeming to grasp less than her sister the meaning of that goodbye. *Ceyda is a good girl, obedient and hard-working*, Gül thought, as she stood there at the foot of the stairs. *She's a clever girl, she'll make the best of the separation*. But Ceren is still so little, and even though Gül makes no distinction in her love for her children, part of her heart stayed right there, forever tied to Ceren's screaming, scratching and writhing, things she's too old for now. That's how she will remember Ceren over the next 18 months.

But right then on the platform, the image vanishes when she frees herself from Fuat's arms. He takes her suitcase, and they walk together along empty-looking streets. Gül can't imagine any people inside the houses, even though there are lights behind the curtains.

They hear the faint buzz of a flickering streetlamp.

Fuat asks how the journey was, but Gül doesn't want to tell him how scared she was at the stations. Not this man, who could hardly wait to come to Germany, who left behind his wife and daughters without a backward glance, for longer than the year they'd planned. She doesn't want to tell him she hadn't been able to do her business in that stinking, cold train toilet for the past three days, nor how much joy and relief she felt when she saw him on the platform.

'The journey was long,' Gül says, 'like the journeys in fairy tales.'

‘Oh yes, it’s a long way by train. We’ll fly back, God willing. It’s quicker than taking the bus to Ankara, you’ll see.’

He was right, Gül thinks when she sees the flat. It’s a single room with a big bed, a bedside table, a single wardrobe and a chest of drawers; there’d be no space for anything else. There’s a small kitchen with a table and two stools, and a tiny hall.

‘The toilet’s in the stairwell,’ Fuat says once Gül has put her suitcase on the bed. ‘Come on, I’ll show you.’

Her in-laws had an outside toilet and there was no flush like there is here, but she’s never seen such a tiny flat. She thought Fuat was exaggerating as usual when he said there was no room for children here, even if they slept standing up in the wardrobe.

‘I’ve got to go, time for work,’ he says. ‘I’ll be back in the morning.’

Gül closes the door behind her husband, sits down on the bed and opens her suitcase. A pair of shoes, a pressure cooker, two dresses, underwear, two skirts, a cardigan and very little else.

Why lug along cheap tat from here, they said, *when you can buy nice things there?*

Gül wants to put her clothes away, but when she sees the mess the drawers are in, she simply tips them out onto the bed and starts sorting the contents. Once she’s finished with the drawers and the wardrobe, she makes her way into the kitchen and lights a cigarette, a Samsun. She smoked almost two packs on the journey, and there’s only one last cigarette left after this one. She pulls her feet up on the stool and leans against the wall; there’s a small mirror above the sink. Gül gets up to look at herself. She

still looks exactly like she did in Turkey, but she doesn't feel the same.

The feeling inside her is bigger than the image in the mirror. Perhaps that's why she feels like such a stranger.

She wakes up the instant she hears the key in the door, and she immediately knows where she is. She leaps up, greets her husband in her nightshirt and puts the kettle on in the kitchen. Fuat's eyes are small and red; he doesn't talk much over breakfast, only nodding at the stories Gül tells of home. When he's finished eating, he takes a bottle of whisky out of the fridge and pours three fingers into a tumbler. Gül stares in amazement.

'Oh yes, that's how it is,' he says. 'Whisky, real whisky like in the films. You can make real money here – and look what you can buy for it!'

'But so early in the morning…'

'So what? I've been on my feet all night long – I deserve a little drink after work.'

And he tops up his glass, as if in defiance.

Fuat sips silently at his drink while Gül washes up. She's still in her nightshirt and hasn't been to the toilet yet.

'Aah,' a satisfied sigh escapes Fuat's lips after he takes his last determined slug of whisky. 'Come,' he says, leading the way to the bedroom.

Once Fuat falls asleep, Gül washes his glass, dries the dishes, puts the kettle on for another tea, and lights her last remaining cigarette. She takes out the newspaper clippings she collected over the past few weeks and puts them on the table.

She's been using these clippings to learn the German words for door, day, week, time, street, apple, house, key, breakfast, lunch, bed, chair, table, trousers and skirt.

Words she found difficult to remember, and which were of no help with the German customs officers.

Back home they'd told her she would have to go through Customs, but the word had sounded strange to Gül, even in Turkish, and was linked in her mind with the image of a brightly lit corridor dotted with men in uniforms, guns heavy by their sides.

She hadn't imagined the man with a black moustache, who took a pack of cigarettes out of her coat pocket, then put her suitcase on a table, opened it and searched inside. He seemed to be asking questions too, but Gül simply shrugged and stared back at him. The words *Tür, Haus, Tag, Woche, Apfel* she might have recognised, but the only one she guessed was *Zigarette*, which sounded similar to the Turkish word.

None of the words Gül knew helped her to say: *I don't have any more cigarettes. The ones in my coat pocket are my last pack*.

She could probably just have said, *Nein, Zigarette*.

But eyes and real life helped where language was not enough.

Gül goes over all the lessons she's learned from the newspaper, then she writes a letter to her father and one to her mother-in-law, has another glass of tea and smokes another cigarette, which she's pinched from Fuat's pack and which tastes completely different to the ones she's used to. She looks out of the window, cleans the two rings on the electric hob, empties the cupboards and wipes them down before filling them up again. She smokes another cigarette and gazes out of the window a while. The streets still seem empty, but they look clean, as if they're swept every hour.

Fuat wakes up around two that day, wanting his breakfast. At about four, Gül goes outside with him, to

Germany.

The two Greek men who live opposite work alternating shifts and share the flat because it’s cheaper that way. Above them live a Greek couple, and a Spanish couple and their child. There’s only one apartment on the ground floor, and it’s home to an old German couple who hardly ever go out.

The Spanish couple’s son’s name is Rafa, as far as Gül can tell. He looks around eight years old, and he has to stay home alone when he gets in from school because both of his parents work. Gül watches from the kitchen window as he walks home with his satchel on his back. It won’t be long before he’s back outside the door to the flats, peering upwards. Every day they play beştaş, a game with five pebbles, which Gül has taught him. They sit on the step outside the front door, and Rafa teaches her German words. The words for stick and stone, for skin and bone, for head and heart, for pen and paper, and many more. After five days or so, Gül realises Rafa has passed on all the words he knows. When she points to a motorbike, the nameplates by the doorbell or her shoelaces, the boy simply shrugs.

For several weeks, they sit outside the front door in the afternoons playing beştaş together – a schoolboy and a woman in her early twenties, mother to two daughters. Sometimes Gül talks at him in Turkish, and sometimes Rafa speaks Spanish to her. She enjoys this hour or two before she heads back inside to prepare Fuat’s breakfast.

At the weekends, Fuat often leaves the house at the same time as he would for work. ‘What else am I supposed to do?’ he says. ‘It’s not like I can sleep.’

And he comes home about the same time his shift would usually end. Sometimes he’s so drunk that he throws himself on the bed fully dressed and seems to find sleep of

some sort instantly. But mostly he's so drunk that he pulls Gül out of the kitchen into the bedroom or tugs up her nightdress if she's still in bed. He never comes home sober.

While he sleeps, Gül sits in the kitchen without any book, radio or newspaper to speak of; the days don't quite know how to pass. At the weekends, she can't even reckon on Rafa standing outside the front door and looking up at her kitchen window.

But Fuat and Gül do go out on Saturdays and Sundays, to meet up with others who have come from Turkey. There aren't any Turks living on their street, but there are a good fifty of them in the area. They're often young men, like Fuat; some are unmarried, others have left their wives and children behind in Turkey.

Ozan lives nearby with his wife Nadiye and their son Ergün, and both Fuat and Gül like visiting them. Fuat, because Ozan likes a drink as much as he does, as they put it, and because the two of them are keen gamblers, bound by their love of making a quick buck. And Gül, because Nadiye seems like a woman with a good head on her shoulders, someone who knows exactly what she wants, though she's even younger than Gül. Sometimes Gül finds her a bit cold, like when she talks about her older sister's first son.

'He was almost two years old,' she says, 'and he was often sickly, but they thought he'd pull through. But then he had a bout of diarrhoea that had him in the ground in the space of a week. Maybe it was better that way. May the Lord keep others from suffering the same pain, but the child just wasn't tough enough for this life. He wouldn't have made it much further. You can't expect to be rubbed down with rose water every day in this world.'

Maybe that's just how people are in that part of the world, Gül says to herself. Nadiye and Ozan come from the

Black Sea region, and Gül sometimes has trouble understanding them at first.

‘I got to know Turkey when I was in the army,’ Fuat says. ‘Kurds, Circassians, Alevis, Georgians, the ones from the mountains, blond chaps from the Aegean, fancy Istanbulites, men from the Black Sea coast with big noses, all the people of our country. And you’re getting to know them here in Germany. This is your military service,’ he says, laughing.

Neither of them suspects that this period of service will last well over fifteen years.

Nadiye’s son isn’t one yet, but already she’s heavily pregnant again. Gül wonders what will become of these children.

Gül has been in Germany for almost two months when she realises her period is late. She spends the first few days fretting and hoping, but one morning Fuat comes home and finds her crying in the kitchen.

‘What’s happened?’

‘I think I’m pregnant again.’

Fuat just looks at her. Gül can’t say whether it’s the hope of a son she sees in his eyes, or happiness, or even disappointment.

‘I came here to work,’ she says. ‘What are we supposed to do with another child? Am I supposed to leave it with strangers, like we did the girls? Will this one have to grow up without a mother, without a father?’

‘Are you sure?’ Fuat asks.

‘No,’ Gül says, knowing full well that her period’s been late before and her husband has almost always been careful, no matter how drunk he’s been.

‘We’ll talk to a doctor, then.’

Nadiye has to see the doctor too, because it’s only a matter of days before the baby is due. The doctor explains

to her and her husband, by drawing on a piece of paper, that the baby hasn't turned around and they're going to have to perform a caesarean. Nadiye will need to spend a few days in hospital.

The doctor who examines Gül doesn't use drawings to help her understand. Gül is shy around this grey-haired old man, who seems a little doddery and is constantly groping in his shirt pocket for his glasses, which are propped on his head. She doesn't understand a word he's saying.

When they're out of the surgery, she asks Fuat: 'Yes or no?'

'You heard what he said.'

'And how was I supposed to understand what he meant?'

'He said *baby*, didn't he? Surely you've heard that word before? What's not to understand?'

Gül holds back the tears until she gets home, and then a little longer, until Fuat has left for work.

'What am I going to do with this little one?' Nadiye says. 'I can't exactly take him into hospital with me. Would they give Ozan time off, do you think? But what's the poor man supposed to do with a child all day? Oh Gül, life's so much harder when you haven't got your people around you, looking out for you.'

'I can look after Ergün,' Gül says. She can tell from Nadiye's eyes that she hadn't reckoned on her offering to help, or even wondered if she might. Nadiye's look of surprise makes Gül want to give her a hug. Hers is a pure heart.

'You're mad,' Nadiye says. 'You don't want to be lumbering yourself with a kid at the moment.'

Gül hasn't told her about her pregnancy. Has Nadiye sensed something's not right?

‘Don’t be silly!’ Gül says. ‘Just give Ergün to me, you know I’ve got two children of my own and you can’t go leaving a baby with your husband; he’s here to work. He wouldn’t like it and you know it.’

‘What’s all this in aid of? What are we supposed to do with an infant?’ Fuat scolds. ‘You know I need my sleep. As if it weren’t enough that I work nights and you’re always making noise, now you want to bring a child into the house, is that it? You and your ideas. It beggars belief.’

While her husband sleeps, Gül sits quietly on her stool in the kitchen or plays with Rafa. She can’t do anything about the fact that her husband wakes up when a plane flies past overhead. She even tries to light her cigarettes quietly.

‘We won’t disturb you,’ she says now. ‘You won’t even hear him; we’ll be in the kitchen the whole time and you won’t hear a peep.’

He’s your friend’s son, she could say. *Why are you acting like it’s nothing to do with you? It’s our duty to take care of this child*. She could say that, but then he’d get even more wound up.

‘Not a peep, you say? He’s a baby! You don’t know when he’ll scream and when he won’t, are you having a laugh? *Not a peep*.’

He sticks a cigarette between his lips and sucks the smoke in angrily.

Where do I get these ideas? Gül thinks. *I wait in the kitchen all day long for my husband to get up, there’s no space at all here, my own children are far away, I’m pregnant again, and I get it into my head to look after someone else’s child. But what else was I to do?*

Gül is lucky. As it turns out, Ergün is quiet during the day. Every morning, once Fuat’s gone to bed and she’s finished washing the dishes, she carries the little boy in her arms to visit his mother. The hospital is about ten minutes

away, and Gül is still scared of getting lost when she goes out on her own, but she only needs take two turns before she reaches Nadiye.

Ergün is quiet during the day thank God, but at night, at night while Fuat's at work the child cries. He stirs, and at first, only makes enough noise to wake Gül. But as soon as Ergün sees her face, the face of a stranger and not his mother, he starts wailing and almost nothing calms him down.

Which is probably why Gül starts to cry soon after him.

'See,' she tells the baby. 'That's life for you, we can't change it. My children and I have been separated, too, and I'm not happy about it either.'

She cuddles the little boy, hugs him to her chest, and they cry together through part of the night until Ergün falls asleep, exhausted.

'That's life for you,' Gül says. 'Soon I'll have another child and there'll be many more things I never would have wished for.'

The first time Gül drank alcohol, it was liqueur that she drank in her mother-in-law's kitchen, liqueur that the many guests who visited during Eid had turned down, and which tasted better with every sip. Eventually, she grew queasy and threw up. The following morning, she threw up again and thought it was the after-effects of the alcohol, until her friend Suzan explained that she was probably pregnant.

With her second daughter, Ceren, she had only felt sick in the mornings two or three times, and now in the mornings with Ergün, before Fuat gets home, she doesn't feel great – her eyes are swollen, she hasn't slept enough, her mind is on her daughters – but she doesn't feel bad.

After four nights she takes Ergün back to his mother, and at home, in the toilet in the stairwell, she discovers a big dark-red stain in her white knickers.

‘I came here to work,’ Gül says. ‘That was the reason. Not to spend all my time sitting here in the kitchen, so far away from my children. We wanted to earn money.’

‘You didn’t want any money,’ says Fuat. ‘You always refuse when you’re offered it.’

He’s replaced the stools in the kitchen with chairs now, and he even managed to get hold of an old armchair that just fits next to the door, where he’s sipping whisky and Coke.

‘I didn’t do it for money,’ Gül says, ‘I did it to please God. It’s not right to earn your bread from other people’s need. We’re in a foreign country, we have to stick together.’

‘Money’s money,’ Fuat says. ‘You’ll never be rich until you understand that.’

‘Well, I can’t exactly go to Nadiye now and say I do want it after all,’ Gül says.

‘We’ll never get enough saved if you keep working for everyone for free.’

‘I want a proper job,’ Gül says.

Fuat twists the glass in his hand and takes another sip.

‘Look,’ he says, ‘everything in this country has to be done just right. You need a permit for everything. They let you come here because you’re my wife. And they have a rule that you have to have been here for six months before they’ll give you a work permit. Without a work permit, you can only work off the books, and that’s not easy. I’ll see what I can do, alright?’

Fuat knows his wife is a hard worker. Back in Turkey, she asked him to buy her a sewing machine so she could contribute to the family’s income. He was sceptical at the time, but the investment soon paid off.

He already has an idea of what Gül could do. It may seem like the rules in Germany are different to Turkey, but Fuat knows you’ve still got to be smart if you want to make

it. People who follow the rules don’t get far. Wherever you are, you have to keep an eye out for opportunities and people who can level your path.

Two days later, Gül finds herself at the conveyor belt of a chicken factory, plucking chickens for eight hours a day. She has a fifteen-minute break for lunch, and she’s allowed one visit to the toilet on each side of the break.

The first night, Gül dreams of those naked and half-naked chickens, pink flesh as far as the eye can see. Flesh, flesh and more flesh; the smell of blood, and the faces of the men whose job it is to pull the heads off the slaughtered birds. Half-formed eggs removed from the meat, feathers floating on the air. In her dream, the seas fill up with naked, dead chickens and threaten to flood the land.

The second night, her dream is much worse.

Ceren has got into trouble and Gül has to rescue her, get her out of somewhere, free her. She has to be there for her daughter; she has to reach out her hand and help, but Ceren keeps slipping away and every attempt is in vain. Gül kicks and struggles and tries, she toils and travails, but Ceren slips away from her in a maelstrom of fear and angst; Gül simply can’t get a grip on her.

It’s four thirty in the morning when Gül wakes up, more than an hour to go before Fuat comes home from work. She gets up, the images pale but the feeling of the dream painted in such stark colours that her hands tremble as she sits down at the kitchen table with pen and paper. She writes a letter to her mother-in-law: *Is something the matter with Ceren? Is my daughter healthy? Has something happened to her? Write back, please write quickly. Don’t leave me wondering*.

She makes breakfast for herself and Fuat, but the dream has her trapped beneath a bell jar of anxiety. No matter

where she goes, no matter how she moves around the kitchen, something is cutting her off from the world. Something is behind her, above her, inside her, and even when she doesn't think about it, she can feel that it's there.

She sticks a stamp on the letter, one of the many Fuat bought for her, along with paper and envelopes. 'What are you planning to do,' he asked, 'write a letter a day? What do you want with twenty stamps at once?'

'Yes,' she told him. 'Every day or every other day, perhaps every third day, but I want to keep writing – it's the only way we can stay close to each other.'

Gül posts the letter on her way to work, and the bell jar around her grows a little thinner; a little air gets through to her anxiety and one or two clear thoughts form in her mind, but then she's back at the conveyor belt plucking chickens, with scraps of last night's images in her head and the weight of the dream still pressing down on her.

People say light as a feather, she thinks as she rips out the down, *light as a feather – they must have come up with that one long before they had chicken factories*.

Just before lunchtime, the man who showed Gül the ropes two days earlier comes rushing in. Herr Mehl is a skinny man with glasses, whose upper body always looks like he's leaning forward, and whose wrinkled neck reminds Gül of a turkey. Behind him are two women and one of the men who pulls the heads off the chickens.

'Quick, quick, quick, an inspection!' Herr Mehl says, dragging Gül away.

She works out what's going on.

In Istanbul, Gül had seen street hawkers running away from the police with big trays covered in simit. She'd felt sorry for the traders; they earned their money by the sweat of their brow, but if the police caught them, their sesame rings ended up trampled in the dirt.

Herr Mehl runs into the walk-in refrigerator with the four workers. Gül has to hide in a big box that she only fits into if she draws her knees up to her chin. She's curled up so tightly that she can't even see how many hands are covering her with plucked chickens.

If anyone looks in the box they'll see me, with or without the chickens, Gül thinks as she waits there, feeling the weight of the meat. And: *At least the simit sellers were outside in the fresh air*. And: *I did forget the dream for a moment, though*.

Two hours, she could have said, *two hours I spent in that box in the walk-in refrigerator. It was so cold that it froze the marrow in my bones, I had no feeling in my fingers or in my toes. Two hours I spent there with those cold, dead chickens on top of me. It's not like being in a house where you've run out of coal. It's not just the cold; there's the fear too. How was I to know what would happen if they found me? For all I knew, they might take me to the police station, put me on a train and send me home. I can't speak the language, can't even tell left from right in German; what would I have done, trembling at a police station, exposed, fished out of a box of dead chickens?*

Two hours. The idea of exaggerating a little only occurs to Gül later. Doesn't Fuat always say you've got to be smart in this world, so you don't go under, so you don't lose out?

'About twenty minutes,' she says. 'About twenty minutes I spent there, hardly daring to breathe, worrying they might see the steam coming out of my mouth. I don't want to go back there.'

'You can't choose where to work if you haven't got a work permit. You can't even choose *with* a work permit.'

'I don't want to go back there,' Gül says. 'Who knows when the next raid will be, and I don't want to get pushed

around police stations and courtrooms half-frozen to death. I'm not going back there!'

To her surprise, Fuat nods. Perhaps her last words sounded determined enough, perhaps what she says makes sense to him, perhaps he has an inkling of what it feels like to lie in a box of dead animals.

'I'll keep an ear out,' he says, and it sounds like all he has to do to find her another job is listen out for a minute.

At the end of the orchard at Fuat's parents' house is a little swimming pond, about fifteen feet long and four feet wide. When Fuat stands in it, the water comes all the way up to the thick hair on his chest. The pond is somewhere pleasant to cool off on hot summer days, though it's an effort to fill it with water from the well and it's two days before the water is warm enough to get in. In the space of two weeks, the pond's cement walls are covered with algae and the water is full of duckweed.

Ceren had been sitting at the edge of the pond, dipping her hand into the water and playing with the streaks of green, when Meryem called over from the next garden. Ceren's grandmother, Berrin, who was sitting by her side shelling walnuts, stood up to have a natter with her neighbour over the wall, which only came up to her waist and ran between the two gardens.

While the two women were talking, Ceren fell into the water. She thrashed, gasped, cried out, gulped water; the three-year-old girl who, just weeks ago, had scratched her face because her mother had left her.

Once, Gül fell through the floor of the cellar in her mother-in-law's house, into a covered hole that had been forgotten for some time. Back then, Berrin had ignored Gül's cries, not realising what had happened.

This time, she realised right away and ran over to the pond. The duckweed repulsed her, she had never been in the little pond before and was no better a swimmer than Ceren. It took a moment for her to conquer her fears and step into the water.

Meryem had climbed over the little wall and was peering into the pond, watching as Berrin attempted to grab hold of her floundering granddaughter. Three or four times Ceren slipped away from her and then, when Berrin thought she'd finally got a hold of her and lifted her out, Ceren hit out in her panic, slipped on the duckweed, and fell back into the water, wriggling about more panicked than before.

Now Meryem jumped into the pond too. She was a little bolder than Berrin, and together the two women managed to heave the little girl up onto the edge, where she coughed and cried and kept on kicking.

So that's what had happened.

You've got a very good inner voice, Berrin writes. *Even in a foreign country you sensed that something wasn't right. You should be proud of your mother's intuition; it binds you to your child*.

Gül will often ask herself whether she was a good mother to her daughters. And Ceren, unlike her mother and her grandmother, will learn to swim.

Gül's first day at the dressmaking factory is behind her when she receives the letter from her mother-in-law. That morning, she turned up for work an hour late.

First they had to get the bus, then board a tram. 'Keep your wits about you,' Fuat had impressed upon Gül on their way into the factory in Bremen. 'Remember the route. And don't be surprised: places aren't as far apart here as they are at home. You can travel from one town to the next in half an hour.'

Gül tried to concentrate when they got off the tram, paying attention to all the landmarks she saw along the way. *Turn right at the building with the sign that starts with an A*, she murmured to herself a few times over. *Oh, it's an Apotheke, a pharmacy – so, right at the pharmacy, then keep straight, then go left at the big crossing*. The crossings here were all bigger than she was used to, but she had never seen one quite as big as this before. *Keep straight until you get to the end of the wooden fence, then go right*.

The building, when they eventually went in, was huge, a world away from the chicken factory. They even had a Turkish interpreter on site, Nermin, and Gül had thought she'd be more relaxed here. This was somewhere she could work; there was a translator, and she wouldn't be in a fix just because she couldn't speak the language.

She hadn't been daunted when she saw the room full of dressmakers sitting at electric sewing machines, all the piles of bras. She hadn't even wondered if she'd be up to the task of using an electric sewing machine – she thought it had to be easier than having to pedal all the time.

It's just getting there that's the tricky bit, she said to herself. And as if he wanted to prove precisely that, Fuat had got lost in the building's corridors.

'It beggars belief,' he grumbled. 'It's as if they build these factories just to confuse us. These rich men, they don't want us to see what's really going on. What sort of corridor is this? Where does it even lead? There's not so much as a sign – I expect they charge extra for that.'

All weekend, Gül walked the route to work in her mind over and over; *Get the bus first, then the tram with the number 6 on it. Get off at the street with the long name made up of two words, the first one beginning with F, the*

second with M. Walk back in the direction the tram came from, then turn right at the chemist's …

I'll manage it, she kept telling herself, but she felt uneasy all weekend and started awake again and again on Sunday night. As if it wasn't enough that she was worried about Ceren, as if the horror of the dream wasn't still creeping into her waking hours.

But it seemed the more she traced the route in her mind, the less she was able to remember it. It was a big city, Bremen. What would she do if she got lost? She had been scared enough in Istanbul, and everyone spoke her language there.

On Monday morning, she sat on the very edge of her seat on the bus counting the stations, deep in concentration as she looked out of the window. She got on the right tram, couldn't find a seat, but she kept looking out, constantly, and counted backwards: *four more stops to go, three more stops, two more, one more*.

She walked back in the direction the tram had come from and turned right at the pharmacy, then took the left turn at the big crossing. She walked and walked and walked, but the wooden fence never appeared. She had been on the right street; she'd recognised everything up to this point and had taken the correct turning both times. Something told her she should have passed the wooden fence by now, but it was nowhere to be seen.

Just to the next turning, she'd said to herself. *Just one more, or perhaps it's the one after that, or the one up ahead, might that be it?* She had been walking along the same road for twenty minutes before she decided to turn back. She felt hot and her breathing was going faster than she was.

She was confused; she couldn't explain what had happened. *Fuat got lost too, in the factory*, she tried to

reassure herself, but she simply couldn’t understand where she’d gone wrong.

Until she came to the point where the wooden fence must have been before. *Oh, what a fool I am*, she scolded. *What a clod!* A building stood there, so new it almost gleamed; the fence had been hiding the building site.

Building sites and construction pits aren’t fenced off in in Turkey, that’s why I was so foolish, she thought. But it was obvious that this was where the fence had been. *If we had fences like these in Turkey, Orhan Veli wouldn’t have stumbled into that hole and died*, she thought. *He’d still be alive and could have given us more poems*.

She got to work almost an hour late. Her forewoman, a tall, well-built woman who reminded Gül a little of a horse, simply shook her head and pointed at a vacant sewing machine.

Sonja – that was the woman’s name – sat down at the machine herself and showed Gül what to do. Gül nodded, then she sat down and took Sonja’s place.

She trod carefully on the pedal, and the needle rattled away. The machines Gül had used before were mechanical; she’d had to use her feet to keep them running.

Gül thought of her first ever time at a sewing machine. She was thirteen years old and had left school early, and her father had sent her to Esra the dressmaker to help out. Back then her short legs barely reached the pedal, and she hadn’t many other skills, either.

Bit by bit, though, she had learned to sew, and now, after spending a few minutes getting used to the electric machine, the work seemed like child’s play.

Her movements were always the same, so she hardly needed to think, and after the first hour her hands did the work automatically. The needle ran smoothly, she didn’t

have to coordinate her hands and feet, and if it weren't for the noise of over a hundred machines, if it weren't for her worrying dream, if it weren't for her shame at arriving late, her fear of perhaps not finding her way home – it might almost have been pleasant.

During the break, Gül saw the other women on the machines take something out of their ears. Toilet paper. It was a good idea, so she decided to go to the toilet and get some for herself. She didn't want to go on her own; she might not find her way back to the hall or she might get lost on the way there. She looked around but none of the other women looked Turkish. *That one over there might be Spanish or Italian, that one definitely looks Greek. And that one*. And a few other faces stood out to Gül. *It's funny how quickly I've learned to tell the Germans and the non-Germans apart*, she thought. *If only there were a few more Turkish people around*.

Sonja came up to Gül, who was standing stiffly in the corridor, looking unsure. She put a hand on Gül's shoulder and said something Gül didn't understand, but because she smiled, Gül smiled back. It was as simple as that.

'Tuvalet?' Gül asked.

The German word was so similar that Gül just couldn't remember it. She regretted saying it as soon as the word left her mouth. She'd have to find her way back as well.

'Komm,' Sonja said.

Standing outside the toilet stalls, Sonja made two sounds at once: a low *Aaah* from her mouth and a loud *Pfff* from her guts.

Gül stared at her in shock. She'd never heard an adult fart with such lack of inhibition. It was one of those things that simply weren't done. You weren't supposed to cross your legs in the presence of elders, smoke in front of them, or return borrowed plates and bowls empty to friends and

neighbours. Women weren't to curse, at least in mixed company, or go out in the street half-naked, and you weren't supposed to break wind in public.

Sonja laughed when she saw the face Gül was pulling.

'Luft,' she said, slapping her abdomen, 'It's just air, you have to let it out.'

Gül hurried on the toilet to make sure she finished before Sonja. She tore off two sheets of toilet paper and put them in her pocket.

The rough paper in her ears made the noise easier to bear, and Gül worked and thought about farts, this strange country, Ceren, the way home. She thought about how much money Fuat had probably lost at cards over the weekend, what she would earn here, whether they had raids in this huge factory, and where they'd hide her if they did.

Sonja kept popping over, taking a quick look over Gül's shoulder, nodding and taking the finished bras away. When the shift ended, she beckoned Gül over, and Gül recognised the interpreter with the Istanbul accent, alongside the forewoman.

Oh dear, she thought, *they're unhappy with me – I did turn up late on my very first day. And I bet I didn't work fast enough – I've been lost in my thoughts for the last few hours. Or maybe I didn't do the sewing how they wanted it. That'll be 200 bras that need throwing away now. Oh dear*.

'Good afternoon,' Nermin said. 'How are you?'

'I'm well, thanks be to God. And yourself?'

'Fine, fine. Did you have any problems today?'

'No. Yes. Well… I couldn't find the way. It won't happen again.'

'Don't worry about that,' Nermin said. 'What did you do in Turkey?'

'I was a housewife.'

Just because she'd had a sewing machine at home, that didn't make her a dressmaker.

'A housewife,' Nermin repeated with a smile. 'Do you know how many bras you sewed today?'

Gül shook her head. *Oh dear*.

'312. And do you know how many the others manage?'

I bet it's over 500, Gül thought.

'I'll tell you. The fastest workers manage about 380. And you were almost an hour late. We do piecework here, which means you can earn a lot of money. Sonja's very pleased with you, she told me to say so. We can always use good workers like you.'

Then Nermin said something to Sonja in German. She had a proud, almost arrogant air about her, this Nermin; she looked like a rich young lady from the upper classes with her nylon stockings and bouffant hairdo, with her skirt that barely grazed her knees. No doubt she had a good life in Istanbul. Gül couldn't imagine what she was doing here, so far away from home. Or what she was looking for.

Gül would have liked to be glad that they were pleased with her, but she was worried about the journey home and troubled by her thoughts of Ceren, which had grown less frequent but lost none of their urgency.

It was only when she got home, when she saw the opened letter on the kitchen table and read it, that something warm and gentle flowed through her body, making her heart grow light. For the first time since she'd come to Germany, so it seemed.

'Hats for the fat twins,' Fuat said. 'So that's how we'll earn our money. You'll be on time tomorrow, I bet.'

Hats for the fat twins was what the street hawkers shouted when they were selling bras in Istanbul.