



VINTAGE

IRON EARTH, COPPER SKY

YASHAR KEMAL

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About the Book

Turkey's greatest novelist, Yashar Kemal was an unsurpassed storyteller who brought to life a world of staggering violence and hallucinatory beauty. Kemal's books delve deeply into the entrenched social and historical conflicts that scar the Middle East. *The Wind from the Plains* trilogy is widely seen as his masterpiece, alongside the legendary *Memed, My Hawk*.

After a particularly bad season, a group of poor cotton-pickers are unable to pay their creditor, shopkeeper Adil Effendi. Overwhelmed with shame and guilt, they wait in terror for Adil to come and demand retribution. But when he inexplicably fails to appear, Adil begins to represent an irrational and tyrannical force, growing in their minds until they become sick with apprehension and obsessed with the terrible disaster that is sure to come upon them.

In their despair they turn to Tashbash, a brave, decent and loyal man, investing him with virtue, grace and miraculous power. But the cotton-pickers have no idea of the effect of their idolatry on Tashbash, with his innocent doubts and mental torment, until his fate finally befalls him and the novel draws to its apposite close. Written with deep compassion and lyrical beauty, this is a novel alive with the acute observation of human nature.

About the Author

Yashar Kemal was born in 1922 in a village on the cotton-growing plains of Chukurova, which feature in this novel. He received some basic education in village schools, then became an agricultural labourer and factory-worker. His championship of the poor peasants lost him a succession of jobs, but he was eventually able to buy a typewriter and set himself up as a public letter-writer in the small town of Kadirli. After a spell as a journalist he published a volume of short stories in 1952, and in 1955 his first novel, *Memed, My Hawk*. This won the Varlik Prize for the best novel of the year. It has sold over a quarter of a million copies in Turkey and has been translated into every major language.

Yashar Kemal was a member of the Central Committee of the banned Workers' Party. In 1971 he was held in prison for 26 days, then released without being charged.

Kemal, many of whose books have been translated into English by his wife, is Turkey's most influential living writer.

By the same author

MEMED, MY HAWK
THE WIND FROM THE PLAIN
ANATOLIAN TALES
THEY BURN THE THISTLES
THE LEGEND OF ARARAT
THE LEGEND OF THE THOUSAND BULLS
THE UNDYING GRASS
THE LORDS OF AKCHASAZ:
Murder in the Ironsmiths' Market
THE SAGA OF A SEAGULL
THE SEA-CROSSED FISHERMAN
THE BIRDS HAVE ALSO GONE

Yashar Kemal

IRON EARTH,
COPPER SKY

Translated from the Turkish by
Thilda Kemal



Harvill Secker
LONDON

Chapter 1

Silently they made their way towards the oak-wood. Hasan walked ahead, hunched forward, his hands thrust under his jacket. Ummahan followed close behind, her eyes on her feet.

The world was shrouded in snow, hill and vale lost under a sheer unsullied whiteness. Even the sky was quite white. Only down south, way over the Taurus forest, a pale greenish-blue haze hovered like a flimsy veil spread over the boundless whiteness. A dazzling sun bore down on this frozen expanse, reflecting millions of tiny silver sparks.

The two children were barefoot and stepped over the crisp hard snow as though on live coals.

Hasan looked back.

'The minute we get to the forest ...' he began, then stopped.

'Yes?' Ummahan asked eagerly.

'Nothing. I've changed my mind. I won't tell you.'

'Don't then!' She shrugged. 'As if I cared!'

'Like hell you don't!'

She did not answer back. He was obviously spoiling for a fight.

'D'you hear?' he insisted. 'I said like hell ...'

'I heard you, brother. What d'you want me to do if you won't tell me?'

'I won't,' he shouted. He began to run. He ran so fast that Ummahan could not keep up with him.

He's become strange, this brother of mine. Never talking, always cross ... Grinding his teeth, howling in his sleep ... Grown-ups always tell of such children ... How the wasting

sickness gets them and they die. Hasan ... Singing and laughing all day long ... And now ... Like a dead tree ...

When Hasan looked back Ummahan was nowhere to be seen. He could feel the sun now like a warm caress on his neck.

‘Ummahan!’ he called, blinking against the glaring whiteness. ‘Where are you? Ummahan!’

‘I’m coming ...’ Her thin voice trailed off over the wilderness of snow.

He caught sight of her, struggling up the white slope like a tiny black insect.

‘Hurry! I’m going to be late because of you, damn you,’ he shouted.

She was sweating. ‘Please Hasan, let me get my breath ...’

‘I shouldn’t have brought you along,’ he burst out. ‘“Never set out with a bitch, or you’re sure to fall into a ditch!”’ He made his voice as gruff as he could and held his chin wisely in his hand like the village elders. This was sure to exasperate her.

Ape! Piddler! she thought. How he wetted his bed ... I’ll fling it in his face now ... But then he’ll never tell me the secret of the wood ...

‘“You’ll get lies all day long and more than you need, but never a shred of sense from the petticoat breed”,’ he taunted again. Then he paused expectantly.

There was no reply from Ummahan.

She’s pretending she doesn’t care, the hussy. You just wait, my girl!

‘“Neither faith nor loyalty can you find in a whore!”’

He saw Ummahan’s eyes filling with tears. A pang of remorse shot through him. ‘That wasn’t for you,’ he blurted out, taking her hand. ‘You’re my dear, beautiful sister. It wasn’t for you.’

‘Of course it wasn’t,’ Ummahan cried triumphantly. ‘Would a boy ever call his own sister a whore?’

This irritated him. 'Well, haven't you rested enough?' he said. 'You must have collected all the breath in the world by now. Come on, hurry!' He spurted on. 'When we get to the forest ...' He licked his lips. 'Aha! Then ...'

'Who cares?' she retorted, beginning to lose patience.

Hasan, exasperated, shouted. 'A whore, that's what you'll be when you grow up!'

'Yes, a whore,' she shouted back defiantly. 'That's what I'll be. Such a whore and oh, what a fine time I'll have!'

He could not believe his ears. A good spanking that's what she needs. But suppose she turns back home and leaves me? He was afraid of entering the oak-wood alone.

'Girl,' he said, 'I ought to trample you underfoot, but ... Come on, walk!'

'I won't! I'll go and tell Father everything you've said. Every single thing!'

'Go to hell! Don't you know Father's worried to death? If you tell him, I'll hack you to pieces with this axe. Now walk!'

'Only if you promise to tell me the secret of the wood.'

'Walk and I'll tell you.'

High overhead a flock of birds flew past, a scattering of black specks in the emptiness of the sky.

There was a weight on Hasan's heart, an aching pain he had never known before. That flame-like blue bird, the elusive bird of good luck that digs into steep riverbanks to nest deep down in the bowels of the earth like a snake ... If only he could catch one now! No one but Old Halil had ever been known to trap a blue bird. He used to pin the bird's glossy jet black beak on to some child's shoulder, an amulet against want and poverty for ever ... But there was no Old Halil now. He had disappeared in the autumn when they had gone down to pick cotton in the Chukurova plain. His son had given him up for dead, and the chapter from the Koran had been read in his memory.

‘Dead?’ Hasan’s grandmother had cried. ‘He? Die? That fiend, that limb of Satan whose murder would be sanctioned by all the four Holy Books? Oh no, neighbours! Oh no, he’ll never die, that one!’

The villagers had been shocked. ‘But Meryemdje, can’t the old chap die like any other human being?’

‘How dare you read the Koran, how dare you recite the *Mevlut*^{fn1} for that infidel, that renegade?’

Long Ali had tried to stop her. ‘For heaven’s sake, Mother, don’t! He’s dead and gone. It’s a sin to speak against the dead, however wicked they were. They’ve nothing more to do with this world ...’

‘Old Halil isn’t dead!’ she had continued to repeat obstinately.

The *Mevlut* was held on the barren cotton field, with all the villagers attending. The Bald Minstrel intoned the prayer just as though he were singing a familiar ballad, and the women, as always, were moved to tears by the magic of his voice. Only one person was missing.

‘My ears mustn’t hear our Prophet Muhammet’s holy *Mevlut* sung for that apostate,’ Meryemdje muttered as she hurried to the farthest corner of the field near the irrigation ditch. The sound followed her. Her hands over her ears, she hastened on, but the chanting seemed to rise as it floated over the flat land. She flung herself down and bent her forehead to the warm Chukurova earth. ‘Oh Mother Earth, please stop that Bald Minstrel from sinning against my beautiful white-bearded Allah! Turn his tongue into wood ...’ She scrambled to her feet and rushed on until she came to a hollow behind a clump of trees. It was like the sun flowing brightly back over the glistening world after a dark spell of rain. The sound had died away at last.

When she returned to the cotton field the *Mevlut* was over. The Bald Minstrel tried to banter with her but thought better of it after one glance at her face.

‘My beautiful black earth!’ she cried, as she sank to the ground and began to pound the earth. ‘It’s you I’m speaking to and no one else here. These villagers don’t deserve to be spoken to any more. They’ve made a mockery of our religion. They’ve annoyed our Holy Prophet. I wouldn’t stop here another minute among these infidels, it’s only old age that pins me down. I tell you, my clever all-knowing earth, my sultan earth, I’ll never open my mouth again to anyone in this village, not even to its beasts and insects! Because I’ll have you know, Old Halil isn’t dead!’

Long Ali rushed up and clapped her mouth shut. Meryemdje was shrieking and struggling like one possessed.

‘That Meryemdje!’ the villagers said. ‘She’s gone raving mad.’

‘She always was mad.’

‘Yes, but it’s getting worse as she grows older.’

From that day on Meryemdje was never again heard speaking to anyone in the village.

Hasan was gathering brushwood as though his life depended on it. He piled it on the sandy earth at the foot of a rock that jutted out like an awning, forming a small cave where the snow had not penetrated. Then, to Ummahan’s amazement he produced a brand new box of matches.

‘So that’s your secret!’ she cried.

‘You’re dying to know, aren’t you?’ he said. ‘This is only one of my secrets, and don’t worry, I didn’t steal them. I earned them by the sweat of my brow.’

It came to her like lightning.

‘I know!’ she cried gleefully. ‘I know how you got them!’

‘Say it then, since you’re so clever,’ he jeered. ‘But mind you, if you’re wrong I’ll give you a good spanking.’

‘Those cherry shoots you carried all the way down to the Chukurova, you swapped them for these. That’s what you did.’

He was taken aback. Why the little witch, he thought with sudden pride, she's clever our Ummahan.

He struck a match and held it to the sticks. They blazed up instantly and the two children huddled down shoulder to shoulder, as close as they could to the slow-spreading warmth.

'Do you know, Ummahan ... But first, swear you'll never tell a soul.'

'I swear it.'

'Say Mother'll die if I do.'

Ummahan hesitated. 'Let Mother die if I do ...'

Hasan's face lit up. 'You see this box? Well, I've got another nine of them. All for those cherry shoots! These matches'll last me ten years, fifteen years ...'

'Oh, they'll last for ever!' she exclaimed admiringly.

Hasan was pleased. 'Look!' He drew a sling from his pocket. 'I got this too. When it's spring and warm again, we'll be able to shoot birds.'

'Oh yes!' she cried. 'Dozens and dozens ...'

'And then we'll light a fire with these matches ...'

'I'll pluck them clean and salt and cook them.'

'And then we'll have a feast.'

A warm longing for roasted, fragrant meat welled up in them.

'Just wait till the warm spring days are here. Just wait, dear sister ...'

She was quick to take advantage of his softness. 'What was it you were going to tell me when we came to the forest?'

'Shh!' he said. 'Later, we've got plenty of time. We'll gather the wood in the afternoon so we don't have to go back to the village till sundown. Do you know, Ummahan, I'm frightened of that village. I'm afraid Adil Effendi will come ...'

She turned her huge deep black eyes on him and saw the fear on his face. 'So am I,' she said quickly. 'I'm terrified.'

‘Poor Father, he’s so worried he doesn’t know what to do.’

‘Mother’s afraid too. The whole village is full of fear, as if it were being threatened by a pack of wolves. Only Grandmother’s not afraid.’

‘But she won’t speak to anyone, not even to us. If only that Adil Effendi would come and do whatever he’s going to do to us. I wish it were over ...’

He moved closer to the fire, straining his long thin neck. His huge black eyes shone brightly in his bony face. A faint scar ran down his left temple to his neck like a vein. His hair, roughly clipped by his mother, stood out in ragged tufts. Brother and sister were very much alike, slight of build, slim-fingered and dark-eyed. But Ummahan’s mouth was full and red, strangely alive in the wanness of her face, like a bright late-blooming flower on the autumnal steppe.

Hasan’s eyes were fixed on the flames. He saw a pack of wolves running and tumbling over each other, fighting a pitched battle. And then, in an instant, all gone! How could they have vanished so fast? Just now that big wolf had been there, ears pricked, tongue thrust out and almost licking the mossy rock wall. And then with a whiff of the wind it had crumbled into nothingness. But here was a whole forest growing out of the fire, now aflame, burning away riotously, now sunk into blackness and smoke. Hasan sniffed at the acrid fumes with delight, then threw in more twigs and cones. The twigs crackled and a flame darted up, tapering out to the roof of the cave. This is a poplar, Hasan thought, a tall glowing poplar of fire. Then the tree snapped and fell back into the flames, and now he saw myriads of ants, crystalred, swarming, seething ... For some reason the ants upset him. Quickly, he piled brushwood over them and suddenly a horse, a gigantic horse leaped up from the fire.

‘Look, Ummahan,’ he shrieked, ‘look how it’s galloping!’
Ummahan started.

'It's gone,' he sighed. 'Just slipped by in a twinkling. What a handsome horse it was, with its long flying mane ...'

'Those flames!' Ummahan laughed. 'Why don't I ever see anything?'

'You wouldn't!'

'At this rate you'll soon be like Spellbound Ahmet.'

'Why not?' Hasan retorted kicking at the sand. 'Is he a bad man?'

Ummahan thought this over. 'No, but he's mad, isn't he?'

'Who knows?' Hasan said. 'Now look. Look really hard and you'll see those horses and insects and people, and even the *jinn* and *peris*, for there are lots and lots of them, you know.' He threw in some cones. 'Now, look well.'

'I never see anything but flames coiling round and round like ropes,' she complained.

'Here it comes!' he shouted. 'A greyhound! See, it's running. It's gone ...'

'I didn't see it,' she said, downcast.

'What a pity,' he sighed. 'It was such a beautiful greyhound.' Then he took her hand. 'Never mind, you'll see them one day too.'

They fell into silence, lost in their thoughts.

Ummahan was the first to rouse herself. The winter sun was sinking fast and it had turned bitterly cold.

'It's getting late. Mother'll be anxious if we stay after dark.'

Hasan rose and walked up and down, up and down, dragging his feet in the soft sand.

'I don't feel like going back!' he said helplessly at last. 'Not ever!' He was thinking of the lucky blue bird. Oh, to catch a thousand of them and hang their darkly shining heads all around the village. That would turn away the evil eye. A miracle ...

'If only we could be sure that Mother wouldn't cry,' Ummahan said. 'And then ... If it wasn't for the dark ...'

'If we didn't get hungry,' Hasan added.

‘That’s true,’ she cried. ‘If only we were never, never hungry at all ... But Hasan, we’d better be quick. Look at the sun.’

He grabbed his axe and ran up to an oak. The blow rang out loud in the emptiness of the wood. A dark cloud was advancing over the steadily fading steppe. It came, black and angry, sweeping away before it the scintillation of the snow, staining the whiteness of the earth and sky. He swung the axe furiously, almost at random. With each stroke, frozen flakes dropped to the ground.

‘Hurry, Ummahan! Hurry!’

She was darting to and fro, piling up the sticks and binding them into faggots.

‘All right, Hasan. We’ve got enough,’ she said at last.

He threw down the axe and looked at his sister suspiciously.

‘You wait here,’ he ordered, ‘and don’t dare turn to look where I’m going, or I’ll hack you to pieces here and now with this axe.’

Each time it was the same. Where did he go? What did he do? Ummahan was burning to know. But she never could pluck up the courage to go after him.

He ran swiftly, jumping over the rocks and fallen trunks until he came to a great rock set like an island in the midst of a clump of pines. There he paused, his heart beating loudly. Then slowly, as though touching a sacred object, he lifted a large stone. There was nothing under it except a feeble stirring of yellowish, ant-like creatures. With infinite care, as though he feared it would break and the magic would be shattered, he lowered the stone.

On the way back Ummahan looked at him reproachfully.

‘Hasan ...’ she began.

‘Shh!’ he whispered.

‘But you haven’t told me the secret of the forest,’ she protested. ‘You promised ...’

‘Shh!’ he said sharply.

^{fn1} *Mevlut*: a memorial service for the dead.

Chapter 2

They were all squatting about the hearth. The wood Hasan and Ummahan had brought blazed and crackled, filling the hut with its forest fragrance. Old Meryemdje sat still as a stone, her back to the wall, her head bent. Ali eyed her uneasily, thinking of other winter evenings when his mother would while away the long hours with an endless store of tales and reminiscences. If only she would be her old self again now, in these days of trouble ... If only ...

How long was it since the evening prayer? No one spoke. The children were quiet, listless, buried in themselves. Elif had tried to cheer up the household, but she too was silent now. Only the long mournful ululations of the wind from the steppe filled the night.

‘Mother,’ Ali said in a wheedling tone, thinking of the wonderful stories Meryemdje could tell of the steppe and its wolves, ‘what of the wolves now in this cold, with the whole world frozen over? What do they eat? How do they keep alive?’

Meryemdje did not seem to hear him.

‘Mother ...’ Now if this doesn’t shake her into talking, he thought, then nothing ever will to her dying day. ‘Mother, people are saying Old Halil isn’t dead. They say he came back here while we were still down in the Chukurova plain and when his son returned to the village and opened the door, who should he see inside but Old Halil fast asleep! And you knew it all the time, Mother! You said he wasn’t dead. And now he’s ashamed to show himself because he thinks it’s his fault the village was late for the cotton

picking. He's made his son swear not to tell a soul that he's alive. Yes Mother, just like that ...'

Meryemdje did not stir. A threatening rumble came from the steppe.

Ali's hut was built in a hollow with the bare earth for its back wall. Uneven stones daubed with mud made up the other three walls. Though the roof was of stout oakwood, the house itself was old, dating back to Ali's grandfather. In stormy weather Ali always feared that the snow-laden roof would cave in. Yet he knew this was unlikely in the winter when the whole house with its walls and dirt floor was frozen hard. Houses collapsed only during the spring thaw.

Their one cow, one calf and three goats were lying by the hay stacked in the far corner of the room. It was cold in spite of the brightly burning fire. What they needed was more livestock to warm up the place with their breath, Ali thought.

'Mother,' he said, 'the crop's bound to be plentiful this year, after all this snow. I'll buy a few more goats and another cow with the money. That'll be more than enough to heat this house, now won't it?'

But he might as well have spoken to a corpse.

His thoughts wandered to Adil Effendi and his threats. I intend going to that village myself, Adil Effendi had told the Muhtar,^{fn1} and take the goats and cows from their hearths and the butter from their firkins, yes everything, down to their women's last drawers. All the villages have paid their debts. Your village went down to the Chukurova just like the others, so how is it they all picked good cotton and you didn't? You're simply lying, and this is the last time you get any credit from me. Why, the villages around here have been dealing with us for nearly a hundred years, ever since my grandfather set up shop, and this is the first time a debt hasn't been settled. The village of Yalak is the first to have broken the age-old bond. You've sown the seeds of evil in these mountains ...

A voice at the window roused him.

'Ali! Ali, open the door!'

'Tashbash, is that you?'

It wasn't like Tashbash to come visiting so late in the night. Something must be wrong, Ali thought as he opened the door.

'What news, brother?' he asked anxiously.

'Bad,' Tashbash replied, as he sat down by the fire in the place Elif had left for him. 'Adil Effendi's coming.'

'When?' Ali asked wearily.

'Well, nobody knows exactly. Perhaps this very minute ...'

'What shall we do? Have you thought of something?'

'What's there to think of? We can't pay, that's all. I haven't been able to buy a yard of cloth this year. My wife's in rags ...'

'It's the same with everyone.'

'It's no use telling Adil Effendi it wasn't our fault, that we were led into a barren cotton field, that we'll repay him next year with double interest. No ... Ah, it's that Muhtar Sefer who's brought this upon us, and Old Halil too.'

At this Meryemdje raised her head. Her lips moved silently in a sullen mutter.

Tashbash stared at her in amazement.

'Ali, will Mother Meryemdje still not talk?'

Ali shook his head despondently.

'Well!' Tashbash exclaimed. Then he went on quickly. 'Have you heard? Old Halil isn't dead. He's right in the village, hiding in his son's grain crib.'

'I know,' Ali replied.

^{fn1} Muhtar: village headman.

Chapter 3

Old Halil had made his bed in the grain crib. He never came out except under cover of darkness, and then only when he had to relieve himself. Day and night he lay there, cowering into a corner every time the front door was opened. He had got it into his head that the villagers intended to kill him, and nothing his son could say made any difference.

‘But Father,’ Hadji would plead, ‘you haven’t done them any wrong. Everyone knows it’s the Muhtar’s fault that we didn’t find a good cotton field. Just show yourself once, and if anyone so much as wags a finger at you, then come back here and never go out again.’

‘You’re only a child,’ Old Halil would answer obstinately. ‘You don’t know those wily villagers. All they want is to get hold of me and tear me to pieces. Ah, don’t I know!’

‘But you’ll just rot away here, in this dark hole, without ever seeing the light of day.’

Old Halil cut him short. ‘I’d rather die than come out!’

That day there was anxious whispering about the house. Something was brewing. He read fear on his son’s face.

‘Hadji!’ he called. ‘Come here. What’s wrong? Tell me, have they found out that you’re hiding me?’

Hadji sat down beside him on the low wall of the crib and explained about Adil Effendi and the threat that hung over the village. Old Halil did not believe a word of it, but still it was a straw to cling to.

‘You go and tell those villagers,’ he said craftily, ‘that Old Halil knows how to get them out of this fix. They’ll all be amazed to see how. I’ll save them, but only if they promise

not to kill me. You must make them promise before telling them I'm alive or they'll tear me to shreds.'

'There you go again, Father! Why should anyone want to do that?'

'Do as I tell you. You can't understand these things. You're only a child.'

'Father, are you mad? A child? I'm getting on for fifty! And anyway, everyone knows you're here.'

'They know?' Old Halil cried out in terror. 'I'm dead, finished. Bolt the door! Quickly! Now!' He flung himself down and drew the blanket over his head. 'Murderer! Bolt that door ...'

Hadji shook his head in exasperation as he went to the door.

'Ah, aaah!' the old man wailed. 'That my son, the apple of my eye, should be the cause of my death! I didn't eat to feed him, I went in rags to clothe him, and in return he's bringing down my house over my head!'

He lay there, moaning, working himself into a frenzy. They might be here any minute, the Muhtar, the villagers, all itching to lay their hands on him, to kill him ... Then they would go to Adil Effendi and say, 'See, we've done away with the culprit. Such a thing would never have happened in this village but for him.' At any moment now that door would burst open. Leading the crowd would be Meryemdje, her hair bristling like a broom. He could hear her screaming vengeance. 'Kill him, women! Kill him! Tear him to pieces, the infidel, the unholy renegade! Kill him!'

'Ah, Meryemdje!' he cried aloud. 'If it weren't for your poor dead husband, my dear friend Ibrahim, if it weren't for him, I know what I'd do to you.'

And then, as always when the fear became unbearable, he saw himself in his prime, riding below Chiyshar village on a late autumn afternoon through a wood of luminous plane trees. He had just stolen the horse from Göksün on the Long Plateau, a sorrel that galloped like the wind, its

colour blending with the russet trees ... They were skirting a brook, so thickly coated with leaves it looked like a red carpet flowing down into the valley, when the horse had baulked. And then he had seen the wounded man lying half hidden by the undergrowth. Quickly he had got off and ripped up his own shirt to make a bandage.

‘I can’t go to a town. I can’t see a doctor,’ the man had moaned. ‘I am Memo, the bandit.’

Halil had taken him to Aslan Agha, chief of the horse-thief gang. And there the outlaw had remained until his wound healed.

Memo, the lord of these mountains, ready to lay down his life for Halil. If only he were alive now, alive to teach these villagers a lesson!

He hears them, a howling pack at the bolted door. ‘Come out, you godless heathen, you traitor!’ And then with a great crash the door breaks open. They come pouring through, but almost in the same instant they reel back, scrambling over each other, yelling with fear. Three hefty outlaws rigged out in cartridges from head to toe are aiming their gun muzzles at them.

‘Let them have it, Memo,’ Halil shouts. ‘Shoot them all down, the rascals!’

But Memo laughs. ‘Why waste good bullets! Half of them’ll die of fright anyway!’

And now Halil is swaggering up and down the village and the villagers come cringing up to him.

‘Please forgive us, Halil Agha. Don’t turn the bandits on us ...’

The door creaked open. His heart began to thump.

‘Who’s that?’ he quavered.

‘It’s me, Father.’

‘Look, Hadji, you must get me out of here. Take me to that cave at the foot of Mount Tekech.’

‘But Father! There’s a raging snowstorm outside, enough to freeze you if you go next door, let alone to Mount

Tekech!’

‘You do as I tell you. There, in that cave, with my faithful friend Memo ...’ Something seared through his heart. ‘Ah,’ he cried, ‘if he were alive now, I’d have him mow the whole village down!’

‘Father, I’ve told you again and again no one’s giving you a thought. The villagers have enough to worry about as it is. If you’d only go out just once, you’d see how they’d open their arms to you. Why, at the *Mevlut*, when we thought you were dead, they all came and cried their hearts out.’

Old Halil sat up. ‘So you mean I’m not important enough, eh? You snivelling whelp, this village is in debt, hungry, naked in the dead of winter, and you think they don’t know it’s my fault? Shame on you! A fine son for an old eagle like Halil to have!’ He slumped down. ‘I’m cold,’ he groaned. ‘Bring me another blanket, quick, and tell that whore of yours to cook me some *tarhana* soup. Piping hot I want it. Let me drink something warm before I die ...’

He lay there till nightfall, trembling with expectation, straining his ears towards the door. Weren’t they going to come after all?

‘Father,’ he heard his daughter-in-law call, ‘the soup’s ready. We’re waiting for you.’

A tantalizing fragrance filled the house. His stomach rumbled with hunger.

‘Is it really night? Quite, quite dark?’

‘Quite, Father,’ Hadji assured him.

‘Go out and have a good look, for pity’s sake, to make sure.’

Hadji opened the door, slamming it to again.

‘It’s so dark outside,’ he announced solemnly, ‘you could cut through the night with an axe.’

Old Halil skipped out of the crib, nimble as a child. He snatched up a spoon and began to gulp down his soup as though he had been starved for days. When he had had his fill, he raised his head and looked warily at the door. Village