The Sultan's Seal

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Extract

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Tarabya
Chamyeri
Middle Village
Bosphorus Strait
Nishantashou
Yildiz Palace
Beshiktash
Dolmabahche Palace
Grande Rue de Pera
British Embassy
Pera
The Golden Horn
Galata
Topkapi Palace
Grand Bazaar
The Old City
Sea of Marmara

1

Dark Eyes

A dozen lamps flicker across the water, moving up the strait in silence, the oarsmen invisible. A dry scuffling noise drifts from shore, the breeze too indolent to carry it very far. Wild dogs bark and crash through the bushes. There are snarls, a short yelp, then silence again.

As the boats cross the light of the full moon spilled across the Bosphorus, the fishermen take their places, actors on a luminous stage. In the stern of each boat a man rows, the other stands, holding a conical net attached to a pole. Attracted to the light of the oil lamps hanging from the bows, zargana fish crowd the surface. In a single motion the fishermen slip their nets through the black liquid, then raise them high above their heads. The sound of nets breaking the skin of water is so soft that it cannot be heard from shore.

There is a splash. The closest fisherman to land turns his head and listens, but hears nothing more. He casts his eye over the rocks and trees bleached by moonlight, what is beneath or behind them

lost in shadow. He notices a circle of ripples moving outward from the shore and frowns, then points and mutters something to his brother, who is rowing. The other man shrugs and applies himself to the oars. It is so quiet that the fisherman imagines he can hear the scrabble of crabs across the stone point at nearby Albanian Village, where the current is so fierce that the crabs cannot proceed up the strait through the water. Centuries of crabs taking this shortcut have worn a path through the stone. Just an animal, he thinks, and tries to banish from his mind the stories he has heard about djinns and demons abroad in the night.



KAMIL PASHA GROPES on the bedside table for a match to light the lamp. He is magistrate for Istanbul's Beyoglu Lower Court that includes Pera, where the Europeans have their embassies and business houses, and Galata, the crowded Jewish quarter below Pera, a warren of narrow streets that wind and coil down the steep hill to the waters of the Bosphorus and its inlet, the Golden Horn. The pounding on his door has given way to loud voices in the entry hall. Just then, his manservant Yakup enters with a lit lamp in hand. Enormous shadows sail across the high ceiling.

"My apologies for waking you, bey. The headman of Middle Village says he has come on an urgent matter. He insists on speaking directly to you."

Squinting against the light, Kamil pushes back the satin quilt and stands. His foot slides on the magazine that has slipped off his bed. Sleep finds Kamil only when he loses himself in reading, in this case in the *Gardener's Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette,* several years out of date. It is now June in the Rumi year 1302, or 1886 by the Christian calendar. He had fallen asleep over the German botanist H. G. Reichenbach's reclassification of *Acineta hrubyana,* a many-flowered orchid recently discovered in South America with stiff, unarticulated brown lips. Kamil has slept uneasily. In his dreams, an

undertow of small, leather-skinned men, faceless, agile, pulled him down. Yakup, ever vigilant as are all residents of the wooden houses of Istanbul, must have come in and extinguished the oil lamp.

Kamil splashes water on his face from the basin on the marble washstand to dispel the numbing hollowness he always feels in those gray moments between waking and the first soothing intricacies of his daily routine—shaving, wrapping his fingers around the calm heat of a steaming glass of tea, turning the pages of the newspaper. The mirror shows a lean, tired face, thin lips pressed in a grim line beneath his mustache, eyes obscured by unruly black hair. A single bolt of gray arcs above his left brow. He quickly rubs pomade in his wet hands and slicks down his hair, which springs up again immediately. With an exasperated sigh, he turns to Yakup, who is holding out his trousers. Yakup is a thin, dour man in his thirties with high cheekbones and a long face. He waits with the preoccupied look of a lifelong servant no longer concerned with the formalities of rank, but simply intent on his task.

"I wonder what has happened," Kamil mutters. Believing himself to be a man of even temperament, he is wary of the surfeit of emotion that would cause someone to pound on his door in the middle of the night.

Yakup helps him into a white shirt, stambouline frock coat, and yellow kid boots, intricately tooled. Made by a master bootmaker in Aleppo according to a method passed only from father to son, they are as soft as the skin at a woman's wrist, but indestructible and impervious to both knife and water. Etched in the leather inside the shaft is a grid of tiny talismanic symbols that call on powers beyond those of the bootmaker to strengthen the wearer. Kamil is a tall man, slim and well muscled, but his slightly rounded shoulders and upward-tilting chin convey the impression that he is bending forward to inquire about something, a man lost in thought, bowed over old manuscripts. When he looks up, his moss green eyes contradict this otherworldliness with their force and clarity. He is a man who controls his environment by comprehending it. As a result, he is uninter-

ested in things beyond his control and exasperated by that beyond his comprehension. Fate belongs in the first category. Family, friends, women inhabit the second. His hands are in constant motion, fingertips slipping over a short string of amber beads he keeps in his right-hand pocket. The amber feels warm, alive to his touch; he senses a pulse, his own, magnified. The fingers of his father and grandfather before him have worn tiny flat planes into the surface of the beads. When his fingers encounter these platforms, Kamil feels part of a mortal chain that settles him in his own time and place. It explains nothing, but it imparts a sense of peace.

He lives frugally, with a minimum of servants, in a small, ocher-colored wood-frame villa that he inherited from his mother. The house is set within a garden, shaded by old umbrella pines, cypress, and mulberry trees, on the Bosphorus shore above Beshiktash. The house had been part of his mother's dowry. She spent her last years there with her two children, preferring the quiet waterfront community, where everyone knew her and had known her parents and grandparents, to the palatial mansion on a hill overlooking the Golden Horn from which his father, Alp Pasha, minister of gendarmes, had governed the province of Istanbul.

Kamil kept the boatman who for years had ferried his father on weekends to his wife's villa. Every morning, Bedri the boatman's knotted arms row Kamil down the strait to the Tophane quay, where a phaeton waits to carry him up the steep hill to the courthouse on the Grande Rue de Pera. On days when his docket is light, Kamil walks from the quay instead, delighted to be outdoors. After his mother died, Kamil had a small winter garden added to the back of the house. As magistrate, he has less time now for botanical expeditions that require weeks of travel, so he tends and studies the orchids he has gathered at his home from many corners of the empire.

Taking a deep breath, Kamil strides down the wide staircase to the entry hall. Waiting impatiently inside the circle of lamps held by Kamil's servants is a short, red-faced man in traditional baggy trousers, his vest askew and one end of his cummerbund coming undone. His red

felt cap is wound in a striped cloth. He shifts his weight restlessly from one sturdy leg to the other. Upon seeing Kamil, he bows deeply, touching the fingers of his right hand against his lips and then his forehead, in a sign of respect. Kamil wonders what has happened to agitate the headman to such an extent. A murder would have been brought to the attention of the district police first, not to the magistrate at his home in the middle of the night.

"Peace upon you. What brings you here at this early hour?"

"Upon you be peace, Pasha bey," the headman stutters, his round face reddening further. "I am Ibrahim, headman of Middle Village. Please excuse my intrusion, but a matter has come up in my district that I think you must be told about."

He pauses, his eyes darting into the shadows behind the lamps. Kamil signals to the servants to leave the lamps and withdraw.

"What is it?"

"Efendi, we found a body in the water by the Middle Village mosque."

"Who found it?"

"The garbage scavengers." These semiofficial collectors begin just before dawn to gather the refuse washed up overnight on the shores and streets of the city. After extracting useful items for themselves, they load the rest onto barges to be dumped into the Sea of Marmara, where the current disperses it.

Kamil turns his head toward the sitting room door and the window beyond. A thin wash of light silhouettes the trees in his garden. He sighs and turns back to the headman.

"Why not report this to the police chief of your district?"

Kamil shares jurisdiction with two other magistrates for the European side of the Bosphorus all the way from the grand mosques and covered markets in the south, where the strait loses itself in the Sea of Marmara, to the frieze of villages and stately summer villas extending along its wooded hills north to the Black Sea. Middle Village is little more than half an hour's ride north of Kamil's villa.

"Because it is a woman, bey," the headman stutters.

"A woman?"

"A foreign woman, bey. We believe Frankish."

A European woman. Kamil feels a chill of apprehension. "How do you know she is Frankish?"

"She has a gold cross on a chain around her neck."

Kamil snaps impatiently, "She could just as easily be one of our Christian subjects."

The headman looks at the marble-tiled floor. "She has yellow hair. And a heavy gold bracelet. And something else. . . ."

Kamil sighs. "Why do I have to drag everything out of you? Can't you simply tell me everything you saw?"

The headman looks up helplessly. "A pendant, bey, that opens like a walnut." He cups his hands together, then parts them. "Inside one shell is the tughra of the padishah, may Allah support and protect him." He reaches one cupped hand forward, then the other. "Inside the other are odd characters. We thought it might be Frankish writing."

Kamil frowns. He can't think of any explanation for the sultan's personal signature to be on a piece of jewelry around the neck of a woman outside the sultan's household, much less one with European writing. It makes no sense. The tughra, the sultan's seal, is affixed on special possessions of the imperial household and onto official documents by a special workshop on the palace grounds. The tughranüvis, royal scribes charged with creating the intricate and elegant calligraphic design of the royal name, and the royal engravers are never allowed to leave the palace for fear that they could be kidnapped and forced to affix the signature to counterfeit items. Since the empire is so large and such forgeries might go unnoticed, the only solution is to keep the sultan's "hands" close by his sleeves. Kamil has heard that these scribes carry a fast-acting poison on their person as a further precaution. Only three people hold the royal seal used for documents: the sultan himself, the grand vizier, and the head of the harem household, a trusted old woman who grew up in the palace. Royal objects made of gold, silver, and other valuable materials are engraved with the tughra only on their orders.

The headman's roughened fingers clasp and unclasp as he waits before Kamil, head bowed, eyes shifting anxiously across the marble floor. Noticing his increased agitation, Kamil realizes the headman thinks Kamil blames him for awakening him. He eases the frown from his face. Kamil remembers that even law-abiding citizens have reason to fear the power of the police and courts. The headman is also a craftsman responsible to his guild master for his behavior and afraid of bringing official wrath down on his fellows. He probably brought the matter to the magistrate's attention instead of the Middle Village police because of the gold found on the body. The local police might have stripped the body of valuables as efficiently as the garbage scavengers and he might be held responsible. But the sultan's seal and the fact that the woman might be European also indicated that the matter would fall under Kamil's jurisdiction of Pera. While the sultan had given foreigners and non-Muslim minorities of Pera the right to administer their own district and to judge cases related to personal matters, like inheritance and divorce, the population still relied on the palace for protection and the state courts for justice in other matters.

"You did well bringing this to my attention immediately."

The headman's face relaxes and he bows low. "Long life to the padishah. May Allah protect him."

Kamil signals to Yakup, standing just outside the hall door. "Ready a horse and send messengers to Michel Efendi and the police chief responsible for Middle Village district. Ask them to meet me at the mosque and to keep away idlers until I arrive, especially the garbage scavengers. They'll pick her clean. I want to see that pendant. The police are to make sure nothing is disturbed." He adds in a low voice so that the headman does not hear, "And the chief is to make sure the police disturb nothing."

"I sent a messenger to the local police, bey, and told my two sons to stay with the body until I returned."

This headman has healthy ears, Kamil notes.

"You are to be commended, Headman Ibrahim. I will make sure

the proper officials are notified of your diligence and desire to please the state." He will ask his assistant to send a commendation to the headman's guild boss.

"I rode here on a neighbor's horse, Pasha bey, so I can show you the way."



THE VILLAGERS HAVE pulled the body out of the water and onto the quay and covered it with a worn sheet. Kamil pulls back the cloth, looking at the face first, out of respect and a certain reluctance. In the year since he was appointed magistrate, most of his cases have involved theft or violence, few death. Her hair is short, an unusual style, pale and fine as undyed silk. Strands of it cradle her face. A cool breeze strokes his neck, but he can feel the heat crouching in the air. Already he is sweating. After a few moments, he pulls the sheet away slowly, exposing her naked skin to the sky and the burning eyes of the men around her. The sharp ammonia stench of human excrement from the rocks at the base of the quay makes him jerk his nose away and step sideways toward the corpse's legs.

He can no longer avoid looking at her body. She is short and slender, like a boy, with small breasts. Her skin is stark white, except for a dark triangle at her pubis. Crabs have begun their work on her fingers and toes. She wears no rings, but a heavy gold bracelet weighs down her left wrist. The currents have cooled her body, so it has not yet begun to change into a corpse; it is still a dead woman. Later, she will become a case, an intellectual puzzle. But now he feels only pity and the shapeless anxiety death always awakens in his body. She is not pretty in the accepted sense; her face is too long and narrow, her features too sharp, with wide, thick lips. Perhaps the face in motion might have been attractive, he muses. But now her face has the cool, dispassionate remove of death, the muscles neither relaxed nor engaged in emotion, her skin an empty tent stretched over her bones.

A gold cross hangs from a short chain around her neck. It is

remarkable that the cross has not come off during the body's tumultuous ride through the currents, he thinks. Perhaps the body has not come far.

He bends closer to examine the necklace. The cross is wide and showy, of beaten gold, decorated with etched roses whose outlines have been filled in with red enamel, now cracked. The metal is twisted where the chain passes through, as if it had snagged on something or someone had tried to pull it off. He lifts the cross with the tip of his finger. Hidden beneath it, in the deep hollow of the woman's throat, is a round silver pendant, simple but beautifully designed. A thin line bisects it.

He leans closer to the dead woman's neck. A damp, mineral cold seems to rise from the body, or perhaps it is his own face that has become clammy. He looks up into the glare of the strait to steel himself. Drawing a deep breath, he returns his attention to the pendant. He inserts his thumbnail and pries the halves apart, angles them so that they catch the morning sun, and peers inside. A tiny recessed lock that had held the halves together is broken. The inner surface is engraved with a tughra on the top half and, on the bottom, strange markings—as if a child had tried to draw a picture using only short, straight lines—unlike any European language he has seen.

He lets the cross and pendant fall back onto the woman's neck and turns over her wrist to examine the bracelet. It too is unusual; as wide as his hand, it is woven of thin filaments of red and white gold in a checkerboard pattern. The bracelet fits tightly around her wrist, held in place by a slim metal post inserted into interlaced channels.

The crowd of locals jostling to see has increased; it is time to move. He gestures to one of the policemen.

"Cover the body and bring it to the hamam."

The policeman bows, pressing his fist solemnly against his forehead, then against his heart.

Kamil looks around for the headman, who is standing proudly in a knot of local men, answering questions. The two strapping young men flanking him must be his sons, he thinks with a twinge of regret.

Kamil has not married, despite his parents' and now his sister Feride's introductions to any number of suitable young women from good families. He would love to have a grown son or daughter, but the emotional messiness and demands on his time he imagines would be made by a wife and young children repel him.

"Where was the body found?"

The headman leads him down a short flight of steps to a narrow rocky cove behind the mosque. The rococo mosque stands on the tip of a spit of rock that stretches out into the Bosphorus like a hook, making a natural barrier. It looks like an ornate wedding cake of white marble on an outstretched hand. On its southern side is a small open square where men come to sit and drink tea under the plane trees, watching the fishermen make their boats ready and mend their nets.

Kamil picks his way, stepping carefully to avoid the night's effluvium. He squats at the water's edge. Opaque in the early light, it sloshes heavily against the rocks as if weary.

"This is where they found her. There's a whirlpool that washes things up. My sons are fishermen and were in the square cleaning their boat when they heard a commotion. They ran over and stopped the scavengers from taking the bracelet."

"Your sons are admirable young men, Ibrahim Efendi."

The headman bows his head, suppressing a smile. "Thank you. I'm proud of my sons."

"Did the scavengers take anything else?"

"Not that I know of."

"I'd like to speak with your sons."

Kamil questions them. The younger boy, his mustache still only a soft shadow above his lip, answers so earnestly that his words pile up one on another and the magistrate is forced to ask him to repeat. The body had been caught on a rocky protrusion and the young men happened upon the scavengers just as they finished pulling it onto the shore. They had called their fellow fishermen over and together they kept the scavengers from looting the body while the younger brother ran to fetch his father. The men had no idea who the woman was.

This did not surprise Kamil, since the only women whose faces these men were likely to have seen were their own relations or women of easy virtue. While the Christian and Jewish subjects of the sultan did not always veil their faces, they were nevertheless modest and did not display themselves to strangers in the streets unnecessarily. Kamil sends the eager young man to find the village midwife. He will need her help to examine the body. From his elder brother, Kamil learns that the fishermen had heard strange noises coming from shore the night before, the barking of wild dogs and a splash.

The men place the body on a board that only moments before had carried loaves bound for the bakery ovens, drape it with the sheet, and carry it up a narrow dirt alley between the overhanging roofs of wooden houses. Their feet stir up white puffs as they pass. Soon the householders will emerge for their morning chores and sprinkle water on the streets to lay the dust. Pigeons and doves murmur behind the high garden walls.

The hamam is a square stone building topped by a large round dome. Since it is early, the fires that heat the pipes under the floor have not yet been stoked, and water does not yet flow into the basins set into the wall around the room. The gray marble rooms are cool and dry. The men file through a series of small echoing antechambers until they reach the large central room beneath the dome. When the hamam is in use, bathers soak in this room in cascades of hot water brimming from marble basins in a haze of steam. Kamil directs the men to lay the body on the marble belly stone, the round, raised massage platform dominating the center of the room, and to light the lamps.

"Good morning." Michel Sevy, the police surgeon, appears behind Kamil, startling him.

"I didn't expect you so soon."

Kamil had requested the young Jewish surgeon's assistance on this case, as on others, not just for his medical knowledge, but for his skill in documenting the telling details of a crime scene in his notes and sketches. Still, Kamil finds Michel's habit of appearing at his

elbow, seemingly out of nowhere, vaguely disquieting, as though it were not in his power to command Michel. Rather, the surgeon arrives as a djinn might, stealthily and unpredictably.

"You must have galloped the entire way from Galata," observes Kamil dryly. Michel's heavyset face and thick neck are red from exertion. His hair and mustache are the color of wet sand and his large, doleful eyes an indeterminate hazel. They roam the room slowly as he takes off his outer robe and hands it to the policeman by the door.

Kamil reflects that Michel reminds him of the brown spiders in the northeast mountains. The spiders were the size of a fist, but their coloring perfectly camouflaged them in the low, sere brush, so that travelers did not see them until they were underfoot. They were fast and, when they ran, let out high-pitched squeals, like babies. He had seen a man die after being surprised and bitten by such a spider. Usually, Michel's penchant for colorful dress draws attention to him that his person does not, but when pursuing criminals into their neighborhood dens, Kamil has seen Michel in dun-colored pants and robe that render him all but invisible.

Today Michel is wearing baggy blue shalwar trousers under a red-striped robe held in place by a wide belt of yellow cloth. His black leather shoes make no sound as he walks across the marble floor toward the belly stone. He moves with the careful deliberation of a wrestler.

"I was curious. The messenger gave me only half a story. Something about a drowned foreign princess."

His smile fades as he looks down at the dead woman.

"Besides," he continues, looking more serious, "this is partly a Jewish neighborhood, so I thought I could be of some assistance."

Despite Michel's abruptness, Kamil appreciates his direct answers, so different from the usual polite circumlocutions with which conversations are initiated. He finds that people often are afraid to tell him what they know, in case they are wrong. They also are afraid to say that they don't know something. His teachers at

Cambridge University, where he had studied law and criminal procedure for a year, assumed that when questioned, a person would answer with either truth or falsehood. They had no concept of Oriental politeness that avoids the shame of ignorance and shies away from the brutal directness of truth, and that encourages invention and circumlocution as the highest markers of ethical behavior.

Accuracy in a subordinate means sacrificing the buffer of respectful indirectness and obfuscation of problems that would have spared his superior from worry. But Kamil, laboring since his youth under the heavy mantle of his father's status, is only too happy to shrug it off.



"I HAVE the tools."

Michel pulls a leather-wrapped kit from his belt and places it on the belly stone, at the head of the corpse. He takes a folder of thick blank paper from a saddlebag, and a narrow lacquered box from which he extracts a pen and several sticks of fine charcoal.

"Ready."

"We'll wait for the midwife. In the meantime, go to the street and see what you can learn. Was anyone traveling last night or out on a boat and did they see or hear anything? The fishermen mentioned barking dogs. Did anyone notice an unknown woman in the vicinity? Also, send two policemen along the shore north of here. Her clothes are missing and there may be some signs of a struggle. Perhaps someone heard something in one of the other villages near the shore. Have them check in the coffeehouses. That's always the best way to learn anything. On your way out, clear the room of onlookers. Have them leave the lamps."

Michel does as he is told and then is gone, leaving the door ajar.

A few moments later a woman in a frayed cloak appears in the doorway just inside the circle of light. Her head and shoulders are draped in a brown shawl. Slipping off her outer shoes, she pads softly

across the marble on leather socks. She removes her cloak and shawl with swift, practiced motions, folds them neatly, and drapes them over a nearby basin. Underneath, she wears a striped robe over wide trousers and a kerchief tied around her graying hair.

"Are you the midwife of Middle Village?"

"Yes, my name is Amalia." She averts her face modestly, but alert eyes sweep the room. Seeing the body on the marble slab, she comes forward.

"Poor woman." She smoothes the hair gently away from the dead woman's face.

"Is this as she was found?" She moves to the body and begins examining it. She is used to being in command of a situation and seems oblivious that she is sharing this activity with a magistrate.

"Yes. We need to know if she has been tampered with and anything else you can tell us. I will wait over here."

He withdraws to the outer shadows and waits at a discreet distance, but where he can still see what she is doing.

The midwife's practiced hands probe the body of the dead woman.

"A woman in her twenties, I would say. Not a virgin. She has not previously given birth; there are no signs of stretching."

Kamil frowns. "Perhaps she killed herself over the loss of her honor and threw herself into the Bosphorus. She wouldn't be the first girl to do so. Some of the Franks are as fastidious in their expectations of women as we are. If she is unmarried, it could ruin her."

"Possible, I suppose." Amalia moves her fingers over the dead woman's face and pulls up her eyelids.

"Dark eyes." She bends closer and then looks up abruptly. "Look at this, Magistrate bey. The eyes are blue, but the pupils are too large. There is only a small rim of blue visible. Perhaps she was drugged."

Kamil steps forward and looks down at the woman's eyes.

"What could cause the pupils to expand like that?"

"Apoplexy, but she's far too young for a disease like that." She thinks for a moment. "Many years ago, an old uncle in my family died

of opium poisoning. He had such eyes. At the end, he was a bone with huge eyes, black like cups of coffee."

Kamil feels chilled and plunges his hands into his pockets.

"Opium poisoning?"

She looks at him curiously, alert to a change in the quality of his voice. "Yes, but I don't think that can be the case here." She points at the body. "She's too healthy. Opium addicts stop eating and taking care of themselves."

"But maybe she just started smoking opium. Maybe it's not that far advanced."

"Then her eyes wouldn't be dilated. That happens only at the end."

"At the end," Kamil repeats in a low voice. Abruptly, he walks over to one of the basins against the wall. He turns the spigot handle, releasing a gush of water. He quickly turns it back, but not before wetting his sleeve.

Amalia watches him carefully and reaches her own conclusions. "If there is anything—" she begins, but Kamil cuts her off.

"So if it's not apoplexy or opium, may Allah protect us, what else can it be?"

"There's one other possibility," she says slowly, thinking her way toward the answer. "Tube flower."

"Tube flower? Isn't that for colds?" Kamil has a vague childhood memory of inhaling steam from a cup of viscous yellow liquid to quell a cough.

"Yes, it's used as a cough medicine. The herbalists in the Egyptian Spice Bazaar sell it. But I've heard that drinking it makes people see and hear things that aren't there, and can even cause death if it's strong enough."

Kamil is surprised. "Why on earth would they sell something like that in the bazaar?"

The midwife shakes her head at the ignorance of men. "You're not supposed to drink it, just inhale or smoke it. You'd be surprised how many things in an ordinary household can cause death."

"That would make our job endless."

"It shows that people are not evil," she responds, "and can resist temptation. Believe me, every house in this village has a motive for murder. All you need is a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law under the same roof. It's a wonder tube flowers aren't more popular." She turns before Kamil can see the smile flit across her face.

Her face is serious again when she bends down and picks up the dead woman's hand. She examines the palms and fingers, looks at the intricate clasp of the gold bracelet. The limbs move reluctantly. Rigor mortis is finishing what the crabs left undone.

"A lady. These hands have never worked the fields, scrubbed laundry, or labored in a kitchen. The nails are perfectly shaped, not cut straight across like those of women who must work in their households. They're not torn, as they might be from a struggle. Indeed I see no marks on her that indicate she struggled. The skin is unmarked except for the effects of its passage through the strait."

She steps back and looks at the body.

"Her hair is short. I don't know the meaning of that. Among some minorities, women cut their braids when they marry. But there's no wedding ring and no mark on her finger where it would have been."

She turns her head toward him.

"She doesn't appear to have been dead very long. The water has done little. I've seen fishermen and young boys who drowned in the Bosphorus and washed up in Middle Village. This young woman didn't come very far."

Kamil shifts restlessly. He scans the room in vain for Michel's bundle, where he might find paper and ink to take notes. It was a mistake to send him out before the midwife's arrival.

"Please continue. So you believe she drowned."

She pulls at the dead woman's shoulders to turn the body. Kamil helps her. The cold, clammy texture and unnatural firmness of dead flesh shocks and disgusts him, as it always does.

What is life, he wonders, when death can claim so much of what we are for itself? Here is the woman, whole, yet where is she who had thought, eaten, and perhaps laughed or wept the day before?

At such moments, he wishes intensely that he could believe in the afterlife promised in Islam, the clear rivers and unending companionship. But he had not been able to believe in his youth, and now he believes in a future of science and progress, which is inevitable and eternal, but does not include him beyond his life span. A belief of little comfort to the weak in their flimsy barques, or to the strong when the unforeseen upsets the course upon which they have set their ships. Kamil has known both kinds of men and the immovable anchors of faith that give them the illusion of a steady harbor. They do not understand that they are still at sea and that the danger has not passed. Faith is an anchor in a bottomless sea.

The midwife instructs Kamil to prop the body on its side. When she pulls down on the jaw, a stream of dark water spills from the mouth. She pulls the head forward and pumps the body's arm. A pink froth bubbles at the lips.

"Drowned. If she were already dead when she entered the water, she would not have breathed water into her lungs."

They let the body slide back onto the marble. Kamil is grateful to let go. His hands are clammy and he resists the temptation to thrust them into his pockets to warm them.

The midwife points to a large mole on the dead woman's right shoulder. "That might help to identify her."

She stands back, waiting for further instructions.

"Thank you. You've been most helpful and highly observant."

She smiles thinly. He muses that this simple village midwife has more scientific acumen than many educated bureaucrats of his acquaintance. It's a simple matter of reading the given evidence for data, not conjecturing on the basis of possible hypotheses.

Popular fears can fatten fatally on the thinnest gruel, especially in times of insecurity. Like the present. The imperial treasury taken over by European powers as a result of the empire's debts, wars on many fronts, and factions battling over what kind of government the empire should have—a parliament or undiluted power in the hands of the sultan. In every direction, the empire's provinces are being clawed

away by nationalists supported by Europe and Russia. The streets of Istanbul teem with refugees. Kamil doubts whether even a parliament could stem the bleeding of treasure, land, and people from the great, unwieldy body of the Ottoman state, the boundaries of which these days are as soft and indistinct as those of Fat Orhan at the Turkish bath.

Change creates anxiety, Kamil muses, in high places and low. An anxious populace is eager to be distracted by dark fairy tales. This midwife will keep her sense, though.

She sees the approval in his eyes and smiles again, genuinely this time.

"I would like you to do me one more favor," he adds. "Ask in the village whether anyone knows this woman, or has heard or seen anything unusual. If so, send a messenger to the magistrate's headquarters directly, and I will send my assistant to speak with you." He assumes that, like most of the population, she is unable to read or write.

"We will thank the messenger," he adds, politely skirting any open discussion of money. "One more thing. You will not mention"—he pauses and gestures toward the body—"the condition of the deceased."

She agrees and bows her head slightly. She pulls on her outer garments and leaves.

Kamil is alone with the corpse. The body has not yet begun to decompose. It gives off a wet, empty smell.

A sudden movement just outside the circle of light startles him.

"Michel! How long have you been there?"

"I came in right after she began her examination. I sent the police off to find out what they can. I'll talk to the residents myself later. I thought you might need me here instead."

Kamil is simultaneously aware that Michel had disobeyed him, but, as if he could read Kamil's mind, had instead done what Kamil had silently wished.

"Yes, of course," he agrees reluctantly, aware that somehow he has lost, but unsure in what game.

"I've been in the next room, taking notes. The rooms echo. I could hear her perfectly in there. What a perceptive crone, eh?" he says admiringly. "She saved us a lot of examination."

"Yes, she was very good. We should check with the merchants in the bazaar to see whether they remember who recently bought dried tube flowers."

"You know, the Istanbul Sephardim tell about drops used by their Spanish ancestors to make their eyes seem black and large; they call the substance belladonna, beautiful woman. I wonder if it's the same as our humble tube flower."

Michel walks over to the body, a small bowl in his hand. With a sudden movement, he turns the body onto its side and presses on its chest. A thin stream of liquid spurts from its mouth into the bowl.

Michel examines the liquid. "I'll be able to tell from this whether she drowned in salt water or fresh." He eyes the leather bag of tools still lying at the head of the corpse. "I could check the contents of her stomach."

"I think we can't afford to do anything before contacting the foreign embassies. If this is one of their nationals, they won't want us to return a carved-up body."

"Yes, you're quite right." Michel looks disappointed.

"Give me the cutters."

Kamil snaps the necklace chain. He works at the clasp of the bracelet and pulls it off. Opening the pendant, he hands it to Michel.

"There is a tughra inside."

Michel turns the pendant over in his hand and examines it from all sides. "And some other markings. Do you know what they are?"

"I don't."

"She has some connection to the palace, then?"

"Perhaps. I wonder. Eight years ago, an Englishwoman was found dead just north of here at Chamyeri. A governess at the palace, Hannah Simmons. They found her floating in a pond. She'd been strangled." He frowns. "I don't suppose there's a connection."

He doesn't mention that the victim's name stuck in his mind because the superintendent of police for Beyoglu was removed from

office by the minister of gendarmes—the man who had replaced his father—because he had failed to find the murderer. Kamil had perused the file on the murder when new at his job, but decided not to reopen the case. Too many years had gone by and it was not politically expedient to try to solve an unsolvable crime, especially one that involved members of the powerful foreign community and the sultan's palace. Now here is another young foreign woman dead, this time on his watch. He stiffens his posture to hide his anxiety and his excitement.

"That was the body found on the scholar's property above Chamyeri Village. It made for a lot of gossip at the time," Michel remembers.

"That's right. Ismail Hodja's house." The lesser details in Hannah Simmons's file had been shouldered aside by the continual press of new cases.

He ponders the young woman on the platform. "Just a coincidence, probably. She could be Circassian or from the Balkans. They're often yellow-haired with light-colored eyes. Anyway, Chamyeri is quite a ways north of Middle Village."

"Not that far by water. The current is powerful there. A corpse thrown in at Chamyeri would end up at Middle Village in no time at all. If the killer is the same person, then either he lives in that area or is a frequent visitor. One has to know the Bosphorus to navigate it or to wander its shores at night. The wild dogs alone would keep people away."

"I can't imagine it has anything to do with Ismail Hodja," Kamil responds firmly, his eyes following the cones of light as they descend from the dome and pierce the body on the belly stone. He is distressed by how quickly the surgeon accepted a link between the two murders. "The hodja's reputation is impeccable."

And there was no one else at his house who would come into question. The details in Hannah Simmons's file were jostling at the gates of Kamil's memory. The hodja's sister was a recluse, his niece a mere child at the time. There were only a few servants; not a large household.

"Anyway, the body was found in the forest behind his house, near the road, I believe. So it could have been anyone. Still," he muses aloud, "I wonder whether it would be worthwhile to talk to the hodja or his niece."

Michel doesn't answer. Kamil turns to find him still holding the pendant and staring intently at the body.

Michel turns and asks in a carefully neutral voice, "Do you want me to wrap this up?" He indicates the pendant in his hand.

"The cross and bracelet too. I'll take them with me." Pointing his chin at the body, "We don't even know who the woman is. She appears to be foreign, so I'll begin with the embassies."

Michel hands him the small bundle. He lays his cloak over the cold belly stone, sits on it, and takes out his sketching materials.

"But first I'll go home to change," Kamil adds companiably.

Michel doesn't look up, but begins drawing the body.

Kamil watches Michel's head bowed over the paper, fascinated by the creation emerging from beneath his stick of charcoal. He reflects about how little he knows of Michel's personal life, other than that he is unmarried and lives with his widowed mother in the Jewish quarter of Galata, and the story of their shared history. They spend time together in coffeehouses and clubs discussing everything under the sun, but Michel never opens to Kamil the private book of his life.

He and Michel attended the same school and knew each other by sight, but belonged to different circles. Michel, whose father had been a dealer in semiprecious stones, won a scholarship to attend the prestigious imperial school at Galata Saray. Children of wealthy Muslims, Jews, Armenians, Greeks, and other sons of the far-flung empire bowed their heads together over texts in history, logic, science, economy, international law, Greek, Latin, and, of course, Ottoman, that convolution of Persian, Arabic, and Turkish. It was not social class, religion, or language that separated Michel and Kamil in school, but the nature of their interests.

Soon after becoming magistrate, while Kamil was walking up the

narrow streets toward his office, a man got up from a stool outside a coffeehouse and approached him. Kamil recognized the flamboyant colors of his old schoolmate's clothing and his wrestler's glide. That evening, they sat together in the coffeehouse and, over narghiles of apple-cured tobacco, exchanged news of their activities since graduation. Michel was finishing his training in surgery at the Imperial School of Medicine. Kamil was among the young men chosen for training in France and England as magistrates and judges in the newly introduced European-style secular courts that had shouldered aside the religious courts of the kadi judges. Michel had volunteered his services to Kamil, who eventually sponsored his appointment as police surgeon. Michel's intimate knowledge of the neighborhood had helped Kamil solve several cases. Michel also introduced him to the Grand Bazaar, a city of tiny shops all under one roof, surrounded by a warren of workshops—hundreds of establishments, some no bigger than a man's reach, owned by men of all the empire's faiths. Michel's father and two generations before him had been merchants there.

Kamil pauses under the arched doorway leading out of the hamam, the polite formula of parting dying on his lips, unwilling to intrude on Michel's concentration.

Kamil turns and makes his way through the echoing antechambers. He stops at a basin, turns the metal cock all the way open, and rubs his hands together under the cold water. There is no soap, but he feels less polluted. He shakes the excess water off his hands and strides out of the gloom. At the threshold, he is momentarily felled by the brightness of the world.

His hands still chilled, he mounts his horse and winds his way up past the village and into the forest. Here, the morning sun filters softly through the trees. Birds chirrup madly; the shrill calls of young children fall through the air like knives.

When he reaches the road beyond the forest, he spurs his horse to a gallop.