

Nonexistents

Dođu Yücel

translated by

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Whenever we dream

That's when we fly

So here is a dream

For just you and I

Whenever you dream

You're holding the key

It opens the door

To let you be free

And find the sacred heart,

Somewhere bleeding in the night

Run for the light

And you'll find the sacred heart

A shout comes from the wizard

The sky begins to crack

And he's looking right at you – Quick

Run along the rainbow

Before it turns to black – Attack!

Ronnie James Dio

Millennium

News of a New Age

November 30, 2010

The mystery of the Age of Chaos solved?

A diary found in the trash, may very well be the only solid item so far that would provide an explanation to the unusual events and the ineffable beings we have been encountering. Your news source *Millennium* acquired a copy of this diary that has been kept secret from the public.

We are daily witnessing strange events which turn everything upside down and prevent us from living peacefully, and yet, the cause of these events has not been brought to light. Even though the religious authorities have proclaimed the arrival of Judgment Day, a large majority of the population believes that what has been taking place is not in line with the signs of the end times or the scenes of Armageddon described in the sacred texts. Even the most fervent believers have ceased to wait for the second coming of their prophet. On the other hand, many scientists proclaim that the scientific theories they have been upholding as a result of centuries-long logical inquiries and empirical experimentation are no longer valid, and that the rules of physics and logic are no longer useful. In a world dominated

by chaos, they claim they have nothing else to provide, and hence, in a sense, they have announced their retirement.

A group of experts designated by the United Nations continues its research in Istanbul where everything began. Last week, the team found a diary composed of multiple notebooks along with some documents in a trash bin in Kartal. According to the authorities, what is written in these journals sheds light on the source of these unexplainable events which continue to turn our lives into chaos with increasing severity every passing day.

Millennium received word that the diary, commonly known as "The Doomsday Scriptures," belongs to a young businessman yet to be identified.

The journals are being analyzed from various perspectives. Scientists, criminologists, astrologists, conspiracy theorists, and paranormal experts from various countries have been working on the journals day after day and have not arrived at an answer. While some of them focused on the possibility that the journals may be intended to divert attention as part of a conspiracy, there are others who claim that these journals accurately explain what has been happening.

Until today, the journals have been kept secret from the public.

But your newspaper *Millennium* has set out to change this. We believe that everything that may shed light on these

unexplainable incidents should be shared immediately with the public. To this end, we obtained a copy of this diary and some other confidential documents that were kept under extreme security measures.

The diary is divided into volumes stamped with dates, and includes various drawings, pictures, news clippings, screenplay outlines, photographs, and transcripts.

Instead of providing this material to the public in a disorganized manner, we saw it apt to present it in a manner that is in keeping with our journalistic discipline. In order to convey the beginning and the unfolding of events in the most comprehensible way, we arranged the diary entries and documents in chronological order. With the hope that you may better understand these events and may find a path to salvation from this malice threatening our civilization, we subjected the documents at hand to editorial filtering. We added titles and editorial notes to the original text in order to make it easy for our readers to follow the events recounted in the diary.

You may get confused, you may get terrified. You may curse the writer of the diary, or you may not make any sense of what you read, but in these pages is hidden the best, or rather the only, explanation so far about what has recently been taking place.

We need to warn you: do not drift off while reading. Keep your doors locked, your windows sealed especially if you are

living on the ground floor. Authorities are warning citizens to keep their windows, blinds, and shutters closed since there has been a steady increase in the reports received about giant reptiles, terrifying demons, and strange creatures.

CHAPTER ONE

The Beginning

Document 1

One unsigned journal. It's a thick Ece company journal with black binding. On the lower right-hand side of the cover there is a white sticker with the date "March 17, 2009." A red ribbon was found on the first page. Pages of the journal used to be white but yellowed in time. Page lines are faint as is light red border that runs on the left-hand side. Though the handwriting is not neat, it is legible.

The Journal of a Young Businessman and a Series of Ordinary Events

March 17, 2009

It was five past seven in the morning when I stepped out of my apartment and onto the doormat. Right on time! I was proud of myself like a knight bowing in front of his king, having returned from battle with victory. As I went down the stairs I remember, being swollen with pride as I posed haughtily saluting my people watching me – and by people, I mean the heating pipes, stairs, the handrail, the doormat and the light switch –, or, at least, I recall imagining this scene. This was the first successful moment of the day and it was heralding that it wouldn't be the last.

There are those pitiful who don't consider it a success to step on the doormat at 7:05 every single morning. They might disdain at my having been ready in front of the door at the same time, at the same minute every morning for the last three years with no exception. That's why they keep losing. If they want to win, they better watch me: the fastest businessman to get ready in the morning.

First, a calculation: If a suit-wearing working man needs to be outside his door at 7:05 in order to get to work in time, that person needs to wake up at 6:25 at the latest, or 6:30 in the worst case. But I can be ready at the same exact time by waking up at 6:48. I need precisely 17 minutes after waking up to relieve myself, eat breakfast, get prepared, and leave home. Thank goodness I know some shortcuts no one else knows.

Mine is a brilliant system. The moment of waking up is important; alarm clocks, wake-up call services, they're all pointless. God bless smart phones. The alarm function of my all-inclusive cellular doesn't give up, like a Terminator on a mission to wake you up no matter what. Your cell phone placed on top of the dresser at the far end corner out of reach, with the correctly chosen ring tone, guarantees that you will wake up. First rule: Under any circumstances, nothing should change. All the little maneuvers should be followed through neatly in order. If everything goes well, I shall be standing on the doormat at exactly five past seven with my tie and my ironed suit on, my briefcase in my hand. Second rule: Don't ever do less than two things at a time.

After turning off the alarm comes the mathematical part. While I drink a glass of water that I put on the dresser the night before by using my right hand, I open the top drawer with my left hand. I pick a pair of socks with my left hand. As soon as I finish drinking the water and my right hand is free, I put on my socks. To have the socks at the top drawer is a crucial detail. If my socks were in the bottom drawer, I couldn't have achieved these two movements simultaneously and likewise couldn't have added this 1 extra second to my life every day. In the span of my career, it amounts to 1 second times 1530 days equal to 1530 seconds, which is 25.5 minutes (almost half an hour).

As soon as I get to the kitchen from my room, I put two slices of bread with a slice of cheese between them (buy sliced cheese, don't bother with slicing!) into the sandwich

toaster, I switch it on, I rotate toward the electric water boiler (I keep these gadgets side by side in order to speed up my movements) and right away I pour water into the boiler from the pitcher next to it, switch it on and head for the bathroom.

Instead of heading to the bathroom right after I get up, I delay my need for relieving myself just a little to give a start at things in the kitchen and this presents me with a remarkable amount of time. So, I add that amount of time which would have been spent in the kitchen waiting for the water to boil and the sandwich to toast (while doing nothing else), I steal roughly 1 minute from the god of time and add it to my sandglass. One minute should not to be underrated. From the moment I came up with this approach, it has resulted in 1330 working days saved, which makes 1330 minutes, or 22.16 hours; almost a whole day! Still, I cannot content myself with the amount of time gained by switching the order between the kitchen and the bathroom; the heart of the matter is the toilet. People generally don't do anything else while they empty their bladder, which is a big mistake. There are things you can do other than watching the yellowish liquid coming out of your johnson for close to a minute. Like, brushing your teeth. And then you'll have 51 seconds to yourself you would have spent only brushing your teeth, and it'll add up to a significant amount of time if you factor in the rest of your life. OK., I don't claim that drinking water while picking a pair of socks out of the drawer or brushing teeth while peeing are my inventions. There might be other people who use these or other tactics but I'm pretty adamant on this one, and I'll apply for its patent rights! Now, you pee, your bladder is empty, but there are a few more drops and you waggle your tool. Before that waggle, in the last moments before your peeing is theoretically over, you lean over and flush. Besides, there won't be much pee left at that last moment of shaking. Leaning over to flush and then straightening up amounts to one second, and if you multiply this with

each day and for the eight or nine times that you piss during the day, the time saved is not to be sniffed at. As you see, there are a thousand ways to trick the god of time.

After the call of nature and the fastest possible shave, you're back in the kitchen. While placing a tea bag in a mug, you take a bite of the toasted sandwich, add the now boiling water (don't wait for the clicking sound, if you hear the sound of boiling, it means it's boiling already and you gain half a second). Don't ever do less than two things at a time. While taking a second bite from your toast, add sugar to your tea and stir. While chewing your toast, sip your tea. While wiping your mouth, take one anti-migraine tablet (Excedrin) out of the medicine drawer, swallow it. (This may not be included in everyone's to-do list but since most people use popular over-the-counter supplements such as One A Day instead of migraine pills, it can be considered to be a common item.) Pour the rest of the tea down the sink, leave the kitchen. Put on your suit. While you put on your tie, grab the James Bond style suitcase by the hall, turn off the lights. Now you're ready. Check the time. It's got to be exactly five past seven.

Thanks to these little time management tricks that might seem trivial, I'm at the right place at the right time, but the race isn't over: I have to be at the subway in ten minutes. I never wait for the elevator if it's not on my floor. Getting to the ground floor by the stairs takes 17 seconds at most. I never say "good morning" to any neighbor I run into; sometimes a single "morning" leads to "how are you doing" and then to "the facility dues are really high" and to a chat that costs you 35 seconds. So, I don't exchange "morning"s at the expense of being labeled the "rude neighbor" and so I can arrive at the subway on time, steadfast to my calculations – unless crossing the street drags on. But I'm always on my toes; if I bump into someone I haven't seen for a long time, I have only two minutes to chat. Three minutes tops. If I grant him/her four minutes, then I'd have to walk

faster, or even run to make up for the time lost. Fortunately, I hardly ever chat with the shopkeepers in my neighborhood and it's unlikely that I'll run into anyone I know around here. Even if I see a friend at this time of the day, he'll probably be in a hurry too, so he won't wish to grant me four minutes of his time. On with calculations . . .

When you reach the street, push the pedestrian button at the traffic lights (just to be certain even though someone else may have pushed it before you did). Step down from the sidewalk right after the light turns red to automobiles and before it turns green to pedestrians, and cross the road (you will gain at least a second). Walk to the subway entrance, wait for the escalator's sensors to detect you; as it starts working, take your place on the right side, smooth the wrinkles of your suit with your hand as the escalator goes down, insert a coin into turnstile, wait for the sensor of the escalator to perceive you, take your place at the right as the escalator moves, and then you're on the platform. Wait for the train at the "right spot" in front of the car that will stop the closest to the escalators at your destination. You will pass through the same door of the same car every day but it will be worth it since you'll have an extra fifteen seconds.

You get off three stations later, then in five seconds you reach the elevators before everyone else thanks to the subway car you have chosen. Taking your place to the right, walk slowly and you will be among the first to get out of the station unless there are running teenagers.

The rest is fixed: after crossing the street through two traffic lights, you buy your newspaper from the newsstand at the corner, walk toward the company building, enter through the automatic doors as soon as the sensor detects you, leave your briefcase at the X-ray machine, take out your ID from your wallet as your briefcase slides through to the other side. After you get your briefcase, wave your card over in front of the card reader at the

turnstile to get in, wait for the elevator, get on the elevator with the others who have been waiting; when the elevator finally gets to your floor after stopping three or four times at other floors, the doors open, you get out, say “good morning” “hey, what's up?” to those you're on good terms with, greet with a smile those you aren't on so good terms with (a faint smile in case they weren't actually looking at you), get your coffee from the coffee machine, pass few cubicles, pass a few more cubicles, arrive at your cubicle, turn on your computer, launch the finance programs, open your Excel files, generate the most profitable method until the meeting that is in few hours.

Time is a catchword in my job. When I was younger, it used to piss me off to hear the businessman character in Hollywood movies say things like: “Time is money. Ticktock (snapping fingers) 1 dollar, 2 dollars. I lose money every minute the clock ticks. It's 3 dollars now, come on man.” I used to hate the maxim our ancestors supposedly said: “time is money.” When did our ancestors become capitalist anyway? But now this trite proverb summarizes my life. Time means money. Every second lost equals the money I lose, and every second gained equals the money I make.

Today, I made good use of the time = money equation. Phone calls were shorter than I expected, meetings wrapped up quickly, and a lucky day at the stock market meant I made good money for the company and our clients. It was a successful day. After work, I met with Aslı, we had a nice dinner in Nişantaşı. After dinner we went to her place, we drank some coffee and since we were drinking coffee, we rekindled our love. I stopped by at Tolga's on my way home, he bragged about his most recent act of lechery. “Don't let Esra in on it,” he said. I smiled. If someone else had been the one to tell me that, my reaction would have been different.

Anyway, it's 23:45 already and I haven't written anything down in my journal for a long time, I haven't noticed how time passed. Now 2 minutes for brushing my teeth, plus doing other chores, putting the garbage out, putting on my pajamas, taking my antidepressant and finally putting my head on the pillow at 24:00. I love calculations that are on the hour mark!

Nightmare

March 18, 2009

This morning, I could have been on my doormat at 7:05 just like yesterday and the day before yesterday and many other days if I hadn't had that damn dream!

I don't even remember the last time I had a dream. When I was in high school, I kept a notebook next to my bed in which I wrote down my dreams. I used to condition myself to have dreams and also to remember them. Nice stories emerged from that exercise. After I enrolled in university, I gradually abandoned this practice. And after entering the business world, I began to condition myself not to dream at all before sleeping. Dreams used to stimulate my creativity and illuminate my subconsciousness, but now, they exhaust my mind when I'm sleeping and lower my performance at work. Despite all of my efforts, I wasn't able to elude a perplexing dream last night that left me utterly confused.

Like in the old days, I feel the need to write this down. I'm not eager to make it into a story, but it seems to me that I can discover something new about my subconsciousness.

Let this dream have a name too . . .

Born into a Nightmare

A man in his fifties and a woman in her forties walk hand in hand down a broad street in the early 1900s as a couple of horse-drawn carts pass by. It's understood from their appearance that they belong to an affluent family.

Suddenly, the guy looks at the woman and notices that her belly is swelling. Even though the woman appeared to be in regular shape a moment ago, she now looks like she's five months pregnant. Despite this sudden change, one reads in the man's eyes not a sense of surprise but a sense of happiness, excitement, and triumph which says "finally we did it." In order to celebrate their success, they walk into a tailor's store nearby.

A tailor sporting a pencil moustache takes the woman's body measurements, chooses a fabric among the rolls and, as happens in dreams, makes a dress ready right away. The woman puts on her dress and enjoys her reflection in the mirror while the man signs a promissory note handed to him by the tailor with an elegant pen he has taken out from his pocket. And it's no ordinary pen. This is a fountain pen that attracts all attention to itself as soon as it appears, making it obvious that it's much more than just an ordinary accessory. It's also the exact same pen that I inherited from my father, right up to the symbol and markings. The man signs his signature and then puts the pen back into his shirt pocket like a deft knight putting his sword into its sheath.

The woman looks even more attractive with her new dress, and he's clearly in love with her. They exchange glances and then wrap up her old dress into a bundle and leave the store.

The sidewalk which was crowded before is deserted now. The man and the woman keep on walking without noticing this unusual situation, with the carelessness of someone

daydreaming. A while later, a spasm shoots up the woman's body and she bends over with a scream. The man holds her before she falls on the ground. She's convulsing in such pain that he gently lays her down on the pavement. He holds her head with one hand and puts his other hand on her belly. While she quivers on the ground sweating, I look at her belly together with the man in the dream, and we witness her belly visibly swelling rapidly, swelling even more to arrive at the stage of giving birth. He is crying out for some help, and I look around but can't see anyone else. He is yelling at her "Hang on! Please hang on!", until he sees the red fluid in between her legs.

He decides to deliver the baby on his own as a last resort. He places her old dress under her head as a pillow. He wipes the sweat from his forehead with the sleeve of his shirt. Then he rolls up his sleeves and bends down under her skirt, spreads her legs as much as he can. He looks at her womb and with him I too stare at her birth canal. He shouts "I can't see it." She shouts in pain, she pushes, she screams. He yells again "I can't see it." He removes his hands from beneath her skirt and wipes the sweat on his forehead this time with his bare arm and then again he puts his head back under her skirt. He tries to reach out to the baby but every time he pulls out his hands and raises his head over her skirt, all I can see on his face is desperation.

And then, a huge baby pokes its head out from beneath the skirt. The expression on the man's face changes suddenly. With great joy, he reaches out his arms for the baby. It seems like the baby is pushing itself up from her crotch with its hands. As soon as the new father delivers the baby, still connected to its mother with the umbilical cord, he lays it down gently and takes care of his wife. Though the look on his face is one of horror on his face, the look on hers is pure happiness. She says "You did it." He first nods but then

realizes that his wife is about to pass away, says “This isn't, this isn't what I wanted.” She smiles, closes her eyes and breathes her last.

The woman, like an island in the midst of a lake of blood, lies lifeless. He fondles her face and her hair with a devastated expression, as if he could give life to his wife with a mere touch. He cries, he lays his face down on his beloved's skin, wets her bloody dress with his tears. In the middle of a deserted street, a man large in size and old in age cries like a baby. And the baby doesn't cry despite the difficult delivery; on the contrary, the baby giggles like a tickled child. The man who has just lived through the biggest suffering of his life wipes his tears and looks at his newborn son. The baby slaps his hands onto the lake of blood, he plays with the life fluid of his mother. He keeps on giggling. The father continues to look at him. The baby plays with his umbilical cord, he beats it on the puddle of blood like a girl who jumps rope, splashing few drops of blood on his father's face. The expression on the father's face turns blank. He calmly takes the pen he used earlier to sign the promissory note in the tailor's store out of his shirt pocket, he holds the pen gently like an author and looks at it for a moment. His hands are shaking, he squeezes his right fist in order to prevent the shaking, holds the pen tightly like a knife. He raises his hand and quickly lowers down the pen toward the baby . . . As the pen approaches its target in slow motion appropriate to dreams, I have the chance to notice the features of the baby and I recognize myself.

As the pen enters into my head through my left temple, I realize that the man who stabs it is not someone who merely looks like my father but is, in fact, my father. The one who lies dead in the midst of the blood lake on the ground is indeed my mother, and my murderer is my own very father. I don't die right away, first I fall down on the spot where the blood lake of my mother ends, with the pen in my head. I can feel the warmth of the

blood dripping from the left side of my face. The blood first stains my face, then it wraps me up in the pool that is gushing out of my body, and with a sense of mismatch peculiar to dreams, I don't feel like someone about to die but as an adolescent full of life. At that moment, I see the fountain of blood running out of my head and I get terrified. The blood isn't red, it's dark purple, the color of ink. When I realize this, the pond of ink starts to bubble up. Tiny little bubbles foam and those bobbles start to enlarge and take shape. These shapes are of people, a lot of people whose corporeal shapes and facial features gradually become clear, and one by one, they come into existence from the ink puddle that turns from a pond into a lake, from a lake into a sea.

As they get bigger, I grow up. I'm not a baby anymore.

Then I notice that I know, and I know very well, one of those people who rise in front of me and is brought to life. My first love Ezgi, whom I cannot forget, whom I thought I forgot but who slips into my thoughts at the most uncomfortable moments, manages to get into my nightmare with the same determination. Despite my fear throughout the nightmare, despite all the spilled blood and ink, there, I meet with Ezgi again after all those years and I leave aside everything – a pure sense of happiness embraces my whole being. Her body is not completely normal; I can see the purple ink running under her skin in her arms and legs. She smiles at me, I smile back. She reaches out her hand and so do I. I hold her hand with my inky hand, the ink splashes on her and completes her body a little more, her fuzzy figure gains flesh.

In this moment of surreal romance, I forget about my father, and when I do remember him and turn around, I see him agonizing in my ink lake. He's drowning. It's as though those ink people are pulling him down. I can't save him, and he sinks to the bottom of the lake. At that moment, a deafening noise transforms the already visually

dreadful nightmare into a sound hell. As the noise increases, I see the boiling ink people return to the ink source one by one. And the last of them, Ezgi, whose hand is still in mine, starts to sink into the purple lake. As soon as the noise becomes unbearable, I realize that it's my alarm ringing.

* * *

The moment I opened my eyes, I reached out my left hand and turned off my phone alarm. Of course, having opened my eyes didn't mean that I was awake. After such a horrible and strange dream, it's not likely I would come to my senses right away. I looked around blindly while still lying in bed. Then I thought: it's just a dream. Why let it ruin my day?

My movements were slackened as a result of the unsettling effect of the dream, my whole system of getting up and rushing to work lumbered off. Turn off the alarm, put on your socks, turn on the toaster and kettle, empty your bladder, shave, eat your toasted sandwich, drink your tea, put on your suit, fix your tie . . .

I checked my watch when I stepped onto the doormat. It was 7:09. Almost 7:10. A single dream had cost me four and a half minutes. And I still had to get to work.

The dream kept wondering around the corridors of my mind on the way to work, at the subway, at work. I could neither focus on my work nor on my conversations with colleagues during the breaks. At the afternoon meeting, Tolga noticed I was distracted, and as soon as the meeting was over he asked, "Where is your mind? What's up?" And so I told him about the weird dream in which my subconsciousness brought together my mother, my father and my first love in a surrealistic *mise-en-scène*, like that of a horror

film. Before I finished telling him the story, he just said “a foolish dream, forget about it” and turned his head away.

After work, I met with Aslı, we ate dinner together. She too realized that there was something off with me, and asked using the same words I had heard before “What's up?” I told her as well about my dream in similar words. I didn't mention Ezgi, of course. Never ever, no matter how stable is your friendship with your girlfriend, no matter how at ease she appears, should you ever mention to her that you had a dream about your ex. It's grounds for separation.

Even though I hadn't mentioned Ezgi, her reaction wasn't any different from Tolga's. First, she stared at me icily, then said “So you're dumbfounded by a dream. And I was hoping I'd have dinner with my boyfriend and have a normal conversation. But there he is, talking about his dream . . .” Women have an uncanny talent of shaming men with only a couple of words, and they never miss an opportunity to do so. I could only say in response “It wasn't just a dream, it was a nightmare,” trying to hide my broken voice as much as I could. A little tense but not really muffled, we parted and headed home.

Really, why has this nightmare occupied my mind so much? Why do I still remember each and every moment of it? Is it because I haven't dreamed for so long that it has such a lasting effect? Or else. . .

Now I need to sleep. I would condition myself much more than ever not to dream.

Family

March 19, 2009

I woke up to the same dream this morning. This time, it was much more realistic. Even the music I set as an alarm didn't wake me up. Fortunately my system wasn't

interrupted, I was outside my door at 07:06. And I made up for that one minute delay by rushing while crossing the streets.

I stepped into the unknown world of my subconsciousness yesterday by writing down that dream and now I realize that I have to follow the journey through, or else I might never free myself from its curse. Now I can confess that this dream is seriously aligned with my past.

My birth took place in this way although not exactly as it happened in my dream. It was a very difficult birth. I shall tell the story from the beginning . . .

The Tale of the Scribe and the Painter That Ends Unhappily

My father was the most important fairy tale writer in the county and my mother was the painter who illustrated my father's fairy tales. They worked on three books without ever meeting and together they created books that were not only cherished by children, but also read by adults with pleasure. My mother Serap didn't like being in public so she never came to the meetings, social events, or parties that were organized by my father Metin's publisher.

My father was curious about the woman who illustrated his stories almost exactly the way they appeared to him in his mind. He made timid requests to his publisher to introduce him to her. He went to his first three book launch parties dressed stylishly but when he didn't see Serap at the party organized for his fourth book, he left early and wrote what would become one of his favorite tales in one night: "The Scribe and the Painter."

In this tale, my father tells two parallel stories: one of a woman who draws a man's visions and another of a writer who writes about her visions. In other words, he wrote the

reflection of their own story in the universe of fairy tales. He adorned this tale with fairies, angels, monsters and child heroes. When Serap read this tale, she was so impressed that she was convinced to meet him.

Back in the publishing house, my father opened the door to a meeting room and there she was, his muse, who had never appeared to him before, but whom he, irrationally, thought he created in his mind to help him write. This was more than love at first sight, it was more like recognizing one's muse at first sight, for both of them.

My parents' relationship shortly culminated in marriage. They became much more productive together and completed their best books during this period. Their partnership brought them to other areas as well. They got into the animation industry and created films that influenced the children of the period. Their names began to circulate abroad where their followers waited for their next books and animations. And they put the awards they received from unheard of competitions on their library shelves so that one day their own children could be proud of them.

Their golden age didn't last long. Two years after getting married, their relationship started to crumble. After a while, it came to light that there was a serious problem between my father and my mother who were known as a solid couple. It became clear that their children would not be able to take pride in their awards on the library shelf because my parents were medically unable to have children.

My parents loved each other so much that they never gave up trying. They tried various medications and all the alternative cures from acupuncture to reiki. They consulted all the healers from Far East to South America. They kept trying for five full years. Even though their passion wasn't oriented to sex, they turned into those couples they saw in movies who stay in bed all day. They even tried Kama Sutra techniques. For

a time, they kept up their positive attitude originating from their being storytellers in facing of this problem. They thought of their inability to have children as “an irony of fate” as all the children of the nation were growing up with their fairy tales.

After some time, my parents, who were thumbing their noses at fate, started cursing their fate so much so that during this period my father's style became unnecessarily morose. He wrote tales that ended badly, my mother's colors darkened and her drawings became abstract. Even though the critics liked their work very much during this period, the readers, and most importantly my parents, couldn't embrace those tales. Because of this, their love for each other faded in time. Making other children happy while not being able to have their own dried up the springs of their muses.

One day, they decided to leave everything behind and retreat to isolation. They settled near a town in Fethiye in the South where they lived in a secluded villa for more than a year. During this time, they communicated with their friends only through letters, but they didn't disclose anything about what they were doing there.

We don't know much about what took place during this mysterious period because they didn't communicate much with close friends or the town locals. But according to speculation, my parents pursued a life in which they put their intellectual life aside and copulated like rabbits. And eventually, they were successful. In their fourth month there, my mother realized that she was pregnant. She shared this information only with my father. There was no evidence in the documents that were found in the villa, or in the records of the nearby hospitals, that they went to a doctor. It appears that my father didn't want to summon bad luck at the last minute by involving technology or third parties.

But eventually, misfortune found them. When her contractions started earlier than expected, my father was caught unprepared. He hurriedly carried my mother to the car

and rushed to the hospital. On the way, her birth pangs got worse and she gave birth to me in the car parked on the side of the road. Against all his efforts (judging by the medical books found at the house, we can safely deduce that my father became an expert during the time of their isolation), my mother didn't survive.

In spite of the difficult delivery in dire circumstances, I was born a fairly healthy baby. But my father who had won a son lost his sanity. For the rest of his life, he blamed himself for the death of my mother. A couple of times I witnessed him ramble to his close friends "We could have adopted a child, we could have resorted to another course. It's because of my male pride that I insisted a lot and this happened." He always sounded so dramatic in those moments. One could tell from his eyes that he was in great pain but his words ringed a little too "treacly" on the ears. He didn't like to verbalize his emotions and whenever he tried to say a few words out of necessity, his voice remained "feigned." That's how my father was.

No matter what his friends told him, he kept blaming himself for my mother's death. He was ignoring the fact that my mother had already reached a risky age for giving birth while they were trying to have a child and this made his self-accusations a little more reasonable. But the neurotic state of my father resembled the remorse of a husband who had willfully killed his wife by his own hands, and honestly, this extreme mental state was indicative of a psychological disorder.

This strange psychology of my father pointed to a more irrational feeling. I never mentioned this to anyone. And I know that I wouldn't be able to convince those who knew him, but anyways, the die was cast: He used to blame someone else for the death of my mother. Me! Nobody would ever believe that a witty man who loved children more than anything would blame his own child for such a thing. Tell me about it! Even

throughout those years when I hadn't been told how my mother died, I could read it in my father's glances: "she died because of you." I suppose that a sentimental and wise person my father was, who loved children, who remained a child and didn't lose his innocence, he changed after that tragic event. When I grew up, his friends told me about how he, still in shock, came to Istanbul without having cleaned his car, that the white seats were colored red from blood. Then I realized that my father changed that day, everything fell into place. The man who loved children was replaced with a man who had a hidden hate for them, primarily for his own son. Besides, when I was growing up, my father quit writing children's books. He started to write second-rate science fiction stories that took place in strange years like 3050.

I associate my childhood with a rustling sound at the background – the sound of my father's fountain pen eternally wandering on paper.

It was as if that disquieting sound rising from the friction of pen with paper whispered that I should blame myself too. Couldn't you have been more patient as a fetus, it asked me. Couldn't you have brought yourself to life without killing your mother? Did you have to eradicate her as you came into existence? These questions never stopped haunting me.

* * *

A sperm and a womb creates a person, but a trauma and other traumas create a personality, said someone. This dream is like a short film that reveals my own traumas and encapsulates the truth in a fantastic dimension. In the first part of my nightmare, I see

myself causing my mother's death through my birth. Then I see the frustrating strife I had with my father while he was alive. And lastly, me losing my first love . . .

First Love

March 20, 2009

I didn't wake up to that wicked nightmare this morning. I wasn't going to be able to stand watching my parents swimming in that lake of blood one more time. Having written it down had a great effect on my overcoming it: writing helps us defeat our demons. But as it turns out, I hadn't written down the whole thing. This time I had a dream of Ezgi who had appeared in the last part of my nightmare. In this dream, I'm getting married. I'm sitting at the wedding table in my suit. The bride is sitting next to me, a girl even more beautiful than Aslı. As I am saying "Yes" in bliss, I see Ezgi in the front row among the guests. I'm petrified. Meanwhile, the bride answers the standard question and says "Yes." I'm not able to react as I cannot get my eyes off Ezgi. With a voice only I can hear, Ezgi asks "Why didn't you carry me on?" I don't understand what she means by that. At that moment, the civil registrar slides the marriage registry towards me and hands me a fountain pen. It is the same pen that my father stuck into my skull in the previous dream; it has the same symbol. I'm terrified, my hands begin to shake. With a despotic expression on his face, the registrar nods towards the inkwell. It also has the same symbol on it. I dip the pen into the ink pot and draw out some ink. Then I place the pen on the paper and as soon as I do that, Ezgi becomes transparent; she is erased a little more with each ink stain I make on the page and the moment I finish signing the book, she completely disappears. When I slide the book towards the bride, I come face to face with a hag instead of the

incredibly beautiful bride I saw before. The hag tugs at my hand and as soon as my hand enters into my field of vision, I realize that I'm as just as old and rotten as her. The hag bursts into laughter until her teeth fall out . . . If my phone alarm hadn't rung just then, her laughter could have lasted forever.

* * *

I came to realize that until I write down the story of my third trauma, I won't get rid of this sequence of nightmares. My third trauma is an unfinished love story.

I saw Ezgi for the first time in a rock concert when I was a senior in high school. Since I was not eighteen years old yet, I wasn't legally allowed to be at the bar, so I slunk into a dark corner at the back. From behind a pillar, I watched the band play. Ezgi was sipping her drink with the same uneasy expression as mine behind another pillar on the left side. We were like two accomplices who were committing the same crime without being aware of each other. She had a red and black outfit, my favorite colors. She wasn't "frilly" like the metalhead and goth girls, nor was she shabby like the punks. She had a very beautiful face which looked like Winona Ryder in the film *Edward Scissorhands* that I had watched that week. I remember this very clearly because I had watched that film with my father. Watching films was one of the rare things we did as father and son.

She and I exchanged glances only once or twice. Or maybe it was just me looking at her. I had difficulty taking my eyes off her but I'm not sure if she actually saw me. I couldn't find the courage to go and talk to her. I loathed my shyness and I extinguished the joy in my heart.

A couple of days later, on my way back home late from a soccer match, I became fixated on the TV sets in the front window of a home appliance store. A hidden camera show was being broadcast. I put my sports bag on the ground and started to watch while standing there, laughing at the prank with ease as though I were watching it at home. I suddenly heard someone else laughing with me. At first I thought someone was laughing at me, but it was just Ezgi who, like me, was fixated on the screen, laughing at the prank.

“Did you see the guy?” she said still laughing. I was enchanted as soon as I heard her melodic voice. I could only nod to her question. I was speechless. During the match, in between three goal posts, I had thought about Ezgi the whole time and had played the game of my life. I had made my team win by repeating “mantras” in my head like “if I can save this kick, I'll see her again,” or “if I save this penalty shootout, I will run into her,” or “if I can punch this side ball, she will be transferred to my school.” When the match was over, I knew none of this would happen. Even though I was the champion of the game, I walked home with a sense of sorrow. And there she was in front of the shop window. We watched two more pranks and fell in love laughing. Or, at least, I fell in love.

We went to a coffee shop nearby. We had so much in common, it was miraculous. I found my soul mate at a very early age and she was a very beautiful soul mate. I offered to walk her home but she refused. She was a “feminist” type, she wouldn't let you walk her home with the pretext that it's late, she wouldn't want you to escort her to the bathroom in a bar, she wouldn't let you carry her bag, she wouldn't walk under your umbrella. In that respect – from what I had heard from my father's friends – I likened her to my mother. With every new thing that I discovered about her, I got more attached to her. What glamored me the most was her voice. The voice that emerged when she was

talking, laughing, getting mad, and even when she was sobbing, sounded like the most beautiful melody in the world. I could have listened to her voice for hours as if she wasn't making sentences with words but creating a melody by stringing notes together. Every time she spoke my name with that melody, I was filled with a strange joy.

We were completing each other's sentences and this alone seemed like a miracle of love. Sure, I was seventeen and didn't have a clue about life or love but I was sure about one thing: she was the one, the chosen one, the girl of my dreams.

For two months, we met mostly after school. We would take random buses and wander around neighborhoods we hadn't been to before. This way we managed to see most of Istanbul's neighborhoods at a young age. In a quarter neither of us knew, on a bench that hurt our butts, we kissed for the first time. It was an awkward kiss. When it was over, we looked at each other and smiled at our clumsiness. But in time we improved. We even started to give low marks to the kisses we saw in the films we watched.

* * *

When I was younger, I had watched a lot of films and listened to many stories from my father. Because of this, I promised myself that I would experience my first time with the girl of my dreams. There were times when I wasn't sure if I was going to achieve my goal and I devised scenarios like "If I can't ever find her, I may die a virgin like Newton." But I was lucky, I was seventeen and I had met that dream girl.

I was going to be able to keep the promise I had made to myself, I was going to say farewell to my virginity without making any compromises. And that's how it actually

happened. My father learned that I was in a relationship. He wanted to meet her. “Bring her here after school tomorrow so I can see our bridal candidate” he said teasing me. That was one of the few jokes I heard from him. As if that secretive, bad-tempered, distant man was gone and was replaced by a concerned sweet father. But when we arrived home from school the next day, my father wasn't at home! I was so mad at him. Introducing my first girlfriend to my father was important to me. I thought that I finally made a connection with him thanks to this meeting, and I believed that a father-son affection, which I had only seen in films, could have emerged between us.

My anger toward my father could have lasted forever if his absence hadn't given way to one of the happiest moments of my life, perhaps, the happiest. As we were waiting for my father, we began to watch a music channel. Music video after a music video, on and on. They started playing “Easy” of Faith No More. During the terrific solo, we started to kiss. Ten more songs might have played but it was as if that solo was still hanging in the air as we were making love. To this day, at the beginning of each of lovemaking, I keep on assuming that I would ascend to that feeling, but it never happens. Is it because I'm not as innocent as before? Or is it because the person in front of me is not Ezgi? Does this fall under cheating? I think of that excellent line of Uğur Yücel in the film *Hayatımın Kadınısın*: do I cheat on every woman I meet with the vision of Ezgi?

After that day, we continued on with our relationship. The first days were beautiful. Then something happened to me. I used to believe that meeting the girl of my dreams at the age of seventeen was my greatest stroke of luck, but I didn't notice that it was also my biggest curse. I was seventeen and my hormones were running wild. I thought my eyes didn't see any girls except her, but when you have a girlfriend, other girls start to have the hots for you. It's the biggest conspiracy of all times! As if women make a pact among

themselves to annoy men! They officially, by force and through tricks, divert one's eyes; this is the truth. My mind was still with Ezgi but other girls entered into my visual radar and because of my inexperience I didn't leave that attention unattended, I kept looking at them through my periscope. Around that time, our submarine started to take on water and our love was sinking.

One day, Ezgi didn't come to our usual meeting spot. Nor the next day, or the following days. She disappeared without a trace. I didn't know a single friend of hers. After not seeing her for a couple of weeks, I reasoned that “she may be sick” or “she may be out of town” and I tried not to get too obsessed about not seeing her.

After my father died, her disappearance was benched out of the first eleven problems of my life. Then it dawned on me: I didn't have a father, I never had a mother, and now the dream girl was gone. We didn't have cell phones back then, there was no social networks on the Internet, there were only streets, boulevards and parks. I walked non-stop during those days. I walked until I had blisters and when I got too tired, I would sit somewhere and watch the people walking by. I stationed myself in front of the school gate. I constantly checked the places, parks and coffee shops we used to go to together. I regularly went to the bar where I first saw her but after I was spotted for being underage, I waited outside the door. I watched domestic soap operas quietly for minutes in front of the home appliance window shop where we had first talked and smiled at each other. It was as if Ezgi disappeared into thin air.

Over the years, none my efforts to find Ezgi paid off. From the time Facebook became popular, I kept searching for Ezgi. I didn't know her last name so I stared at the profiles of all the Ezgis but nothing came through so far. No matter who entered into my life, I persistently kept searching for her on the Internet. Once Aslı noticed that I searched

for someone called Ezgi (Aslı emerged behind me, hovering like a ghost) and she questioned me about it. But I came out of that interrogation scot-free by thinking on my feet.

But I never got rid of this feeling of emptiness, this curse, this longing that follows me about and which I cannot overcome. Filling that void with other girls was just filling an abyss with corpses of lovers. Like people who are born with a hole in their heart, I had to live with a hole in me since I was seventeen. The family curse continued and my tale of romance ended badly.

Suddenly, Ezgi was in my daily mental agenda once again after a single dream. My mother whom I never knew, my father whom I lost at a young age, my first love whose fate I'm unaware of, all gathered in the same dream. What are they trying to tell me?

Professional Life, Colleagues

March 21, 2009

It was a busy day at work filled with important meetings so I didn't even once think of the dream that has haunted me for the last two days. I'm fully aware that my job has helped me to get over many psychological breakdowns throughout the last three years. Today, a few smart business moves and a few impulsive decisions made good money for the board members and the companies I represent. It was the most profitable day of the month. At the end of days like today, I realize how much I love my job and I thank God for finding me this job. I don't open my hands and pray, but let's just say, I pay my respects to God in confidence. Like a shy lover who cannot show his affection, I'm a reserved believer. It's a great gift for timid people like me that God knows everything (or at least that's what they taught us in religion class).

After God, I'm most grateful to my best friend Tolga. Whenever I find myself out of work, he calls me, saying "Hey buddy, I got the right job for you," and saves me. He doesn't just find an opening. He finds some middleman to make sure that I get the job. That's why I need to confess that I have a dependency issue with Tolga (here comes the confession of the day!). In the same way that his longtime fiancée Esra ignores his cheating, I too, chose to ignore some of his crap because he's gotten me out of unemployment a couple of times. Even though I'm not in the same situation as Esra (at least I don't have to sleep with him!), if I lose my job I know it will be more difficult than ever to find another in a life without Tolga. That's why I might yield to small concessions. Let's just say, one of those necessities of professional life.

I wish I was indebted to Tolga only in the matters of work. As with my previous girlfriends, I met Aslı through Tolga, and I've been with her for over a year now. Just like with finding jobs, I suppose it would be more difficult than ever to find a girlfriend in a life without Tolga. I probably would, but not someone like Aslı.

Aslı is a nice person. Beside being nice, she's very beautiful. And beside being beautiful, she's incredibly hot! She has this charm that draws anyone who glances at her, woman or man, into various fantasies. A man who is with a girl like her would be happy no matter what. I'm no exception. As soon as she enters the frame, whatever is taking place in my life vanishes. Her curves can bring back the dead; her voice has an aphrodisiac effect, her movements blow my mind, and our "supernatural" sexual chemistry. . . . When these take charge, nothing remains of the nightmares in which your traumatic memories surface, or of the old flames who visit you in your dreams.

Amateur Foodies

March 22, 2009

As I got behind the wheel, setting out to drive to a meeting in Kadıköy, I noticed a flyer under my windshield wiper. Normally, these flyers piss me off, as does the idea of someone I don't know leaning onto my car to put it there, and of course with having to get out of the car to pull it out which costs me approximately nineteen seconds. That's why I usually throw them away right after I pull them out, but this time, there was something that I cannot describe about this flyer. It was from a restaurant called Kantina that I've never heard of before. I folded the flyer, put it in my pocket and stepped on the gas so that I would get to the meeting on time.

After the meeting, Tolga, Esra and Aslı and I were going to have lunch together. Every two or three days, we meet up as an amateur gourmet team. This all started when we watched gourmet Vedat Milor's show on NTV. First, we imitated him as a joke, and then it spiraled from there. We try to go to new venues as much as possible to search for new tastes, rating the dishes and ambiance among ourselves (we didn't see it appropriate to rate the prices). Usually, Esra or Aslı picks the destinations but today, I gave that routine a break and said "Enough with women's hegemony!" Tolga pretended to support me "Go, man, go!" I said "I found a super restaurant, trust me" and then I was thoughtless enough to mention that I found the restaurant's flyer under my windshield wiper.

Esra, with her Nişantaşı boulevard accent rejected my offer: "I don't want to go to a filthy place which puts flyers on cars and catch stomach flu." Aslı was wavering too, but being my girlfriend, she vetoed more gently. Eventually, I came up with a convincing argument that went along the lines of "As foodies, we should try every restaurant. We

cannot be picky until we become professionals. Even Vedat Milor goes to pita places in Fatih.” Fortunately, my argument worked.

The restaurant was different from the places we had been to. It was neither too bright, nor dim; neither garish, nor plain. I liked the place right away for no reason even though the others sniffed at it.

We sat at the closest empty table. The menus were already set. Their design, typeface and the logo looked stylish. Though we might be the amateur foodies, we did know the import of the menu. Asli, Esra and Tolga found the dishes they wanted right away despite the fact that they had never been there before. Asli called out to the waiter herself even though she usually waits for me or Tolga to do it. “I haven't decided yet,” I complained, but she replied: “I'm starving honey. I haven't eaten anything since this morning.” While the waiter took everyone's orders, I kept leafing through the menu out of spite for Asli. Esra said “This place is famous for its cabbage lobster. You like it, so why don't you order it?” But wasn't this place a new find? Since when did the cabbage lobster become famous? Tolga said “Yes, it's got your name on it,” and added to the pressure. Just then, my eyes became drawn to the name of a dish: X-Wings. I looked at the ingredients: mushrooms, chicken, and some vegetables that were not really appealing to me, but it was the name that lured me. I turned to the waiter and said “I want X-Wings.” As soon as the waiter left, Asli said “Oh dear, you picked the most redneck thing in there. It sounds like onion rings, it won't fill you up.” I replied “The way to become a good foodie is to listen to your heart, you should welcome novelties, baby.” She raised her right eyebrow which meant “We'll see” and asked “So, how was work today?” We usually talk about work for a while after ordering but I was fixated on the name of the food. I mumbled “X-Wings, why does it sound familiar?” Asli said “It sounds familiar of

course ...” but didn't complete her sentence nor did she feel the urge to, and after an odd silence that lasted more than a second, Tolga said “Dude, this new software program I was telling you about, it's used in your division. You know, the one that evaluates employers' performance using the method of cross comparison . . .” I was saying “No, it had a different name . . .” when he interrupted me and asked “So, what was decided in yesterday's meeting?” I replied evasively: “You know, the usual.”

Then all three of them started a conversation about celebrity gossip but I was still chasing down my memory lane after the first time I heard the word “X-Wings.” Suddenly, I recalled and shouted “I remember!” Their conversation was instantly cut short and they stared at me. I said “In the fourth episode of *Star Wars*, that is, the first episode of the old trilogy, there were these space ships that attacked Death Star, you know, their wings took the shape of an X when they attacked.” Though Tolga is my age, he's not into *Star Wars*, and the girls wouldn't know, so there was a silence around the table. Besides, I wouldn't count as a *Star Wars* fan, I watched the trilogy when I was little and had few toys, that was all. Around the time when my father began to pull me out of the realm of stories and dragged me into the world of realities, when he was getting rid of the books and the films we had at home by selling them and would not buy me *Star Wars* toys no matter how much I begged, a friend of mine who knew how badly I wanted to have a *Star Wars* toy gave me an X-Wing on my birthday. I played with it all the time. When you pushed a button, it would break up into three parts as if blown up with a laser beam.

As I was thinking of this, Ashl turned to me. She drew herself closer to me and whispered into my ear: “What are you doing tonight?” Her whispering breath fondled the tip of my earlobe. With a sexy voice that could cause a small erection, she continued

“The food here might be too greasy. I want to burn it off. Shall we go work out?” In public, “work out” was our sex code. It was unthinkable to decline this invitation coming from a beautiful girl like her, I said “Sure.” All the X-Wings flying around in my mind were suddenly destroyed by the forces of the Empire, the only thought left was the upcoming work out. Tolga must have overheard our conversation, he said “Nice! So, you're working out often, you must have become endorphin junkies” and smiled wickedly. I was a little embarrassed but Aslı didn't care.

The food arrived and we went back to our previous conversation. Everyone began to comment on their food. I was back to being the rookie foodie in the amateur league. I didn't even notice that the pieces of chicken on my plate were arranged like X-Wings. I was busy evaluating things like the food's taste, how it dissolved in my mouth, its freshness and greasiness.

* * *

At the work meeting later that afternoon, possibly due to the loud speech of the rival company's manager, I started to have a headache so I immediately took an Excedrin and I was myself again. Normally, I need to take two in total, one in the morning and one in the evening, but some days at noon my headache gives me the early warning sign and the sooner I take another pill, the faster I recover. If I stall a little, then I would have to grapple with headache until the evening. Sometimes I remain hostage to a migraine no matter how much Excedrin I take, and I hate those days because I lose a small portion of the time I gain through my unique tactics, and lose a portion of the money that I make as

a result of these tactics. Fortunately, I hadn't had an attack for a long while, likely thanks to the antidepressant.

At that afternoon meeting, I got turned on more than ever. Asli's work out offer invaded my mind with fantasies. Surviving the meeting, I returned to my cubicle, I opened my programs, charts and stock market indices and occupied myself with novel ideas that would earn our investors money. I was tidying up my documents when I noticed that it was already six o'clock. Asli doesn't like to be kept waiting. Suddenly two hands covered my eyes. It wasn't hard to guess to whom they belonged to. I said "Asli." She said "Let's go." "Where?" I asked. "To working out" she said, showing the gym bag she was carrying.

It turned out that she had been teasing me all along: she actually meant going to gym for a workout. I lost my high spirits like a child who was denied a promised gift.

Half an hour later, in workout clothes, we were running on a treadmill in one of the most popular gyms in Nişantaşı. I wasn't keen on tiring myself too much. We played squash for ten minutes at a low intensity. I wasn't able to keep my eyes off her t-shirt which made her breasts getting more see-through as it was getting wet. She soon noticed that I was staring at her. After scoring, she stopped and said "Shall we go work out?" With an incredible reflex, I answered "Yes." Then I said, "Now, if you're teasing . . ." I was making gestures, "I would hit your head with this racket." She smiled and said "Let's go."

Porn Star

March 23, 2009

After I arrived home from work yesterday, I didn't have any energy left even to open the cover of my journal.

The sporting events of the previous day had drained me. I managed to get up at 6:48 this morning and be outside the door at 7:05. Even though I covered all of the bases at work, it was like I was a complete ghost. At any rate, I was proud of myself as a man, and I felt very good, like a super hero on a condom ad. Deep down, I wanted to share yesterday's bedroom achievements with everyone today, but that would have been inappropriate. I felt like an athlete who had broken a record but wasn't reported in the news. That's the fate of us sex record holders. I wanted to call Asli and show off at least to her. "Last night was pretty good, huh?" I said. "It was good" was her only reply. I was somewhat disappointed.

Headache and . . . Things that Start to Take on an Extraordinary Aspect

After this page in the journal, the handwriting becomes more legible and stylish. The ink is a darker blue. It seems that a different pen had been used. And things progressively start to go off the rails.

The Hand of God and Migraine

~~My head hurts, a lot.~~

March 24, 2009

Today after work, Aslı and I had a nice meal at a place close to my apartment. After dinner, we walked home. We were going to make a lot of noise, or at least that's what she said. As we walked, she told me about what happened at the bank that day. I don't remember if it was anything interesting except that a rich businessman made advances at her from the other side of the counter. As we were getting closer to my place, seeing Aslı's skirt stuck in her butt and hearing her effortlessly sexy voice was making me hornier. I was taking extra care not to make a physical contact and keep my distance so that it didn't reach a dangerous dimension. Even though we had been together for more than a year, her ability to turn me on didn't lessen in time; to the contrary, it increased. I normally like wearing suits, but in these kinds of situations, I prefer having a pair of jeans on me. Otherwise there's a pretty good chance that my hard-on might cause me to be the laughingstock of the entire neighborhood. That's why I needed to take my eyes off Aslı's body and focus on something else.

I spotted some boys playing soccer at the side road. They had set up a goal with stones as goalposts in a field intended to be a parking lot. It was clear they were eager to finish the match before the lot filled up with cars. Neither the touchline, nor the goal line or the goal posts were actually there: the boys created an imaginary soccer field and were competing as if it were the cup final. At that moment, Aslı's phone rang. It must have been important since she said "One minute honey," turned around and walked about a meter away from me.

So I started to watch the kids play soccer from a closer range. The goalkeeper from the team on my side looked like me when I was a kid. His style was not much different than mine. He enjoyed showing off, plunging like a professional even at simplest shots. The knees of his sweatpants were ripped, just like mine had been when I was nine. There was a kid on the opposite team who kept pushing and bullying those around him. He was aggressively trying to score, but the goalie was in form today, he didn't give way. Meanwhile, Aslı was still continuing her conversation, she was speaking with someone from the bank, looking up some information on her iPhone and conveying it to the operator. At that moment, I heard the bully shout "penalty!" The goalie tried to object but the others bowed to the decision. The bully placed the ball at an imaginary penalty shootout point. It was pretty close to the goal but since it was only the goalie contesting, it didn't make a difference. The goalie was confident, he opened his arms to cover the area. Suddenly I got excited as if I was watching a cup final in a stadium. The bully ran to the ball, it was clear that he was going to give it everything, and indeed he did! The ball passed through what is called the upper 90 which the goalkeeper could never reach and so it went over the edge of the "imaginary goal." It was a very hard ball, it passed through the goal and then out of the parking lot. The ball was flying straight at Aslı's head! All of

this happened in less than a second but I remember every detail clearly as if I watched it in slow motion.

Aslı was standing on the sidewalk facing the road. It was a single lane back road but it was busy with cars passing right in front of her. The ball was going to hit her head from behind and would make her stumble into the oncoming traffic since she was not expecting it and would cause her to fall in front of the passing cars.

This was the exact scene that was going to take place if I hadn't done a childish thing.

But I did what I had to do, what I did best. I went back to my old goalkeeping days. Before the ball hit Aslı's head, I jumped high and hit the ball with my left hand. I was like a goalkeeper who saved a penalty shot from an upper 90. The best defenseman or striker in the world could not have saved that shot, nor could have a basketball player 1.90cm tall. A ball going that fast and hard required the skills of a goalkeeper, of which I still had in me. When I fell down, I pictured that the kids were watching me in awe, I was proud of myself and with my plunge. Apparently, the kids couldn't have cared less. Not soon after, the kid noted for his bullying yelled "Hey, the ball!" Aslı was not aware of anything since it happened behind her. While I was dusting off my pants, she asked with a puzzled tone: "What's going on?" I kicked the ball over, it was a pass right on the mark and made me happy. While the ball was heading towards the boys, I noticed that the only person who was impressed by my plunge was the goalkeeper I had been watching a moment ago. He stared at me, and I stared back at him.

Now, both of us had our left knees ripped.

Aslı repeated with a louder voice "What just happened?"

"You have no idea, I just saved your life" I said, with the smile of a hero.

That was a lie.

At most, I just saved a shot, but it was an upper 90!

Aslı noticed the hole in my pants as she dusted me off. “You’re such a joke. You must have paid a lot of money for these pants, what a shame!” she said, with the tone of a mother reproaching her son. Clearly, she didn’t believe I saved her life. “You jumped like a kid, in the middle of the street, with people around, knocking a ball out of the way, is that it?” she asked. “I dived” I said, feeling the need to correct her and then added with a deep voice “plunged.” My voice trembled in the first syllable making an atonal shrill. “Plunged” became a “pluuunjaeed.”

“Well done!” she said, this time with the tone of a grandmother.

I had stood behind my move until that moment. Not because it was necessary but because I wanted to and because it was an accomplishment. But with that condescending “well done,” I started to feel guilty. Why was I being so childish? If someone working in my division were passing by at that moment, if he saw me like this, who knows what he would think. If it were one of my bosses or some junior employee, they would cease to take me seriously. And then, as it happened in my previous jobs, I would start to underperform and find myself kicked out. My regret wasn’t only related to the balances at work, it also included a self-pity that was brought on from realizing that I was still acting like a kid. And I filed this fresh misdeed under the “Top Ten Scenes” that I needed to correct whenever someone invented a time machine.

Through this wave of regret, which can unexpectedly catch up to a person, I had Aslı to help me forget.

“Now, let’s check this naughty boy’s wound” she said with an affectionate and sexy voice. She dressed the wound with tincture of iodine on cotton, ripping the hole on the

left knee of my pants a little more. Then she ripped it more and more . . . Then she started to stroke around the wound, “I’m sorry to inform you that you have to stay overnight in our hospital, we might need to check the other parts your body” she said with the terrible yet effective acting of a porn star. Then her hand moved on to other parts of my body.

And here comes the gong, we started off with the work out.

After the first round, a slight headache loomed but I didn't have enough strength to go to kitchen to take an Excedrin. I dozed for a bit. In my dream, I was playing with famous soccer players. I was overwhelmed by a weird bliss that enveloped me from being on the same field with them. The goal posts were strange, they were crossed like X-Wings but I took it to be normal in the dream. The match then took an absurd turn, the turf transformed into thorny weed, the lights went off, the famous players turned into regular people. Every time I plunged to save a shot, the ball slid from my hand and entered the goal. When I fell down, I got covered in mud and the thorns pricked me everywhere. Then I woke up. I saw Asli lying naked. She was lying in a way that looked like she was modeling for a nude painting. She started to touch me, kiss me, she wanted to start the second round. But there was no action from my end. I couldn't understand what was happening to me. My headache was gradually getting more intense, my temples started to throb. I noticed that I hadn't taken the second anti-migraine and antidepressant of the day. I needed to take them soon but I had a girl like Asli with me; she had her needs, I had my male ego, I had to get through the second round. It would normally go at least three rounds, easily. Touching Asli would usually be enough to make me ready for the next round, but not this time.

I tried. It didn't happen. The headache got worse. It was a nasty migraine. My eyes were closing, and as soon as they closed I was seeing X-Wings in neon lights. I was

trying to insert the perfect curves of Asli's magnificent body into these visions but her immense boobs were turning into soccer balls after a while and all my sex drive was dying out. I held my head and moaned. "What happened?" asked Asli. "I have a headache" I said, feeling like a woman who makes up excuses not to have sex.

Asli went to the kitchen and brought a glass of water and a pill. She turned the lights off. She lowered blinds as quietly as possible. Since she has an obsession with keeping things orderly, she tidied up a little. With a low voice she said "Sweetie, I'm going home, I have stuff to do. Try to sleep and you'll feel better. We'll talk later." She was whispering so I couldn't tell if there was a hint of complaint or disappointment in her words. I heard her softly close the door and leave.

I was alone in the dark. Two hours ago I was a young businessman working out with his hot girlfriend. Now I was a lonely, pathetic loser, forgotten by the universe, someone who neither exists nor doesn't, succumbing to a migraine. The pain in my head was pricking more with every passing second, and the worst thing was that it wouldn't let me sleep. I was burying my head in the pillow, pulling the comforter over my head but nothing helped. I grabbed the sides of the bed with my two hands, squeezing my fists as if I was going to break the bed into pieces, but that didn't help either. After a while, as it happens with the worst migraine attacks, I started to punch the wall behind my bed. But my headache was so overwhelming, I didn't feel the pain in my hands. The next step was to get to the living room and throw everything on the floor but now that I'm a working man with a girlfriend, I don't have the luxury to mess up my own house like a rock star in a hotel room. I even have to ask Asli when I want to move two couches in my house, let alone mess it up.

When I closed my eyes, beams of light coming out of nowhere began to irritate me, projecting strange and absurd films onto my eyelids. These lights which could have been fun under normal circumstances were gnawing at my brain and making me go through incomparable torture. In this painful light show, a disco ball appeared and turned into a soccer ball, and then, through the play of lights, into Aslı's magnificent breasts, and the breasts merged into the elliptic ancient symbol I saw on the pen in my nightmare, and then all of these images were turning into rounded numbers like 0, 6, 8, 9 through to eternity. After that, the numbers came together to form a cowboy's lasso, and through incredible craftsmanship of special effects, the lasso turned into a microphone cable that a rock singer flipped around himself on a stage. Finally, all of these round figures joined into the letter "O." The letter hung there for a time, and then right back to the beginning: disco ball, soccer ball, Aslı's boobs, the ancient symbol, numbers . . .

As if the migraine wasn't already eating at my brain, now this light madness! Meanwhile, I assumed that trying to figure out their shapes and gather their meaning would exacerbate my migraine, but this surreal film fest playing inside my eyelids soothed the torment of my unrelenting sickness a little. It was as if I was fighting a migraine monster who slid into me and was pressing down on my being with these figures. But it didn't last long. As the light seeping through the blinds diminished so did the light of these films, and the migraine monster was getting back its strength. I groped my way to the kitchen in the dark without turning on the lights and took another Excedrin.

Half an hour later, I was sitting on the bed with my head between my hands, having realized the fact that another Excedrin was ineffective. The nausea triggered by the migraine was getting worse. As if it was a tangible lump, the headache made my head

heavier, my body bulkier. My temples were throbbing so hard as though two miniature hearts sprouted up at each side of my head and were pulsating.

Since the light show ended, I was looking for my cure in the pitch dark and silence. Any light or sound could have doubled my agony, and so it did! My phone rang with that terrible melody and the screen light started to flash in my room. Even though the light was not directed at my eyes, it was bouncing back from one wall to the other and expanded in the room and hit me straight into my eyes. I stood up and turned the phone off after I saw that it was Ashi calling me. She was probably doing her duty as a girlfriend and was going to ask me how I was doing. I couldn't blame her but she threw me right into lap of the migraine monster by doing that!

The sound and the light show on the little screen of the phone lasted only one or two seconds, but was effective instantly and made my headache unbearably worse. I was now in a fetal position lying on the bed, holding my head in my hands. Now it wasn't just my head, but almost all of my body was about to burst. First my bones were going to fall to pieces slowly, then those broken pieces of bone were going to leak out tearing up my skin, bleeding in streams all around my body. Then it would be my head's turn, my brain folds were going to separate like fault lines and my skull was going to split into two. This was the scenario passing through my mind. The worst part of it all was that, the fear of the sound of my skull aggravating the intensity of my headache was more dominant than my fear of my skull splitting into two. I was so helpless, I thought of hurting myself. I opened my eyes and looked around. My eyes searched for a sharp object.

I noticed the tip of the pen inside my journal that was staring towards me in the dark. I asked myself in a kind of joking seriousness if I could commit harakiri using the pen like a knife. Then it occurred to me that during my unendurable migraine attacks in

the course of the days after I lost my father, I would recover from this pain by writing my journal. One of the widely recognized methods of beating a migraine is to concentrate on a something completely different. If one can find an effective way to focus on a specific point, one can ward off the attack in short term. Personal methods vary; for some, it's eating, for some it's painting, and for some it's bouncing a ball against the wall. For others, jerking off can stop the attack. Years ago, right after my father's death, writing in my journal was the most effective method I could find for the ever intensifying migraine attacks. That's what I learned from my father.

The moment I realized that another pill or self-inflicted injury wasn't going to work but that by writing something down I might be able to relieve the pain, I straightened myself up with difficulty from the fetal position and reached out to the journal lying on the nightstand next to my bed. The pencil was left at the page where I had stopped writing, my usual pencil, the 0.5mm Tombow. I put the pencil on the paper without knowing what I'd write. I started to move the pencil when I decided the first words was going to be "my head" but the lead broke. The sound of breaking lead as thin as 0.5 mm managed to irritate me as much as the jarring sound of the chalk screeching on a blackboard. I threw my head back as if I had been electrocuted. I shook the pencil to see if it had extra pencil lead, it didn't. I checked the lead box in the drawer, it was empty. I picked the ballpoint pen from the drawer and started to write with it, but it didn't write. I tried the pen on another paper scribbling, I shook it, breathed upon it, no use. I stood up and took the pen from next to my home phone, sat on the bed and started to write. It didn't write either. And ballpoint pens are made to last. Indeed! And whenever one pen doesn't work, all the rest play dead as if they were all exposed to a fatal plague spreading fast. I had other pens, too. I looked around above the tables in my room and in the living room, but didn't

see any. My eyes now adjusted to darkness, I could see with the little light coming in from the outside. The pens had vanished into thin air. This is one of the unsolved mysteries about pens; they disappear, they always disappear, and they don't turn up in the most unexpected place. Once they disappear, they vanish into nothingness mysteriously like dead flies, without greeting the eye. Then I remembered the fridge magnet; a gift from the new pizza place: notepaper with a ballpoint pen attached. It didn't work either. The pen in my suit pocket! I ran to the closet and slid my hand into the pocket. First I felt a gluey wetness. I remember that when I looked at my hand, the ink stain on my palm looked like blood, and for a second I felt like someone who had just committed murder and was overwhelmed with incredible regret. That is another aspect of having migraine – it can lead to hallucinations. I took a deep breath when the color of the stain on my hand turned to blue and I realized that the pen had exploded in my jacket pocket.

Then I noticed that my nose was bleeding. I wiped it with a white napkin. I looked at the napkin. The blood stain looked like a Rorschach inkblot. I stared at it for some time. I thought “What does this shape evoke in me” and oddly, I noticed purple ink marks in the blood stain. I must have smeared the ink onto the napkin after I cleaned the ink in my pocket.

“I shouldn't be losing time pondering on this,” I thought to myself. My headache was increasing with every passing second. I needed to find a pen.

After a certain point, I lost my patience, I didn't just open the drawers, I took them out completely, turning them upside down to see if any pen would fall out. Pen or pencil, it didn't matter. I jumped at the sound of every falling pen and scribbled madly on the nearest piece of paper, and each time I saw that they didn't work I hurled them against the wall or broke them into two. A little later, I threw in the towel and crouched down.

At that moment of despair, among the stuff scattered around, I saw an old photograph of my father. I could see the tip of his fountain pen inside his shirt pocket. A thought balloon lit up above my head. "My father's fountain pen!" Ten seconds later, I was in the little room that we used as a storeroom. I removed the stuff on the wooden chest that stored father's belongings, pulled the chest towards me and opened it with difficulty. A copy of the first edition of my parents' books, old photographs, an ancient typewriter, a planet-shaped pencil sharpener, a tape player, a set of old headphones, watches, a VHS player, and many other things belonging to the past were stuffed into this chest. Hundreds of Ece Company journals were arranged at the bottom of the chest in a way that resembled an arsenal.

The thing I least liked among the objects in the chest was my father's pen. In fact I hated it. This hatred was justified. When I was little, my father almost never released his hold of it, he always wrote with this fountain pen. That rustling sound rising from the dance of paper and pen, which seemingly went on forever, was the background music of my childhood. Frankly, I was jealous of that pen like an older brother who gets jealous of his younger brother because he gets to spend more time with the father. I even recall that I hid that pen a couple of times when my father was not at home. Each time my father was flustered by having lost the pen but found it soon enough. After he noticed it was me hiding his pen, he started to keep it locked in a drawer, and I had to accept it like a brother whom I would never be able to get rid of.

My love/hate relationship with the pen turned into admiration years later as I looked at it now. Even though it had led a life of a prisoner stuffed into a chest with other paraphernalia, it looked as beautiful as it was the first day I saw it. It's obvious that it had been crafted with a genius design and hand made by skilled craftsmanship. Its sleek and

bright body is a hue between silver and gold. It reflects its surroundings like a magic mirror. The pen nib draws attention to its elegance and grace but, at the same time, it strikes fear like a Janissary sword. Finely engraved patterns noticed on a closer look are reminiscent of the symbols of ancient civilizations. This pattern is made up of small and dissimilar circles merged together to create a perfect ellipse. The same symbol is also engraved on the pen cap and stands out like an emblem. If I hadn't had the heart to break it or toss it far away when I was a child, it owes this to its beauty. I have no idea where my father found this pen but I'm sure it has a very interesting story.

The dawn-red colored ink pot on the classy pen base, if not as impressive as the pen, looks as eccentric as to be one of the most eye-catching objects in any antique shop. It also has the same symbol on it. The ink pot has a small mouth but a stout body. It looks like Aladdin's magic lamp. The first thing I noticed when I held the pen was its weight; I thought it would be tiring to write with it. Whether the pen worked was another question; no matter how beautiful it looks from the outside, inside it might be rusty, the nib might not be working, the ink tube might be choked up or its filling mechanism might be broken. It might not even write smoothly.

Even if the pen were working properly and writing perfectly, a writing exercise might not stop my headache right away or might not stop it at all. My preoccupation with this recipe to reduce my pain might have been a vain solution arising from desperation. And I couldn't remember a time when I could relieve a severe headache like this through writing, it worked better when the headache was just cropping up. But it was better to test the pen as soon as possible instead of dwelling upon these possibilities before the migraine monster once again seized my whole body.

I brought the silver pen base, the pen and ink pot to the desk at the corner of my study. I took a bunch of A4 sized papers from the drawer and laid them one on top of the other. It was possible that the pen was out of ink and I was not ready to go through another disappointment, so that's why I made sure and dipped the pen nib in the ink pot and filled it with ink by rotating the little handle that looked like a rolling pin. Filled with ink, the pen was even heavier. I wasn't holding it at a close to right angle but leaning it towards the paper. I started writing but it wasn't hard to see that after a couple of sentences my hand would get tired. I brushed that fear aside and began to think about my first word, my first sentence.

"My head hurts" I wrote.

Then I checked my handwriting, it looked nice, and I added "a lot." Now with only five words written, I was bored by this migraine topic. Let my head hurt and split into two, let my bones crack, there's no use writing about it and letting it branch out, I thought. I mulled over the sentence, rewound the day in my memory and started to write about what I experienced.

I was getting faster with every word. My handwriting was beautiful enough to outdo the mediocrity of my sentences. When I set to writing, the pen was getting lighter, it got to an angle close to right angle and then it was sliding over the paper like a skater on an ice rink. With every sentence, I was expressing myself better. Even though my headache was continuing with the same intensity, I managed to distract my attention from it a little bit. When it came to write about the goalkeeping experience from three or four hours ago, I became enthusiastic. Now when I take a peek at those passages, I'm amazed that I could remember that strange incident with so much detail and clarity. The fact is, that incident didn't escape my mind for a second. From the dream I had while dozing after

sex, to the migraine-attack eyelid films, that moment has always been chasing me and now with the help of this pen, it was ready to be unleashed from the dark dungeons of my mind.

When I was writing down on paper about the move in which I revived my childhood goalkeeper reflexes, I wasn't only reliving the sense of triumph of that moment but also feeling an odd sense of relief. The last sentences of that story turned out nicely as well: "While the ball was heading towards the boys, I noticed that the only person who was impressed by my plunge was the goalkeeper I was watching a moment ago. He stared at me, and I stared back at him. Now, both of us had our left knees ripped." A boy, a man, and that strange moment when they identify with each other. But I wasn't satisfied with the following part, the part where Aslı comes and breaks the spell by asking "What just happened?" and then ruining my moment saying "Well done!" . . . That wasn't a nice ending for my goalie story.

I assumed that I was looking for a concluding sentence but regrettably I was at the end of the page and there was no space for adding a new sentence. I turned the page and placed my pen on the left of two clean white pages that laid side by side. Amidst that whiteness, I realized that I was actually looking for an opening sentence, not a concluding one. These pages must be filled, I thought. And I dipped the pen into the ink pot, fed it with more ink and unintentionally wrote:

His name was Varol.

* * *

I looked at the sentence after writing it down, I didn't know why I wrote it. I didn't know the boy nor his name. Why he had to be named, I didn't know that either. Besides, I hadn't heard anyone call his name, so why did I suddenly think of the name "Varol"? More importantly, why had I started to talk about someone else, a boy I didn't know at all, in my own diary? These questions didn't have an answer. I just felt like it. It was like the improvised doodles I drew during the boring work meetings. After that sentence, my diary ceased to be a diary and transformed into Varol's story.

Varol's Gloves

His name was Varol. When he was four, he used to reply "a doctor" when asked "what will you be when you grow up?" He played with a soccer ball for the first time when he was four and a half years old. He changed his reply to "a soccer player" to the inevitable question when he was five. At six, he broke a metatarsal bone on his right foot when he was playing soccer in the parking lot. The doctor said "he has weak bones, so playing soccer is forbidden." And Varol couldn't answer the question "what will you be" anymore.

* * *

I paused after the first paragraph and looked at what I had written in the manner of a professional writer. In that passage, we were quickly introduced to Varol and his love for soccer. And I fired up the story by putting an obstacle in between him and his love. I didn't know what was going to take place later, all I knew was that the intensity of my

headache had diminished with my setting about the story, and that I was burning with a great desire to continue with it.

* * *

Varol watched his friends from a distance, all bitter. He wanted to play a lot but his parents were keeping an eye on him all the time and didn't allow him to play soccer. One day, one of the goalkeepers in one of the matches in the parking lot was injured and the kids called out for a substitute but no one volunteered. Varol had never played as a goalie before, he used to disdain of goalkeeping as being reserved to those who cannot play soccer. But at that moment he reflected quickly: Playing soccer was prohibited, but had the doctor put a ban on being a goalkeeper? Finding a loophole in his doctor's prescription, Varol raised his hand, walked over to the goal, ignoring the puzzled glances of his friends. It didn't take him long to get used to playing with his hands. When his mother passed by the field she got angry at him and exclaimed "Son, what are you doing!" Varol told her that he was a ball boy retrieving the ball for the players and his mother said "Be careful." Varol's basketball-enthusiast father got a little suspicious that Varol was hiding something but didn't say a word.

After a couple of matches, Varol's goalkeeping skills became evident. He made an effort that was not generally expected of average goalkeepers: he plunged onto the concrete at the expense of getting injured, he didn't hesitate to stretch out his hand to block the most dangerous shots. He would have bruises on his knees

and elbows after the matches, but the biggest injury of all was not being allowed to play so he didn't give a damn about these new bruises.

From one street to the next, one block to the other, from one school to the next, Varol's reputation as a goalkeeper got around in very short time, making him a legend. People would say "There is a goalie, he's just nine but he dives like Dasaev, covers the angle like Schumacher, saves side shots like Schmiechel." People came from neighborhoods all around just to watch him. He became a local celebrity in a short time. His father was proud of him now so he didn't stop Varol from playing soccer. His mother, on the other hand, was beating herself up for having assumed that her son was just a ball boy and now she was worried about him. She prayed every single day for him not to break a bone, and urged him to give up his dream, but Varol didn't intend to do so.

Varol held the ball first with his bare hands, then with his mother's old dishwashing gloves, and then he bought the most expensive goalie gloves with the money he saved from his allowance. They were Reusch. He wrote his own name with a marker on the gloves like a professional goalkeeper. He took good care of his gloves. He kept them in bed with him as he slept, carried them to the matches in a special bag and never lent them to anyone. The gloves got punctured in a few places but Varol never gave up on them. Sometimes, before going to bed, he would look at the punctures and speak to himself quietly, "This one is from the match we played against Birol's team, this one happened at Mert's penalty shootout, this one happened when I saved Özgür's toe-poke at the match we played against Şahin's team," taking pride in himself like a war veteran counting his battle scars.

His father was 1.90 m tall and his mother was 1.77 m tall, so it was almost certain that Varol was going to be tall as well. His father was so proud of his own height and was taking so much delight in his son's rapid growth that he leaned the child's back against the wall and marked a notch on the wall almost every day. His father was a Galatasaray fan, so he called his son "the future Simović" but Varol's idol was someone else completely different. In an episode of his favorite cartoon Captain Tsubasa, he saw a goalie named Muller who never let in a goal. Varol wanted to be like him: the only goalie in the world who is closing off the goal completely and who never concedes a goal.

At the age of thirteen, Varol joined the youth team of a professional club. While the club's coach contemplated how Varol would be an asset for the team in the future, the club's directors had already begun to speculate how much money this young talent would earn the club. Varol kept on working harder than anyone, he didn't fail to do exercises on his own after games. Instead of going home right after the training, he would watch the A team's training and would dream of the day he would play in the field with those stars.

The only person who was uncomfortable with this dream of his was his mother. She didn't like that her son was a goalie, nor that her husband kept measuring his height so often. She was alarmed by this goalie dream shared by the father and son. At every occasion, she insulted them about their dream. The father ignored this harsh attitude of hers, thinking that it was based on her fear of her son getting injured. Indeed, Varol continued to get injured.

Jumping and diving to catch even the most difficult ball, jumping into any collision, Varol managed to break her pinky finger a couple of times. His teeth

underwent the worst hardships. When he was only twelve or thirteen, in a match against some high school jerks, Varol broke three teeth from two different shots. He was ambitious, he would continue the match with broken teeth.

* * *

So, where would the story of this young goalie lead to? Varol overcame obstacles, he came closer to his dream, now he must face a last and very difficult obstacle. What could it be? Would it be his mother, who was obsessively protective as if she had a secret?

Or would some other goalies try to supplant him? I continued to write without thinking.

* * *

When Varol reached the age of sixteen, something happened. Actually, something didn't happen! He didn't get taller. His father who measured his son every day at first said "this is a phase," and then measured him once a week, and seeing that he kept making a notch in the same place, and that the notch got thicker, he started to measure him once a month. Soon, as there was no improvement, he eventually gave up. Varol was fixed at 1.66 m tall.

His mother looked more anxious than ever, but at the same time, she amplified the tension around the house with her biting comments like "if you get so obsessed with height and all, things will backlash; it's the work of God!" In the

meantime, Varol kept to his training schedule with might and main. When the regular training sessions finished at the club, he did his own jumping exercises in hopes that they might trigger him getting taller on his own. He drank a liter of milk and some fish oil every day to no avail. Varol didn't get any taller.

Varol couldn't perform well at the professional goal since he wasn't getting taller. In order to touch the crossbar, the young goalie needed to jump on the spot a few times, and then make a final leap with all of his strength, and in order to save the corner shots, he had to run two steps and then throw himself toward the post. Since he had to take few steps before diving, he had to guess which way to dive by looking at the striker's foot, and with every passing day, he was making worse guesses. After a time, his friends at the club started to tease him, calling him a "flying sack."

Varol was no longer able to show off his reflex, speed and success at covering the angle in the larger pitch, and his spirits were almost completely broken. When his coach made him the substitute and then the third goalkeeper, without waiting to be kicked out, he left the club broken and humbled. He took down the poster of Schmeichel in his room and replaced it with the poster of Campos, the shortest among the most famous goalies in the world, and got inspiration from him for a while but then took that down as well. He hid his goalie gloves in the wardrobe and retired from playing soccer.

Someone else was just as sorry about this situation as Varol, and that was his father. His father couldn't at first make heads or tails of his son remaining short. The son of Sky-high Necmi, as his friends called him, was 24 cm shorter than he, and besides, he was 11 cm shorter than his 1.77 m tall mother. How could that be?

If only his father had continued not being able to fathom why his son was so short, because when he did, Varol's family fell apart. It came out that Varol was not the son of Sky-high Necmi. Varol's biological father was a dwarf with whom her mother had a one-night stand.

His parents got separated. Varol went to live with his mother who was secretly blaming the surfacing of her fraud to Varol's fixation in becoming a goalkeeper, which is why even though she wanted to, she couldn't build a mother-son relationship with him. And Varol, in all his immaturity, blamed his short height to his mother's deviant drives, and he became a young man with issues.

He had relied so much on soccer that he had ignored school. Varol couldn't become a goalkeeper as his father had dreamed, and couldn't finish university as his mother had dreamed. Instead he found a job working for the municipality. After working as a ticket seller on buses, he landed on his feet when he became a bus driver. He became a senior driver at the age of forty, a family man with a wife and a kid. He must have been burdened by the trauma of his childhood since he now was hunchbacked in addition to his shortness. Nevertheless, he was successful at work and had enough savings to move to another house when he was forty-three. He rented a nice apartment in Bakırköy. The family moved in.

Moving was a huge hassle because he had filled his little childhood house with lots of stuff over the years. The moving company did all the packing. And after they carried the boxes and cluttered up the new place, it was time to open up the boxes and arrange their contents. Plates, pots, glasses, a wall clock, trinkets, photo albums, clothes, clothes, more clothes . . . As Varol and his wife took these out from the boxes and organized them, their six year old son Yaşar was busy scattering

them around. Varol could never make his son listen to him. Yaşar didn't have any respect for his short hunchbacked father.

When Yaşar opened a box to go through its contents and make a mess, he found Varol's goalie gloves. He assumed the gloves were his mother's dishwashing gloves so he went to his mother and asked "Ma, what are these?" His mother smiled and said "Those are your father's." At that instant, Varol looked what his son held in his hands. Varol's eyes shone with joy as if he had seen an old friend. He took the gloves from his son's hands with care. He looked at the right hand where he had written his name with a marker and smiled at the childish handwriting. He checked the palm of the left hand and saw the old punctures. He thought "This happened at Mert's penalty shootout, this one when I saved Özgür's toe-poke at the match we played against Şahin's team, and this one is from the match against Birol's team," and was puzzled that he could remember each puncture by a trace belonging to a so distant past.

His son Yaşar interrupted his trance by asking "What are they, daddy?" Varol told him "These are my goalkeeping gloves," and then corrected himself "were." Yaşar asked "What are they for?" Varol put on his gloves, "When you wear them, no matter how hard the ball comes, your hands don't hurt." Then he bound the wrist closures, taking the ready position and added "They also help you grasp the ball." Suddenly Varol became aware that he gave himself too much free rein to a fancy and quickly took off his gloves. He was about to toss them aside when he looked at his awfully quiet son and saw in his eyes something that he had never seen before. Yaşar's eyes were glimmering as he looked admiringly at his father. Yaşar's mother witnessed that moment too and having set the vacuum aside,

she watched the father and son with a big smile on her face. Varol wanted to hold on to that expression of admiration in his son's eyes so he took the gloves and said "Come on, I'll show you." He got out the rubber ball from the box, took his son by the hand and headed for the door. Yaşar's mother was about to say "Be careful, what if the ball rolls onto the road . . ." when Varol said "Don't worry, I'll take him somewhere safe."

It occurred to Varol that his new house was very close to the training ground of his old club. He was planning to continue charming his son by showing him some of his old moves at one of the smaller fields there. The same day, the veterans were playing at the large training ground; old stars with whom Varol once dreamed of playing when he didn't know he would remain short. There were at most thirty people in the stands. When he saw his old idols, Varol thought of watching them at first, but his son had no idea who these white haired old men were, he wanted to watch his father. So Varol showed him a few moves on the small field. He got few cramps, but soon warmed up. He bounced the ball at the goal post and then caught the ball with his old elegance and brisk. Yaşar was tickled pink. His father was no longer someone who only went work and then came back home. His father was now flying like the goalies he saw on TV, or better, like the superheroes in the comics he read. After a while, Varol included Yaşar in the game. Father and son took turns kicking penalty shootouts. Yaşar was having the happiest day of his life, and so was Varol. Just then, something miraculous took place.

The veteran goalie in the larger field got injured. He didn't have a substitute. The team's captain, Cüneyt, asked the staff on duty there, then he turned to the stands and asked loudly "Is there anyone who can play goalie?" Varol didn't hear

this question since he was saying to Yaşar “Come on pal, let's go home, your mother will start to wonder,” but Yaşar was facing the field and heard it. In his childish voice he yelled “Yes, here!”

One minute later, Varol found himself playing goalie in the veteran players' match.

Varol played the game of his lifetime. During the sixty minutes he was on the field, he didn't let in a single goal. When the match was over, the team's captain Cüneyt congratulated Varol. And the guy who organized the matches came and took his phone number.

In the newspapers next day, there was a short news piece about the veteran players' match and Varol's name was mentioned as the best player on field. One of the newspapers checked up on his past and mentioned that he had been “a goalie in the youth league.”

After that day, Varol took part in other matches. He realized something very important. He was now even closer to his dreams than back at the time when he was in his best form because in the second half of his life, he came to understand exactly what his dream was about. It had never been about being a tall, professional, well-known goalie! His dream was to never let in a goal like the character Müller he had watched in the cartoon Captain Tsubasa.

Varol was short, old and a little humpbacked, and no one knew him, but there were some matches in which he indeed didn't let in a goal.

* * *

The story was finished. I glanced at the pages. At the outset, the beauty of my handwriting stood out. I had the look of pride in my eyes of a child who was looking at the watercolor painting he did in kindergarten. I noticed something more important at that moment: my headache was gone.

Miracle

March 25, 2009

I woke to the sound of my phone alarm at the usual time. I performed my morning rituals to the letter. There was no problem until I reached the subway station. The escalator I used everyday was out of order, I waited for the sensor for a couple of seconds and then ended up walking down on foot. To my rotten luck, the escalator to the platform was out of order too, so I descended on foot as well, huffing and puffing. Right when I reached the platform, the escalator started to work, what a bad joke! My second stroke of bad luck was that since I had lost more time than expected with these two minor misfortunes, my usual train had arrived at the platform while I was still descending the stairs. I saw it as the doors were closing. I had to wait for the next train. Because of this lost time, I was going to have to be faster after I get off the train.

Thank God, the escalator on the platform where I got off the train was working and I partially made up for the lost time by walking faster up two sets of escalators and then on the walkalator. I bought a paper from the corner newsstand (I had the change arranged in my pocket beforehand and thereby earned at least ten seconds there) and quickly walked into the company building. Even though I tried to compensate for missing the train by rushing, I was at least fifteen minutes late. My office phone was ringing when I entered my cubicle. Who knows how long it had been ringing for; nobody had answered

it. It was such bad luck; during those fifteen minutes, my boss Mr. İsmet wanted to get my opinion on something (most probably to refute it) and when he couldn't reach me, he delayed making a decision; meanwhile, they calculated that the company lost who-knows-how-many thousands of liras because of not having made a decision right then.

Up until that day, I had a clean record on being punctual, so my boss didn't pull an angry face at me, but still, I had a guilty conscience. To compensate for my fault, I took on extra little errands that I don't normally do, running in between the cubicles, helping the newbies. In short, I showed off to the boss whom I felt was watching me.

After having been on my feet for about an hour extra, I took coffee from the coffee machine and went back to my routine in my cubicle. I started reading the newspaper after scanning the headlines. When I got to the sports page, the phone rang and as I reached out to the phone in a hurry, I knocked over my mug. Luckily, there was very little coffee left but the newspaper was ruined anyway. I took charge about the situation on the phone as the coffee was diffusing in the paper and forming a no-sugar-and-a-little-milk map of coffee continents. This was all a result of being fifteen minute late in the morning; whenever I'm late, everything goes downhill, so it shouldn't be ever repeated!

The newspaper was ruined and the no-sugar-and-a-little-milk coffee river was slowly sliding down the paper, creating a map of milky coffee. I picked up a bunch of tissues from the tissue box. I was about to fold the newspaper and throw it in the bin. I watched the progress of the coffee river. It kept advancing slowly and then it stopped.

On the spot where the coffee river stopped, there was a short news piece next to the main story.

I couldn't believe my eyes as I read it.

DISAPPOINTING LOW SCORES IN SOCCER VETERANS' MATCH

A special match between the former players of Galatasaray and Beşiktaş saw very few goals as opposed to previous veterans' matches. The final score was 2-1. Cüneyt from Galatasaray and Metin from Beşiktaş played spectacularly throughout the match. When Galatasaray's goalkeeper, Hayrettin, got injured, Varol Batur joined the match from off-field and carried Galatasaray to victory with his performance. It was revealed that this surprise player was a former licensed goalie who had briefly played for the Galatasaray Youth Team.

My jaw dropped. I don't know how many times I re-read these lines. I cut out the article and put it away from the milky coffee river. As I looked at the clipping, the questions in my head were like a hurricane, breaking out into tornadoes in my skull. What kind of a coincidence was this? Can it just be an incredible coincidence? How could I have been aware of Varol's match? Similar questions rolled around in my head.