

Chance For A Miracle



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Bir Mucize İhtimali | Chance For A Miracle

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Teşekkürler | Thanks

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Today, even though everything is sinking into “That’s just the way it is” despair, there are still many practices people follow in order to change their lives. Some of these include an agreement with God, and others consist of promises given to one’s self. As the line between the sacred and the profane is blurred, materialistic, self-seeking and egoistic demands become apparent. People or humanity lose its potential gradually and try to hold on to wishes that are impossible to happen/depending on chance. Selfishness, the fact that even dreaming is trapped in formulaic visions, the reciprocal tension between the individual and the society nullify the opportunities of, as Ulus Baker said drawing upon Spinoza, “organizing good encounters.” At this point, one is to wish for something even though one’s hands are tied. All kinds of pressure and suppression surrounding the individual have already shaken every conceivable way to connect to outer world, such as hope, wish, want and demand. Hopelessness abolishes the will to carry on.

Chance for a Miracle, has a premise that hope, wish, want, demand or desire are different names for asking a miracle, large or small, to happen. This hope entails the questions of “What do humans wish for? What do they hope for?” At the nodal points of examining these questions and their potential answers, the conceptual framework is embodied in seven stories revolving around a practice of votive. Stories are complex ones for their causes and effects, written on the irregularities of chance, destiny, hope, intention and fear in human life. Seven stories from different classes, milieus and eras of the society are centered on a votive practice sinking into oblivion

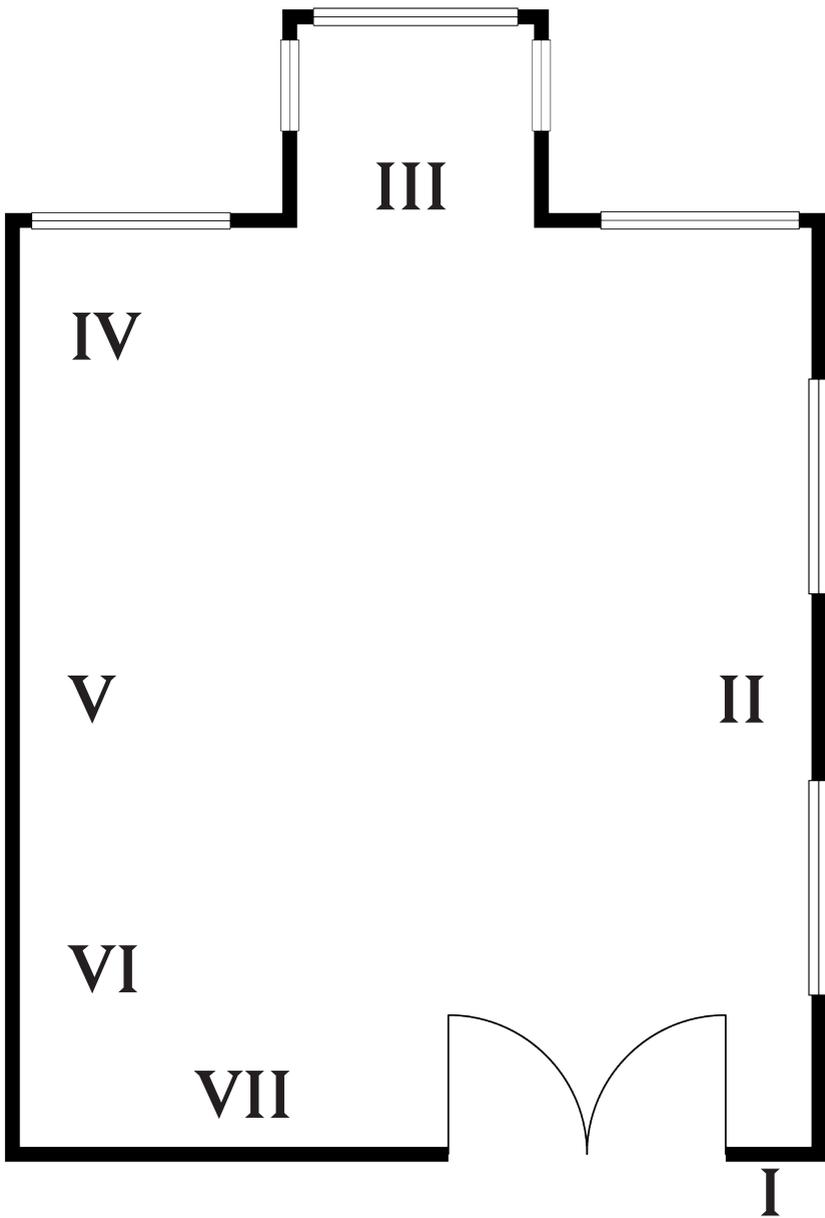
although continued to some extent in various churches from İstanbul to San Francisco, Athens to New Mexico. In fact, they narrate the histories of seven votive offerings (Gr. tama, pl. tamata) hung on a votive cabinet.

Introduction

When asked to write a short piece on Greek culture and votive offerings, I was elated. Especially because this request came from Istanbul, the city I was born and raised in. I haven't written anything in Turkish for a long time, so please excuse my mistakes. I left my home in Istanbul for my aunt's in Baltimore to study at the university. Unfortunately it has been a permanent separation for me. Yet, back then, tamarita tradition was alive. Masters around the Grand Bazaar did silver inlay votives and made molds for those demanded the most. This tradition has been going on for so long that I was astonished when Larissa and Ekin told me there was only one master making votives left. The oldest were votive stones and tablets from asclepiions devoted to Asclepius, Greek god of medicine - one of them can be found in Pergamon, Turkey. These reliefs in votive stones resembles votives in Istanbul so much. They have an important place in Greek culture for so long and indicate the continuity and of course the change in culture. As I have said, when I left Istanbul, the votive culture was alive. I believe, there was both an increase—and pursuant to this increase—a decrease in votive tradition in 1955. Due to certain events, which I do not want to hurt anyone or myself by mentioning, many people incurred damages, both financial and emotional. Later on, I remember many people requested votives. At the end of 1955, many Greeks, as myself, left for various places around the world, particularly Greece and settled. Therefore, there must have been a decrease in the votive tradition. When I came to Baltimore, there was only one master doing votives here. I met Antonis Vondas, originally a repairman of watches and accessories, through my acquaint-

tance with his son, Spiros. After Master Antonis died, at least in Baltimore the tradition died out. Wishing, asking from God are signs of faith and people are either losing their faith or falling into more earthly troubles. Painful and calamitous events such as those of 1955 create times where there is no one but God to turn to. I hope that God will not give any nation or any person such hard time. On the other hand, some votives are for bringing people together or making them even more happier. Return of a long-awaited person, marrying the beloved one, having a dutiful child are among these reasons. As I write this piece, I have read all the stories except for one, that of the heart tamata; the idea of that story hadn't existed yet. However, as I have read, these texts tell the stories of these kinds of votives. They are rather realistic and possibly true to life—maybe they are actual real-life stories, I never thought of asking. In addition to all these, I personally believe that these stories provide a great opportunity to consider what has happened to this votive culture or tradition, what we lost and what is now forgotten. Being aware of our losses and lamenting for them in our own way might not bring back what is gone, but it might ease our sorrow and burden, and help us get relieved of grief. In my humble opinion, it is a good deed to honor the memory of things lost and those who have left.

Prof. Dr. George Panagiotidis



I

My father had a small patisserie next to Hristaki Passage. He baked cakes and pastries of every kind. During summer holidays I worked with him sometimes. My best friend Dimo was the son of a close friend of my father. He was a young man from Tatavla. He had his fling at a very young age, when he was barely a man. Sometimes, when I was alone in my father's shop, he would come and eat some of the pastries without asking. I remember getting angry but I was not able to say anything. I felt bad since my father trusted me with the shop but also I felt ashamed to deny my best friend food. I had a habit of watching the oven fire for hours, standing next to Yorgo the Baker. The cakes rose slowly and when they were baked, their tops cracked, taking beautiful shapes. The cakes of creamy pastries on the other hand, should be risen in balance, they should not get cracked. Of course, each had different recipes. Yorgo knew all of them by heart. He was a calm and modest man. He had a limp and was slow while working but he did his job most beautifully. Timidly, I asked him once why he had a limp. Now it's been more than sixty years but there had been a pillage around here. I guess I was just a baby back then. The pillagers first had stoned our windowcase. Then, when it broke, they entered. My father wasn't there and Yorgo was baking bread. They beat the hell out of Yorgo. They broke the chairs and tables, took the pieces and threw them into the oven. While the shop was in flames, they ate the cakes from the day before. Yorgo was telling me all this. They ate with pleasure. They licked their fingers. Yorgo, maybe due to shock, was delighted that the pillagers loved his cakes. Then, he fainted. Fortunately, my father found him on the floor and nothing more happened to him.





II

While on his way to his friend's wedding in a taxi, Demir checked his smartphone. On Instagram was a photo from Cambodia, shared by Berk. In that photo, an ungroomed Berk was walking barefoot in a jungle with his twenty liters bag on his back. Demir chuckled. It was Berk who made fun of him, while he was going to a leadership workshop to get his first college level managerial certificate. This surely was a nice coincidence: he was in this expensive suit, going to his colleague's wedding in a taxi and he had come across Berk. When he got off the car and walked into the churchyard, he saw his close friend Rıza. They talked a bit about the meaninglessness of religious weddings and the boxing game previous night, and entered the church. They realized there was a couple of silver figures hung inside something like a cabinet. Demir remarked: "What do you think these are?" Rıza, uninterested, shrugged and continued. At that moment, a nice voice replied behind them: "These are votives, for health and well-being, hung in these cabinets. For example, you hang a heart for marriage, a torso for health and so on." Demir turned around to see that the voice belonged to the groom's - his friend's - sister. "How are you, Meryem?" Meryem smiled, took Demir's arm and they started to talk and walk.

A couple of months after the wedding, the senior executive of Demir's department gathered all employees and explained to them that he was promoted, and that his position would be available in the coming months. At first, everyone was tense but when the senior told them that he convinced the bosses to recruit someone from within the company for his position, everybody was relieved. During his lunch break while running on a treadmill in the fitness center on the basement floor of the

skyscraper where their company was located, Demir thought that he should get this position at all costs. He unknowingly started to “love” the dog videos his senior shared on Facebook instead of just “liking” them. For some reason, he started to go in early and leave the office late. He got more and more things done, and ordered his lunch in instead of eating out and having a bit of fresh air. His trainer from the fitness center complained because he was skipping his exercise days. But Demir had his eyes set on the prize. There were three important factors in this business: personal relations, practicality and luck. He could easily check off the first two. But what about luck? He convinced himself that there was no place for luck if one did the right things. He involuntarily laughed. As he was thinking to himself, he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was his friend who got married couple of months before. Demir immediately got an idea.. Before Demir could process his newly inseminated thought, his friend announced that he would be a father. A celebration and gratulation spree started in the office.

A couple of days later, Demir went to the church he had been for the wedding and asked for a votive. When they asked him why he wanted a votive for, he was taken aback. He saw a young woman figurine in the votive tray on the table, “I want one of this,” he said. Demir incorporated a random figurine into his wish. He took a glance at the cabinet and confidently, hanged the votive right in the middle.

After the evaluation process, he was now “Mr. Demir,” the new senior of the department. All his friends congratulated him, a

petit party was thrown and then everyone went back to their work. Demir was sure that he deserved this position with his personal relations and practicality. The “luck” factor occurred to him as he was smiled to himself. This was not a blessing from God after all! He worked hard, strived for success night and day, sweated his guts out and came to this position. This was not something that was achieved with luck or wishfulness. While on his way to church after work, he was thinking about these and trying to convince himself. He looked around and when he was sure no one was watching, he entered the church. Inside, there was nobody, he walked to the cabinet, opened it, took the figurine he hung up before and put it in his pocket.

Almost a year later, Demir was invited to attend the christening of his friend’s child. He went to the church and while he was passing by the cabinet, he was confounded. The very votive he took off months ago was still hanging there. He was not sure, was his mind playing games on him? He took down that votive as well. He, then, went back to look at his drawer at the office. The votive he took off before was looking right at him. He left the new one next to it. Yet, days later, he was still brooding on what had happened. That votive, that so-called wish was nothing to him. Just a silly, unimportant detail. He worked hard and earned that position. He visited the church again and approached the cabinet faint-heartedly. His fear had come true. The votive was there. He had no chance but to take it down again.

III

Dear Arzu,

I don't know where to start. And I'm not even sure whether you'll remember me or not but I came here from San Francisco to Istanbul just to find you. Deep down inside I knew that I would not be able to find you, also while writing this letter, I've started thinking that I had already known what I have discovered here this night but I was not able to admit it. This letter would probably not find you because I don't have any idea where you are. Yet, there are still things I need to write or to tell.

Before I met you, I spend most of my childhood at the church. My father was working at Mission Dolores and my mother was making pupusas in an El Salvadorian restaurant. All I did was to wander at church, memorize the names inscribed on the gravestones, observe the church paintings and listen the prayers. One day my dad bought me some notebook and pencils and I started to draw what I saw at church. It was a turning point for me that the priest took hold of my notebook. They sent me to that school, where you and I have met. I hadn't heard the name of the country where you are from, actually you were the first one I've met from a foreign country. I don't know what happened but something intriguing, something I had never felt before attracted me to you. Maybe it was because I was thinking that I was also somewhat "foreigner" to this country... I'm still not sure. I liked that you cared for me, you liked what I did. I was learning from you, for real. When you took me to your house, my heart was beating out of my chest, and when you

posed nude for me, I almost blacked out! I was thinking that you and I were alike but maybe we weren't; yet, back then, I was so sure that you were someone I'd grow up to be. I'd had a strict Catholic education; I rarely visited vicinity of the church let alone outside the neighborhood. But the time I'd spent with you encouraged me to discover the magical world of San Francisco. You were the one who took me to Castro, to Haight-Ashbury; we hung out with some old hippies in the Golden Gate Park, we watched some important bands of the era live in Fillmore. Everything was going well, I had new friends - thanks to you! For example, it was the first time I met a gay person and even though I thought he was a sinner, I had hard time not to show. Then I kissed a boy and I had a huge fight with my dad because I was late. I was growing and changing; and it seemed to me that I grew to be more like you. I got admitted to college thanks to you. Yet, when you finished the school and had to return to Turkey, it was really hard for me to swallow. Yes, I had so many friends to spend time with, after you'd be gone. But when you left, when I understood that I might not be able to see you again, for the first time I felt the windy and muggy weather piercing through my skin. When I told this to Tanya, my lesbian friend, she told me that I might have loved you in a different way. I strongly refused it. But I needed to see you deadly. I went to church, to pray. Now it is kinda embarrassing but while I was praying to see you again I also prayed for not being a lesbian. After the prayer while I was on my way out, I saw the votive cabinet. We call them milagro in Spanish. Miracle, it is. We use them wishing for health, marriage or for possessions... I thought of making a milagro. I was going to make a

milagro out of your naked body I had drawn and even though I couldn't hang it on a votive cabinet, I would carry it on me. God was forgiving and of course, He would forgive me.

Shortly after I made milagro, I heard that sinister news. Harvey Milk was murdered. Everybody I knew were were mourning. I didn't know what to do but I was considering to leave. I thought it was time to set out on a journey. I decided to follow you. I was really in a need to find what I felt and who I was. I barely knew you but I needed to try. I suspended my studies, used all my cash money I saved by giving private painting lessons to rich kids and I arrived in Istanbul after long and connected flights. I followed other foreigners getting off from the same plane. They took me some place called Sultanahmet. There I found a place to stay, I was sharing my room with a girl. She was an African-American called Angelina. She grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, left home when she was sixteen, sang in Chicago for a time and saved the money to come here. I could tell it from her eyes when I told her my story she was fascinated. She laughed when I told her I didn't have any info about you but your name. She told me she would take me somewhere next day. The next day we went to a place known as Pudding Shop, it was a cafe-like place selling various puddings and soup and stuff. It was full of foreigners. I thought I even smelled some weed. Angelina introduced me to many people, I asked for you but to no avail! Days passed and I found myself wandering around, Pudding Shop being the center, with people from all around the world. And Angelina was always there. As if what you mean to me back in San Francisco was Angelina in Istanbul. One night, while we were preparing

to sleep, Angelina asked me what kind of person you were. With a shy smile and without saying a word I showed her the milagro I engraved your naked body on. Angeline took it from me and smiled. She felt the milagro with her thumb and raised her eyes to look me in the eye. I remember that my heart was beating crazily. And then that Angelina kissed me.

Now I am at a hotel in Istanbul, mostly foreigners stay here. It is 3 or 4 in the morning. On the bed just behind me lies Angelina. Tomorrow, Angelina will take me to a church. She said there is a votive cabinet at the entrance, just like one in our church I suppose. I look at Angelina and think. I came here after you and I guess I found you-in some aspect. Therefore, I will hang that milagro to that cabinet tomorrow.

Love,
Rosa

Aga, sen askerdeydin olayı bilmiyorsun. Ama bak bunu yalnız sana anlatıyorum, bak aramızda kalsın. Boktan da bi' mevzu. Bizim çocuklar anlamaz laf yaparlar sonra işin yoksa dök dişlerini. Neyse, şimdi, bizim yeni dükkanın yan dükkanı bunun ba-basınmış. Var ya takı toka bir şeyler satıyoruz turistlere. Ben de bizim pederin yanındayım sürekli, Allah razı olsun laf da etmiyor iş bul diye. Ha, askerlik olayını çözdüm bu arada bedelli parasını söğüşlüyoruz pederden. Gerekirse gideriz tabii On numara anlayacağım. Neyse ben buna göz koydum, geçerken selam veriyorum filan, başta pek sallamıyor gibiydi. Eyvallahımız yok, tavla mavla oynarken geliyor ben de sallamaya başladım tabii. Sonra bana bi laf attı, naber maber. Ben ses et-medim, neyse bir gün dükkanı kapatacağım, babam Cuma'dan sonra gelmemiş tabii. Bak, burda, baştan söyleyeyim bu kız gavur. Şimdi o aşamaya gelsek, ben zaten diye-ceğim yani Müslüman olursun diye. Neyse gelemedik velhasıl. Ne diyordum? Hah, dükkanı kapatacağım, bu geldi. Evli misin, çıktığın var mı ayağı çektii. Güldüm geçtim, dedim kızım benle dalga geçme, hadi yürü al voltanı. O sırada bunun babası geldi selam verdi, ben gidiyorum kızım geliyor musun diye sordu, bu kız da sen git babacığım ben sonra gelirim filan dedi, adam da tamam deyip bastı gitti ya! İçimden güldüm tabii ben, oh dedim, fırsat bu fırsat. Şimdi doğruya doğru ben indirdim kepengi yedim biraz bunu orda. Tabii lan yalan borcum mu var sana? Sonra gitmem lazım filan, çektii gitti. Dedim tamam bu iş olacak. Sonra işte birkaç gün sonra da bayram, biz babamla taktık dükkanın camına Türk bayrağını. Bi' baktım, bunlar da asmış. Kızı tuttum kolundan dışarıda yakalayıp, siz gavur değil misiniz ne alaka bayrak dedim. Bana diyor ki, bizim de bayrağımız değil mi canım diyor. Şöyle yarım ağız güldüm ama hoşuma da gitti. Bunu ben Müslüman da yaparım evelallah dedim. zaten olmazsa bize de olmaz kanka. Değil mi? Neyse gel zaman git zaman, biz bunla görüşmeye başladık, alıyorum arabaya turluyoruz. Bazen nargileye götürüyorum. Yok lan o bizim oğlanların mekana götürür müyüm ya, allasen akbaba onlar akbaba, leş mekanda hatunun ne işi var! Boğazdaki şekil şukul mekanlara çekiyorum. Benim bi siyah yelek var ya onu çok beğendi, içine mavi giy diyor, şunu bunu diyor yani tam yengeniz olmaya adaydı aslında. Biz bununla akıyoruz boğaz ortamlarına. Neyse dedi ki gel bak şurda bizim kilise var, oraya gidelim. Şimdi bunlar bana ters biliyor-sun ama yani turist gibi giderim icabında dedim. İşte gittik içeri girdik, bir baktım içeride bir dolap var, böyle içinde metalden kaş göz burun ağız ev araba filan asılmış. Bu ne diye sordum ben tabii, dedi bu dilek dolabı. Yahu dedim siz putperest misiniz? Takıldım yani şaka yollu. Vallahı alımdı. Y... m, şaka yollu takılamayacak mıyız?

Bozuldu, kızardı bozardı işte neyse. Dur... dilek dileyeyim madem inanıyor-sun dedim. Beni götürdü bu adaklardan... di. Baktım ince uzun bi' kızıcağız var, onu aldım, taktım dolaba, sana benziyor bu dedim, hoşuna gitti bir de. Neyse, bunlar da gümüşmüş, küçük bi' serveti yatırdık karı kız uğruna, evlat acısı gibi koydu mübarek de neyse. Sonra hadi kızım dedim seni bırakıyorum ben maça kaçıyorum. O akşam UEFA maçı vardı işte, o akşam yani. Neyse, sonra, iki gün filan sonra beni aradı. Diyor ki benim aldığım adak yerinde yokmuş. Bak bak. Sorun yok güzelim dedim, gittik beraber yine aldım adaktan, yine taktık. Ulan sonra yine arıyor beni yine yok adak diyor. Eh başlatmayın sülalenize dedim. Yine gittim taktım ama. Biri bunu söküyor ben de onun dişlerini sökerim diyorum. Kız diyor ki saçmalama bu iyiyeye işaret değil. Neyse bu dediğim olay 5 6 kere oldu. Ben en sonunda delirdim bu kilisede buna bi' azar kaydım papaz mı ne meymenetsiz surathı bi' herif geldi. Bu ker-esteye de sert çıktım tabii, artistlik yapıyor kendince. Başlatmayın lan dolabınıza dedim. Çaktım bir tane camına yumruğu, çakış o çakış bastım gittim. Kız nasıl bağıriyor ama ben seni seviyordum sana aşkıttım evlenecektim beni rezil ettin geld-iğimiz duruma bak ve saire ve saire. Ya sana bir gavurlara iki dedim. Ben alacağımı almışım sonuçta. Lan, tabii, yalan mı diyeceğim sana? Evet, evet, aynen bu çizikler ordan. Cama vurdum ya, kesti cam. Aynen.

IV

Bro, you were in the military back then. But listen, I'll tell all this only to you, between you and I. Some shitty situation. Them guys wouldn't get it, they'd kid around and then, I'd need to break some of their legs. Whatever, now, the shop next to ours belongs to her dad. You know, we sell some junk to the tourists. I'm always with dad, helping out, bless his heart, he's not complaining, never asks me to find a job. Oh, by the way, I handled this military business, dad will pay for it. Of course, I'll go if need be, whatever. This girl comes and goes, hot as hell, thin ankles, curly hair and stuff. Perfect is she. Whatever, I have my eyes on her, greeting her always, at first she was cold. No worries bro, when I was playing backgammon and whatnot she came to me. This time it was my turn to be cold. Then she tried to pull my leg as she sees me, asking me how I'm doing and stuff. I kept my silence. But, one day, while I was about to close shop, it was Friday since my father didn't show up after prayer time, his girl came, oh by the way, let me tell you, this girl is an infidel. Of course if it came to that point, I would tell her to convert to Islam. Yet, it didn't. What was I telling? Huh, I was about to close, this girl came. She was trying to put out feelers, if I was married, if I had a girl and things like that. I just laughed off and, I said, don't you try to make fun of me, bug off! At that moment, her dad came and saluted her, he asked, I'm leaving baby, are you coming, the girl replied you leave daddy I'll come later and dad said ok and left, can you believe this! I laughed up my sleeve of course and thought that it was the time. Now, all's fair, I don't tell lies, I put down the shutters and we screwed around a little bit. Well of course, why should I lie to you! Then, she wanted to leave, said she needed to be at home. I was content with it and sure that

we'd have things to come. A couple of days later, it was national day, we hung the Turkish flag on our window case. Much to my surprise, I saw that they did the same! I grabbed her arm outside and asked her why they did it. I asked, you are infidels whaddya gotta do hanging flags and such. You know what she told me, well, she said it's their flag too. I just threw a half smile but I kinda liked it too. I was sure that I could convert her to Islam. If she didn't, it would not be appropriate for us, right bro? Whatevs, after some time, we started to see each other regularly. I took her for rides. I took her to smoke hookah time to time. Nooo, not the ones our fellas frequent obviously. They are vultures, real vultures. And that place is stinky, why would I take her to that place! I was driving her to classy places on the Bosphorus. You know what, I have a black vest she adored, she was kinda suggesting me what to wear, you know, wear blue wear this or that, I mean, she was a perfect wife material, you know. We were storming on the coast in every classy joint around. Once, she offered that we visit a church, their church, while we were passing by it. Normally, this kind of thing I don't approve of. But, OK, as a tourist I can go. We entered, I saw a cabinet inside, it had metal eyes, noses, houses, cars, that kind of things hung in it. I wondered what it was and asked. She said that it was a votive cabinet. Well, I said, are you some kind of idol worshipper? I mean, I was joking you know. But, she got offended, for real. Isn't it my right to mock, I asked. Well she resented me, her face was cloudy, anyway, ell, I said, if you don't believe me, let me wish for something. She took me to choose one of them votives. I saw a long and lean girl, I bought it and hung it in the cabinet. I told her that it resembled her. She liked it and smiled.

Well, these were silver, I mean it was a small fortune I've lost for some skirts. Then I said I would take her back since it was a game day. That day we had that UEFA game, you remember that day. Well, then, two days later or so she called me. She said the votive I bought was not there. Now, now. No problem baby, I said, we went there and bought another one and hung it. Then, she called me again, she said there was no votive! What are you talking about, bugged off, I went! But I bought a third one anyhow. I told her if someone was taking them off, I would be ripping their teeth off! The girl became superstitious, she said this was a bad sign. Well, that happened 5 or 6 times. And I went crazy, I scolded her. Some sinister, pimp looking priest or someone, I lashed at him too, he was trying to be cool or something. Well, enough with your cabinet. I punched the glass of the cabinet, and stormed off. The girl was screaming, well she loved me well she was in love with me, gonna marry me, well she was disgraced and such. Down with you and you infidels! I had my taste in the end right? Bro, when did I tell you a lie? Yes, yes these scratches are because of the punch. I punched the glass, it cut me. Yes, exactly.



V

“Woodchopper!”

Sami spent his childhood and youth wandering around and chopping wood for neighbors. His father was a woodchopper too. But he had chopped his fingers off with an axe and retired himself at an early age. After school, we always invited Sami to play football with us. My friends were not fond of him but I liked him pretty much. My friends were jealous of him because he matured much earlier. Another reason why they were jealous was probably because Neriman was in love with him. Neriman was the prettiest girl around. “I’ll marry her,” said Efrem, but he knew he wouldn’t be able to marry a Muslim girl. Actually, we all knew, back then, that Neriman would marry Sami. Still, we were all too surprised when she actually did. We thought about why she would marry a seventeen year old woodchopper. Yes, even I thought of that. Then, Sami found a job in the factory and for a long time, worked double shifts. Then they had a son: Aliş. His real name was Ali but Sami always called him Aliş, and so did we. In the meantime, I started to work with my father and I still was a single man.

Years passed, I married and moved to the next neighborhood. I saw Sami every night after he got off of work. He always passed by our house. After a while, we became closer. From time to time, I invited him over to drink raki. Sometimes I sat on my balcony, waiting for him because I would return from work, eat and he would only be finishing with work then. We got along well, and I learned that Sami liked me the most too when we were children. “You were the bravest one!” After some time,

I was not able to see Sami for a couple of days in a row. So, I decided to pay him a visit at his home. When I arrived, I was shocked to see that the woodchopper of many years had his hand caught up in the machine and that couple of his fingers had been chopped off. I couldn't believe my eyes, I was devastated. His son Aliş was 16-17 back then, he was saying that he could work and take care of the family. Both Sami and Neriman had tearful eyes. I couldn't stay long, I left.

Later I learned that the company Sami had been working for had a change. The boss' son became the boss. An engineer who had studied in Germany. An enlightened person. He said: "We'll not leave Sami without any compensation." They gave Sami a surprising sum of money. Enough to buy a house. I was glad to hear that. Sami was happy too. Nevertheless, he insisted on sending his son to college and started to work again. Do you know what he was doing?

"Woodchopper!"

When I heard his shouts, I couldn't believe. It was really Sami, hitting the road to cut wood. That way he could provide for his son and he sent him to prep school. Back then, it was only for rich kids. But Aliş couldn't make it. He couldn't get in to a college a couple of times in a row. He gave up. He wanted to open up a new business. He went bankrupt. Then, he got conned. At last, we learned that he had a gambling debt. He was drinking as well. I heard the "Woodchopper!" cries each and every night. At nights, I listened to Sami's shouts and during the day, I heard

the news about Aliş. I couldn't bring myself to ask Sami what was going on. I was doing alright, I could offer him some money, lend him I mean... But he would get offended. "I thought you were the bravest one but..." he would say. Yet, I needed to go and see him. So I did. But there was nobody there. The grocer downstairs told me. They had sold the house, there was a small field they inherited from Neriman's father, in the village. They had gone there, together with Aliş. Aliş was in a lot of debt, to where, to whom, I don't know. I was slightly offended that they left without saying goodbye. But Sami was a proud man. He'd understood that there would be no woodchopping when there was coal.

That Sunday, when I was in church, I couldn't help but think of Sami again. I thought to myself that this was the least I could do. I would hang a votive. But...which one? A house votive, a hand votive or a dutiful child votive? But please keep this between us, don't let Sami know, he would be offended for sure.



VI

If she knew that it would lead to such a disaster, she wouldn't even think of downloading Tinder on her phone on the first anniversary of her break-up with her ex. But the damage is already done...

Leyla was browsing around on Tinder when her door was knocked gently. She tossed the blanket on her back and walked towards the door. It was Miss Anahit, her landlady. Upon seeing Leyla, a wide smile appeared on her face, without showing teeth. Her wrinkles became more distinctive. Leyla, upon witnessing those wrinkles, thought: "So glad I've installed Tinder." "I need a favor from you, my dear Leyla," said Miss Anahit. "I have a flower upstairs, it stands on the alcove in my living room. Would you care to water it for me? I'll be on the island for a couple of days." Leyla nodded her head for every sentence and question posed by Miss Anahit. "But, it needs to be watered every day." Yeah, well, of course. Leyla was content with her landlady. She was also very happy that Miss Anahit trusted her. She took the keys from her and went back to her couch. Feeling elevated, she resumed to browse on Tinder. Soon, she started chatting with a cute boy. Around six in the evening, they decided to meet. Well, it was Saturday so no need to wait, right? "Let's meet at eight, in Taksim," wrote the boy.

While on her way back home, Leyla felt depressed. Such a waste of time, such a shallow person... She contemplated on what she had had for the last year and realized she had nothing. She remembered that she dumped her boyfriend exactly one year ago, by saying a bunch of crap. She was kinda regretful. But she

ought not to be. She should think about the future, be open for things to come. First and foremost, she deleted Tinder. Then, she opened her “sorrow” playlist she made on Spotify and fell asleep while listening to it. The morning after, when she woke up, she realized that she was not in the mood for anything. The playlist was still playing, the weather was gray. She was too lazy to prepare breakfast and she ordered in some food. While eating, she watched a couple of old Turkish movies on YouTube. Sometimes she cried, sometimes she got angry while watching. Then it was evening in no time and the sun had already set. She remembered the wine in the fridge, opened it and started to drink. Around two in the morning, she wound up texting her ex. Next morning she saw that her message was seen but not responded. She felt regretful, and kept sleeping. In the afternoon she was woken up by the the doorbell. Drowsy, she stood up to open the door just to see Miss Anahit’s face worried as she had never seen before and she panicked. “My dear Leyla, you watered the flower, right?” Leyla was aware that she had no chance but to lie. But, what could possibly have happened because she did not water the flower for two days? “I guess, the leaves, their tips started to dry and turn yellow...” Miss Anahit was gazing at nowhere, not even listening to Leyla’s mumbling.

The next evening, Leyla’s door was knocked gently again. She was trying to get some work done at her computer. She stood up and opened the door. It was Miss Anahit. She was pale and her eyes were red. Leyla invited her inside. This was the first time she stepped in to the apartment. Leyla made some camomile tea and after a long silence, Miss Anahit started to pour

her heart out. George, her childhood friend, adolescence love, had left Istanbul years and years ago. He left to continue his studies in the USA and before he left, he'd given her a flower. This flower was of a different kind; when it was taken care of and watered properly, it never died and stayed evergreen. For years, nothing had happened to this flower. But for the first time now, the leaves had started to turn yellow and fall off. Since Leyla told her that she had watered them (at this point her voice cracked and she started to cry), it could only mean that something had happened to the man. "Pish!" she thought to herself, she would have rolled her eyes if it was not rude. "I'm sure the guy is dying because the flower is withering. The flower and the man must be connected. Because this is not life, this is a corny Hollywood movie!" Anahit's tears were ruining her make-up and revealing her real age. Leyla tried to calm her. She tried to convince her that the flower was just going through a period. In the end the flower had actually withered because Leyla forgot to water it, and it would have been alright in a couple of days since Anahit was watering it now. Everything was crystal clear and simple for Leyla but she could not admit that she had forgotten to water the plant! Unconvinced, Miss Anahit left for home. Leyla finished her work and went to bed. In the dead of the night, almost in the wee hours of morning, she was awoken by a cry. This was a woman's cry followed by mourning and sobbing. Leyla grabbed something to put on her and ran upstairs. She rigorously knocked on the door. Miss Anahit was not responding. Suddenly she remembered that she still had the spare key. She ran downstairs, grabbed the key and opened the door. Miss Anahit was on her knees, with the

telephone still hanging from her hand, swinging back and forth and crying. Her eyes were locked on the corner of the wall as if she had the power to watch the past, fifty or sixty years ago. "Miss Anahit!" cried Leyla barely. She did not know what to say or what had exactly happened. "He died," Miss Anahit whispered among sobs and tears. "A couple of days ago, he got sick suddenly, he had no known sickness but he could not make it, and today, he died." From that point on, it was only repetitive mumbo jumbo. Miss Anahit kept saying "he's dead, he's dead." In shock, Leyla moved her eyes towards where the flower was standing. Almost all of its leaves had fallen and the remaining ones were all yellow. The flower was dead.

VII

Last year, Yordan, a jewelry master at the Grand Bazaar, mentioned in an interview that no one wanted to be an apprentice in his profession anymore. The appearance of Yusuf, as if a divine intervention, made him very happy at first. Yet, he was not sure whether Yusuf was enthusiastic about the job or if he was doing it because he was obliged to. Yusuf did not have parents, he had been staying in an orphanage. If it had not been for someone from the congregation who said “I knew his mother, she was from Cappadocia,” nobody would have known about Yusuf. The elder of the congregation wanted him to be an apprentice before he was discharged from the orphanage. Yordan volunteered and said: “you can stay upstairs in my workshop.” The kid settled in and Yordan did everything he could to make him comfortable—perhaps with the joy of having an apprentice years later. He even found a small, black and white TV that runs with batteries for the kid. Considering many of his past apprentices were disappointments who were forcefully sent to him by their parents, who had no actual interest in the profession, Yusuf was a blessing. That’s why he was doubtful about Yusuf because he was so into his work. Yusuf did everything he was told to without Yordan reminding him a second time. He worked well into the night, did his best to improve his skills and danced to his master’s tune. He cared for details and he had an amazing eye. When it was time to make his very first ring from start to end, Yusuf was uptight. However, he skillfully managed to finish. Of course there were couple of points where Yordan’s touch was needed...but the ring came out well-made. Yordan put his magnifying glasses on and caught himself looking for mistakes Yusuf did. Yet it seemed to be flawless and according

to Yordan, that was impossible. He did not say anything to Yusuf about this and gave him a more challenging task. Yusuf nailed that one, too. Even Mr. Halil, a frequenter of Yordan's shop, teased Yordan: "O master, this apprentice of yours seems to surpass your skills!" Was he being serious? Yordan sent Yusuf to a chain maker, just for him to learn how to make a chain. Was he trying to keep him away from the shop? Upon Yusuf's return, Yordan gave him dull work. He made him clean everywhere, carry boxes and whatnot. He started to lock the doors to the downstairs of the workshop, just to make sure that Yusuf would not work at nights. Yusuf was collecting some discarded hardwood around the Bazaar and sculpting them into figures with his pocket knife, showing them to his master and getting his opinion. Yordan started to get confused, he did not know what to do. He told himself over and over again: "Who said this boy was from our congregation? The testimony of an old nutcase is enough to welcome him in?" One night, he stole Yusuf's pocket knife and the next evening, Yusuf started to carve more beautiful patterns on every conceivable material with a blunt knife he borrowed from the restaurant on the corner. The day after, Yordan secretly poured some water over Yusuf's TV. Yusuf was doing everything his master ordered him to do and he never lost his candid, naive smile on his face. Yordan started to think whether this was a blessing from the God or a curse for not repenting. The kid's eyes and hands worked so well that sometimes Yordan found himself thinking that he might be even better than his own master, Mikail. Was it possible? Yordan went to church to repent, to apologize. He was by the votive cabinet and realized the votive he had put there years ago

for marriage was still standing there. That one had not worked its charm but what's to lose he thought. He could try again, now that God was punishing him...He bought an eye-shaped votive and hung it in the cabinet. The Priest wondered: "What's the matter, Master Yordan, do you have a problem with your eyes?" He mumbled, thinking "not with mine."

