



VINTAGE

TO CRUSH THE SERPENT

YASHAR KEMAL

Contents

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Yashar Kemal

Title Page

To Crush The Serpent

Copyright

About the Book

Since Halil was shot dead in his own home by his wife Esmé's former suitor, the village has pointed the finger of guilt at the dead man's beautiful widow: she must have arranged the murder. The task of vengeance falls on Esmé's little son, Hassan: year after year he is groomed for it, his devotion to his mother sapped with talk of the unavenged ghost of his father, doomed to roam the countryside as a translucent red snake, an insect, a bird. Hassan hears tales against his mother. How long will her innocence protect her?

The stark tale of cruelty and vendetta is told in a narrative of relentless tension, reminiscent of Greek tragedy. It is one of Yashar Kemal's most beautiful and haunting novels.

About the Author

Yashar Kemal was born in 1923 in a village on the cotton-growing plain of Chukurova. 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*, which won the Varlik Prize for the best novel of the year. It has sold over a quarter of a million copies in Turkey alone 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 and, in the words of John Berger, "one of the modern world's great storytellers".

By the same author

MEMED, MY HAWK

ANATOLIAN TALES

THEY BURN THE THISTLES

THE WIND FROM THE PLAIN TRILOGY:

The Wind from the Plain

Iron Earth, Copper Sky

The Undying Grass

THE LEGEND OF ARARAT

THE LEGEND OF THE THOUSAND BULLS

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

TO CRUSH THE SERPENT

Translated from the Turkish by

Thilda Kemal



Harvill Secker
LONDON

HASSAN MUST HAVE been six, perhaps seven, the year his father was murdered.

Eagles were circling above the Anavarza crags, wing to wing. A cloud gathering in the distance cast its shadow over the swamp and glided on towards Dumlu Castle. The flowers of the asphodels reached up to the sun, alive with bees, iridescent, black, blue, yellow. Blue cardoons thrust their spikes out among the crags, bright blue.

Hassan was scuttling along the rocks, partridge-like. The dizzy heights below made his head whirl. He had reached the eagles' nests he was after, but had not found a single egg or chick yet. At his approach eagles started up from the wall-like cliff, the flutter of their huge wings shaking the air.

The rocks were warm under the spring sun, with blue milkwort, yellow crocus and purple clover growing in between. The wild thyme was almost in flower, its scent already heavy.

Hassan's last hope was a nest at the foot of the steep incline. It was almost inaccessible and, once, he had slipped and remained hanging out from the rock over a void the height of ten minarets at least. If he hadn't got hold of that wild fig snag, if it had snapped he would surely have been dashed to pieces even before reaching the bottom of the precipice.

To Hassan the many many springtime scents were the very odour of the Anavarza crags. The bees and lizards and nestlings, the rattlesnakes and arrowsnakes all smelled of the crags, even people did, a pleasant honeyed heady smell. The rain on Anavarza smelled different from rain in other places. It was redolent of wet fragrant rock, and the clouds overhead too emitted a special smell, unforgettable for Hassan, as had been the smell of gunpowder in the darkness of that night. Gunpowder has a different odour among the rocks in the night, not at all as it has on the

plain or on earthy soil ... The night had reeked of gunpowder and the sound of shooting had sounded far out in the distance, whizz whizz whizz, echoing, re-echoing.

The crags of Anavarza are these echoes for Hassan, the blast of shots, that smell ... Blood-stained eagles had been circling in the sky above ... He remembered it all. Forever imprinted in his mind was the terrible memory of that crepitating night and those eagles gliding in the early morning sky ...

Hassan was nine years old and lived alone with his mother. But for some time now he had not been able to look her in the face. If he happened to meet her eye he would be shaken to the core. Even before sun-up, when she offered him a pat of butter, fresh from the swinging-churn, he would spread it quickly over the warm bread and, retreating to the furthest clump of trees, would crouch down there to eat. It seemed to him as if he had not seen her for ages.

It was very hot that morning. There was a weight on his heart and he did not know what to do with himself. It was always the same on mornings like these. Sometimes he would rush out madly into the village, not really knowing where he was going, what he was doing.

This valuable rifle, its stock all inlaid with mother-of-pearl, had been given him when he was only seven, and ever since then he'd been firing it at every living thing under the sun, birds, goats, jackals ... Even at people. Hassan had three uncles, his father's brothers. Not one of them ever rebuked him so much as once, whatever he might have done. The village was a small one and people were all more or less related to each other. It was not long since they had settled here, having been nomads before that. His uncles, his father, when they were Hassan's age, had minded the flocks up in the high Binboga Mountains.