



VINTAGE

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**THE BIRDS HAVE  
ALSO GONE**

**YASHAR KEMAL**

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## About the Book

There is an ancient Turkish tradition which promises a place in paradise to anyone who sets a small bird free. Three boys start up a bird-catching business to enable people to free them in order to secure their place in heaven, but the city-dwellers have become sceptical, and tragedy lies in wait for the boys.

## About the Author

Yashar Kemal was born in 1923 in the small village, Hemite, which lies in the cotton-growing plains of Chukurova. Later, in Istanbul, he became a reporter on the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* and in 1952 he published a book of short stories, *Yellow Heat*. In 1955 came his first novel *Ince Memed*, published in English under the title *Memed, My Hawk*. This won the Varlik Prize for the best novel of the year. His novels include *Beyond the Mountain* (3 volumes), *The Legend of Ararat*, *The Drumming-Out*, *The Legend of the Thousand Bulls*, *Murder in the Ironsmiths Market* (3 volumes), *To Crush the Serpent*, *The Saga of the Seagull*, *The Sea-Crossed Fisherman*, *Little Nobody* and *The Pomegranate Tree on the Knoll*. Other published works include a volume of *Collected Short Stories*, *Essays and Political Articles*, *God's Soldiers* (Reports on Delinquent Children), and a novel for the young, *The Sultan of the Elephants and the Red-Bearded Lame Ant*.

Yashar Kemal is married and has one son. His wife, Thilda Kemal, translates his books into English.

*By the same author*

    Memed, My Hawk  
    The Wind from the Plain  
        Anatolian Tales  
    They Burn the Thistles  
    Iron Earth, Copper Sky  
        The Legend of Ararat  
    The Legend of the Thousand Bulls  
        The Undying Grass  
    The Lords of Akchasaz  
    The Saga of the Seagull  
    The Sea-Crossed Fisherman  
        Yellow Heat  
    Murder in the Ironsmiths Market  
        To Crush the Serpent  
        Little Nobody  
        The Drumming-Out  
    The Pomegranate Tree on the Knoll

# PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Letter      Approximate pronunciation

a	as in French <i>avoir</i> , English <i>man</i>
c	j as in <i>jam</i>
ç	ch as in <i>church</i>
e	as in <i>bed</i> or the French <i>e</i>
g	as in <i>goat</i>
ğ	a soft g that lengthens the preceding vowel and never occurs at the beginning of a word
h	as in <i>house</i>
o	like French <i>eau</i>
ö	as in German <i>König</i> , French eu in <i>deux</i>
s	as in <i>sing</i>
ş	sh as in <i>shall</i>
u	as in <i>push</i>
ü	as in German <i>führer</i> , French u in <i>tu</i>
y	as in <i>yet</i>

YASHAR KEMAL

THE BIRDS  
HAVE  
ALSO GONE

*A novel translated from  
Turkish by  
Thilda Kemal*

VINTAGE

## 1



Tuğrul came walking along the fringe of the wood and stopped by the tents.

Though it was not yet mid-September, three boys from the old quarter of Fatih had already set up a tent near the aged poplar on the eastward side of the green meadow and had even begun to weave clap-nets and place snares. They kept at it from early dawn to nightfall, humming strange old tunes as they worked. One of the boys was short and broad-shouldered. He had large hands and a huge head with hair that stuck out stiff as quills. His three-cornered eyes were marked by casts. The one in his left eye spread right into the dark iris. He hardly ever uttered a word, only opening his mouth to sing. The second boy was tall as a beanpole, with a long neck and bulging eyes that seemed about to pop out of their sockets. This one talked twenty to the dozen, stopping abruptly with his thin neck stretched taut, longer than ever. The third boy was one of those tough city urchins, a real firebrand, never still for a moment. His hands were constantly occupied making and unmaking things while he talked, shouted and teased his companions. Yet his blue-grey eyes were infinitely sad, and though his chin jutted out in a strong curve, there was something sad about it too. A thin yellow moustache, only just sprouting, drooped over his lip and, whenever his hands were free, he tugged at it angrily, as though determined to pluck it off.

Tuğrul settled down on a mound in front of the barbed wire that fenced in the ancient poplar. For the past ten days I had seen him sitting there, hugging his knees to his chin,

unmindful of the thistles that covered the mound, sometimes even leaning on the barbed wire. Strangely enough, he never looked at the noisy bustling boys, nor did he lift his head at the roar of the helicopters and airplanes that passed low over the field.

On Sundays that police chief from Kinali Island would always be there, flying one of those toy planes that are operated from the ground. And not only the police chief, but many others too came to this flat field behind Florya beach. They arrived in posh cars, Mercedes, Volvos, Volkswagens, Murats, to fly their toy planes which made more noise than any real airplane as they whirled and dived in the skies above Florya. Crowding around them would be children from the suburbs of Çekmece, Menekşe, Cennetmahallesi, and even from as far away as Yeşilyurt, all watching in awed reverence, silent, quite still, only their eyes moving from the toy plane to the person who controlled it.

Not once did Tuğrul look up, not even when a helicopter whirred low above him, almost licking the crest of the big poplar. It could have crashed right there beside him for all he seemed to care. So many times I walked past him, but he did not see me. Or did it only seem so? Perhaps he saw it all. Perhaps he did not miss a single thing taking place on the plain, saw the glowing radiance cast by the sea over the land, heard the chug-chug-chug of the fishing boats and caught the salty tang and the odour of rotting seaweed and iodine, moist and warm and penetrating.

One fine morning, I found the wide expanse of Florya Plain dotted with bird snares. They had been set up everywhere, along the fringe of the wood, on the little slope that inclined towards the railroad, under the almond and fig trees, beside the clump of poplars and even among the patches of thistles. Children, men, young and old, well-dressed or down-at-heel, lottery hucksters, three-card tricksters, apprentices to repair workshops, or to

blacksmiths and tailors, small-time fishermen, one and all had spread their clap-nets, tied their live decoys to a string and placed the cages containing the captured songbirds around them. They knelt on the ground, their eyes fixed on the sky, uttering bird-like whistles that rose to a crescendo whenever a flight of birds showed up in the distance.

The greenfinch is a darkish ash-grey bird, slightly smaller than the sparrow. The goldfinch is yellow. Then there is the chaffinch, the coal titmouse and a host of other tiny bright-coloured birds, yellow-breasted, the most brilliant of yellows, or red, flame-like, or green, all so vivid you can see them even in the dark. And there is the blue one, no bigger than a thumb, flashing like a ball of blue light through the sky, leaving a fulgent blue trail in its wake.

Tuğrul was there as usual, his chin on his knees, his arms hugging his legs.

“Hello, Tuğrul.”

He pretended not to hear, but his right shoulder twitched.

“Come now, Tuğrul! I said hello to you. What are you doing, sitting here, day in, day out?”

His back heaved and his frail scraggy neck shrank even lower between his shoulders. A leaf from the poplar tree fluttered down and rested on his foot.

I sat down beside him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

“What’s the matter, Tuğrul?”

Slowly he turned to me, a little embarrassed perhaps, his eyes glowing, as though with tears. He tried to smile, but his thin cracked lips froze. Then he bent his head again.

“Nothing’s the matter, Abi,”<sup>fn1</sup> he mumbled.

“But there is,” I insisted.

“Well, there is, then!” he flared up. “Why should I care?”

“Care about what, Tuğrul?”

“All that!” He gestured angrily towards the tent. “Those fellows there ...”

“What’s wrong with them?”

He glared at me and relapsed into silence.