



The Flea Palace

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ECONOMIST

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The Bastard of Istanbul and *The Forty Rules of Love*

ELIF SHAFAK

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The Flea Palace
by
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PEOPLE SAY I HAVE A FANCIFUL MIND – probably the most tactful way ever invented of saying ‘You’re talking nonsense!’ They might be right. Whenever I get anxious and mess up what I have to say, am scared of people’s stares and pretend not to be so, introduce myself to strangers and feign ignorance about how estranged I am from myself, feel hurt by the past and find it hard to admit the future won’t be any better, or fail to come to terms with either where or who I am; at any one of these all too frequently recurring moments, I know I don’t make much sense. But nonsense is just as far removed from deception as truth. Deception turns truth inside out. As for nonsense, it solders deception and truth one to the other so much so as to make them indistinguishable. Though this might seem complicated, it’s actually very simple. So simple that it can be expressed by a single line.

Let’s presume truth is a horizontal line.

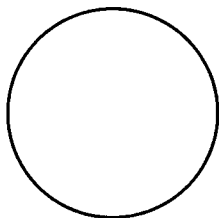


Then, what we call deception becomes a vertical one.



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As for nonsense, here's what it looks like:



With neither an end nor a beginning to its trajectory, the circle recognizes no horizontal or vertical axis.

You can plunge into the circle from anywhere you want, as long as you do not confuse that point with a beginning. No start points, no thresholds, no endings. No matter at which instant or with what particular incident I make the first move, there will always be a time preceding that start of mine – always a past ahead of every past and hence never a veritable outset.

I never saw it myself but heard from someone wise enough, that back in the old days, when the garbage cans on the streets of Istanbul had round lids of greyish aluminum, there was a game that local boys and girls played together. A certain number of people had to join in; few enough not to crowd, large enough to entertain, just the right amount and always an even number.

First in the 'Garbage Game' came the question 'When?'. For an answer, four different segments would be chalked on the round lid with a separate word corresponding to each direction: 'Right Now–Tomorrow–Soon–Never.' The lid would then be spun from its handle in the middle as swiftly as possible and before it found a chance to slow down, the person in line would stop it with the touch of a finger. The same would then be repeated one by one for all the participants of the game, so that each one could fathom which time frame he or she stood closest to. In the second round, four separate responses would be written down as possible answers to the question 'To Whom?': 'To Me–To The One I Love–To My

Best Friend–To All of Us.’ Once again the lid would be given a spin and once again the players would reach out to stop its delirious circumvolution. The third round was intended to find an answer to the question ‘What?’ Four auspicious and four ominous words were marked on the remaining eight spaces, always equal in number, to add a dash of fairness to the whims of fate: ‘Love–Marriage–Happiness–Wealth–Sickness–Separation–Accident–Death.’ The lid would turn once again with the answers now building up so the players could finally reach the long awaited response to the question, ‘What will happen to whom and when?’: ‘To Me–Wealth–Soon,’ ‘To The One I Love–Happiness–Tomorrow,’ ‘To My Best Friend–Marriage–Right Away,’ or ‘To All of Us–Separation–Never’...

Starting the ball of narration rolling is not hard. I too can employ the logic of the Garbage Game with some minor adjustments here and there. First of all, one needs to find the time frame of the narration: ‘Yesterday–Today–Tomorrow–Infinity.’ Then, the places should be designated: ‘Where I Came From–Where I Stand Now–Where I Am Headed–Nowhere’. Next, it would be the player’s turn to assign the subject of the act: ‘I–One Among Us–All of Us–None of Us.’ Finally, without upsetting the four-to-four balance, one needs to line up the possible outcomes. In this manner, if I spin an imaginary garbage lid four times in a row, I should be able to construct a decent sentence. What more than a sentence does one need to start off a story that has no start to it anyway?

‘In the spring of 2002, in Istanbul, one among us died before the time was up and the line closed into a complete circle.’

On Wednesday May 1st 2002, at 12:20 p.m., a white van – in need of a wash and decorated with the picture of a huge rat with needle-sharp teeth on one side, a hairy humongous spider on the other – failing to take notice of the barriers ahead found itself in the middle of a crowd of two thousand

two hundred people. Among these, about five hundred were there to commemorate Workers' May Day, one thousand three hundred were policemen ordered to prevent the latter from doing so, a number of others were state officials there to celebrate the day as a Spring Holiday by wreathing Atatürk's statue, and all the rest were elementary school children made to fill up the empty spaces, waving the Turkish flags handed out. By now, these children had almost broken into hives from standing under the sun for hours on end listening to the humming of dreary speeches. Incidentally, a good number of these had learnt only recently how to read and write, and with that impetus kept shouting out the syllables of every single written word they spotted around. When the ratty, spidery van ploughed into the crowd, these kids were the ones who yelled out in unison: 'RAIN-BOW PEST RE-MOV-AL SER-VICE: Call-Us-And-We-Will-Re-move-Them-For-You'.

The driver of the van, a ginger-haired, flap-eared, funny-looking, baby-faced man with features so exaggerated that he hardly looked real, lost his cool when faced with this onslaught. On steering the van in the opposite direction to escape the wrath of the children, he found himself in the middle of a highly agitated circle of demonstrators surrounded by an outer circle of even more agitated policemen. During the few minutes when the driver was paralyzed into inaction, he was alternately either 'booed' with glee or stoned in anger by demonstrators sharing the same ideology yet apparently interpreting it differently. Steering his van toward the other half of the circle in a desperate move only helped the driver get held up once again, this time by the police. He would have most probably been arrested at once – and things would have conceivably taken a worse turn for the others as well – had the police not darted, at exactly the same moment, toward a tiny, impetuous group determined to start the march right away. The van driver was drenched in sweat when he finally succeeded in getting out of the tumultuous square. His name was Injustice Pureturk. He had been in the pest removal

business for almost thirty-three years and had never hated his job as fervently as he did that day.

In order not to get himself into trouble once again, he shunned the shortcuts and made his way through the winding roads, only to arrive a full hour and forty-five minutes late for his appointment at the apartment building he had been searching. Shaking off his trauma bit by bit, he parked along the sidewalk while staring suspiciously at the cluster of people blocking the entrance of the building. Having no idea why they had gathered there, but nevertheless convinced they would do him no harm, he managed to calm down and again checked the address his chatty secretary had handed to him that very morning: 'Cabal Street, Number 88 (Bonbon Palace).' His chatterbox of a secretary had also included a note: 'The apartment building with the rose acacia tree in the garden.' Wiping away the large beads of sweat on his forehead, Injustice Pureturk stared at the tree in the garden that was in bloom with mauve, reddish pink flowers. This, he thought, must be what they called 'rose acacia'.

Still, since he did not at all trust his secretary whom he intended to replace at the next possible instance, he personally wanted to see the building's signpost with his own short-sighted eyes. Parking the van askew, he jumped down. No sooner had he taken a step, however, than a small girl among a group of three children standing in the crowd screamed in horror: 'The genie is here! Grandpaaa, grandpa, look, the genie is here!' The round, greying, bearded elderly man the girl was tugging turned around and inspected first the van and then the van's driver, each time with an equally disappointed look. Evidently dissatisfied with what he saw, he screwed up his face so that it looked even more sour and drew the three children closer to him.

Injustice was done to Injustice Pureturk. He was not a genie or anything, but just an ordinary man who possessed a disproportionate face with somewhat mammoth ears and unfortunately coloured hair. He also happened to be short.

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Indeed very short: one metre and forty-three centimetres in all. Even though he had been previously taken for a dwarf, this was the first time he was accused of being a genie. Trying not to mind, he doggedly pushed his way through the group toward the ashen apartment building. He donned the thin-framed thick-lensed glasses he habitually carried, not on his nose as the doctor had recommended but inside the pocket of his work overalls. Despite the help of the glasses he still could not make out what the messy protrusion at the front of the building was until it was an inch away: a relief of a peacock with the feathers darkened with dirt. Had it been cleaned up, it might have looked appealing to the eye. Underneath the relief it read: 'Bonbon Palace Number 88.' He was at the right place.

A business card squeezed in-between the lined-up buzzers next to the door drew his attention. It belonged to a rival firm that had two months previously started to work in the same neighbourhood. Since the people around no longer seemed to be paying any attention to him, he took the opportunity to remove the business card and put one of his own in its stead.

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Upon having these business cards printed, he had hired a university student to distribute them all around the neighbourhood, but it had not taken him long to fire the young man without pay, for doing a lousy job. That was typical of Injustice Pureturk: he never trusted anyone.

To unload the pesticide sprays he walked back to his van. Yet, the moment he had shut his door, a blond woman with a hairdresser's smock tied around her neck reached in through the half-open window and gawked at him cross-eyed:

'Is this van all you've got? Won't be enough, I tell you,' she hooted knitting her well-plucked eyebrows. 'They'd promised at least two trucks. There's so much trash, even two trucks would have a hard time.'

'I'm not here to pick up your garbage,' Injustice Pureturk frowned. 'I'm here for the insects... the cockroaches...'

'Oh,' the woman flinched, 'Even then, I tell you, what you've got won't be enough.'

Before Injustice Pureturk could fathom what she was talking about and what exactly these people had been waiting for, two red trucks ploughed onto Cabal Street as if they had heard the call. The crowd stirred upon noticing a van from a television channel right behind the trucks. Injustice Pureturk, utterly unaware of the excitement around him, was trying at that moment to find a better spot to park. However, finding himself amidst chaos upon chaos against his will must have somewhat tattered his nerves by now, for the vein on the right side of his forehead started to thump at a crazy pace. The single movement he made to press down on the vein was more than enough to make him lose control of the steering wheel. Trying to back up in a panic, he rammed into the piles of bags slung next to the garden wall separating the apartment building from the street. All the garbage inside the bags was scattered onto the sidewalk.

If truth be told, Bonbon Palace was used to garbage, having

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struggled with it for quite some time now. From early February to mid April – the period following the bankruptcy of the private company collecting the garbage in the area and preceding the resumption of service by a new one – a considerable garbage hill had collected here, bringing along with it an increasingly putrid smell. Things had not much improved with the new company either. In spite of the regular nightly collection, both the Cabal Street residents and passers-by kept throwing garbage next to the garden wall, thereby managing to collectively raise a garbage hill up anew every day.

If interested you can go there even today to see with your own eyes how, along the wall separating the apartment's garden from the street, the garbage hill levelled by dusk rises anew the following day with no ultimate loss to its mass. Garbage bags are thrown away, garbage bags are then picked up, but despite the continual rise and fall, it is as if the garbage hill keeps perpetuating its presence. The hill comes with its own hill people – seekers who show up daily to collect pieces of tin, cardboard, leftover food and the like, as well as an army of cats and crows and seagulls. Then, of course, there are bugs; for wherever there is garbage, there are also bugs. Lice, too, have taken over in Bonbon Palace...and trust me on this, lice are the very worst...

In order to observe this one needs to spend some time there. If you have no time, however, you'll have to make do with my version of the story. Yet I can only speak for myself. Not that I'll foist my own views onto what transpires but I might, here and there, solder the horizontal line of truth to the vertical line of deception in order to escape the wearisome humdrum reality of where I am anchored right now. After all, I am bored stiff here. If someone brought me the good news that my life would be less dreary tomorrow, I might feel less bored today. Yet, I know too well that tomorrow will be just the same and so will all the days to follow. Nevertheless, with my fondness for circles I should not give you the impression

that it is only my life that persistently repeats itself. In the final instance, the vertical is just as faithful to its recurrence as the horizontal. Contrary to what many presume, that which is called 'Eternal Recurrence' is germane not only to circles but also to lines and linear arrangements.

From the monotony of lines there deviates only one path: drawing circles within circles, spiralling in and in. Such deviation resembles, in a way, being a spoilsport in the Garbage Game: not abiding by what comes up when you spin the round lid of greyish aluminum, spoiling the game by not waiting for your turn, craving to spin again and again; messing around with subjects, objects, verbs and coincidences while comforting yourself throughout: 'In Istanbul in the spring of 2002, the death of one among us was caused by Herself–Me–Us All–None of Us.'

On Wednesday May 1st 2002, Injustice Pureturk applied pesticide dust to one of the flats of Bonbon Palace. Fifteen days later, upon returning for the baby cockroaches born from their dead mothers' eggs, he found the door of that particular flat deadlocked. However, it is too soon to talk about these things right now. For there had been another time preceding this moment and, of course, one before that as well.

BEFORE...

THERE WERE ONCE TWO ANCIENT CEMETERIES in this neighbourhood, one small, almost rectangular and well-kept, the other huge, semi-lunar and visibly neglected. Surrounded by ivy-covered fences and shadowy hills, leaning onto the same dishevelled wall, they had spread out over a wide terrain, jointly and continuously. Both were crowded to the brim yet deserted to the extreme. The small one belonged to the Armenians and the large one to the Muslims. On the six foot wall separating the two cemeteries, rusty nails, jagged fragments of glass and, in spite of the fear of bad luck, broken mirror pieces had been scattered upright to prevent people trespassing from one to the other. As for the two-panelled, iron-grilled, gargantuan doors of each cemetery, they were located exactly on opposite ends, one facing north and the other south so that if a visitor perchance harboured any inclination to cross from one to the other, he would be discouraged by the length of the road he would have to walk. Just the same, no one actually had to put up with such an inconvenience since there had never been a visitor with a relative buried in one cemetery who wished, once there, to pay a visit to the other cemetery as well. Be that as it may, there was many a being that hopped and jumped from one cemetery to the other as they pleased, be it night or day: the wind and thieves, for instance, or the cats and lizards. They had all mastered the many ways of going through, over and under the barrier separating the two cemeteries.

That would not last long. An incessant wave of migrations

cluttered up the city with buildings marshalled in tandem like the soldiers of a sinister army, each and every one looking much alike from a distance. Amidst the muddled waters of 'citification' surrounding them in all directions, the cemeteries remained intact like two uninhabited islands. As new high-rises and rows of houses were built continuously, around them up popped small, sporadic, circumscribed streets resembling from far above the veins of a brain. Streets cut in front of houses and houses blocked streets; the whole neighbourhood swelled, bloating like a foolhardy fish unable to feel satiated even when beyond being full. Finally when just about to burst, it became inevitable that an incision must be made and an opening created on the stretched tight node so as to relieve the pressure mounting from within. That incision in turn meant a new road had to be built before too long.

Due to this unforeseen, unstoppable growth, all the streets in the vicinity had become wedged at the edges like water with nowhere to go. An avenue, by linking them all into a single channel, could make them re-flow.

Yet, when the time came for the authorities to take a birds' eye view to decide where and how to build this avenue, they realized an onerous quandary awaited them. At all the possible sites where such an avenue could be constructed, there was, as if by design, either a government building or the property of the local gentry and if not those, the jam-packed low-income shanty-houses that could be effortlessly taken down one by one but were not that easy to erase when there were so many. In order to be able to build the road that would open the way, they would first have to open the way for a road.

Istanbul being a city where houses were not built in accordance with road plans but road plans made so as not to upset the location of the houses, the construction of the new road required tearing down as few houses as possible. Given this precondition there remained only one option: making the road pass through the hilly terrain of the two cemeteries.

Once the reports detailing this plan had been approved by

the authorities, it was decided that within two and a half months the two cemeteries should be removed and the hilly terrain flattened out. Those who had loved ones in these cemeteries need not worry, they said. After all, the tombs could be moved in their entirety to various spots around the city. Muslim tombs could be transported to the slopes overlooking the Golden Horn, for instance, and the non-Muslims to their own graveyards in various other quarters.

Most of the tombs were so ancient that along with their occupants, their descendants had also changed worlds by now. There were also those that, despite having descendants still above the ground, might yet go unclaimed. In spite of all this, the number of people snooping into the fate of the tombs turned out to be far more than the authorities had initially expected. Among them, some relatives simply wanted their dead to be left alone while others discovered the proposed alternate graveyards were already crammed full. Both of these groups had instantly started to search for ways to reverse the decision. Still, the majority of the relatives acquiesced to do whatever was deemed necessary and to this end set off to shoulder the burden.

In the following days the Muslim cemetery played host at all hours of the day to all kinds of visitors, each singing a different tune. The task of hiding the traces of the nocturnal visitors from those paying homage in the daytime fell upon the cemetery guards who at dawn gathered the spilled bones and closed over the tombs dug up during the night. Then, towards noon, the authorities showed up to inspect the guards, and in the afternoon, families worried about their dead getting mixed up with other people's dropped-by in large crowds, all the while talking and complaining, if not to the tombstones, to one another.

Until the cemetery was officially forbidden to accept visitors, the old and middle-aged women of these families were there almost every single day. When tired of standing up, they would line up with their blankets spread right there around

their relatives' tombs. Once seated, they would either weep alone or pray together, clutching their children tightly to force them into reverential silence. Then time would drift by, the air getting heavier, some children would fall asleep while others escaped to play; and a cloud of languor would daintily follow, forming a canopy over the women on the ground. 'The descent of the spiritual,' this can be called. After all, even the most otherworldly cannot remain oblivious to the forces of gravity pulling them down to earth. In this state the women would make it through to the night. Rooting about in their long tattered bags, bought who knows when and mutated over time into the same grimy tone of brown, they would fish out aniseed crackers, pour tea from thermoses while at the same time circulating lemon cologne to wipe both their sweaty faces and the reddish skin marks around their knees left by knee-high nylon socks that, no matter which size you chose, were always too tight. Next they would peruse the pages of the notebooks of the past, recalling one by one the names of all those who had made life living-hell for the dearly departed. Once they started to hammer out past controversies, it would not take them long to abandon the mourning of the dead and switch instead to gossiping about the living. All tea gone and only a handful of aniseeds left from the crackers, one among them would remind the others of how the dearly departed, as if not having suffered enough on earth, were now denied peace even deep down under the ground. With that reminder, the gloom of the setting would engulf the cloud of languor. 'The ascent of the material,' this can be called. After all, even the most worldly cannot remain indifferent to the celestial. Thus, these old and middle-aged women would step by step wander off from prayers to curses, from curses to gossip, only to retread to the beginning to wrap up this undulating conversation in a final prayer.

As they retread, they would start searching for the children spread among the tombstones recklessly roaming the cemetery. The children would be sought, collared and dragged back to

the gravestone of their relative for a last supplication. By then, the men would also have returned to the same spot, dog-tired from struggling all day long in vain to speak up to the deaf ears of bureaucracy, having acquired all in all a few fragments of documents and the map to the new burial ground but still not a wee bit of clarification about where their dead would be buried within it. Pretending everything to be under control and within their purview, the aforesaid males would austere confront each and every galling question and gloomy interpretation that their mothers, younger sisters, wives, mothers-in-law, older sisters, aunts, sisters-in-law and daughters put to them. While blankets were gathered and tombstones bid farewell to, several women would notice the many inconsistencies in the men's responses and ask either new questions or re-formulate the old ones, only more persistently this time. With that final touch, the men's nerves, which were stretched tight as bow strings by the gears of bureaucracy, would snap. With them yelling at their wives and their wives yelling back at them, families would leave the Muslim cemetery in utter chaos and without having resolved anything. Then night would descend, the two-panelled, iron-grilled, gargantuan door would close down, and thus the hours of the cats and tomb thieves would commence.

As for the Armenian Orthodox cemetery, it too had plenty of visitors around the same time. With one difference: the majority of these visitors were there not to transport their tombs but rather to say their final goodbyes. Even if able to procure the necessary permit to transport, in what burial ground among the orthodox cemeteries of Istanbul, long diminished with loss and shrunk through constriction, could they have buried their dead? Some prominent families and church members managed to move a number of graves but that was all. Among the dead left behind there were cherished ancestors of eminent families, as well as those long unclaimed or recently abandoned; those whose grandchildren had scattered to four corners of the world and those whose families

still lived in Istanbul; those who had remained all their lives utterly faithful to their religion and loyal to their state, as well as those who refused to recognize either God or a state...

For that is how things are. It is not their *quantitative* scarcity vis-à-vis the majority that makes minorities hapless but rather their *qualitative* similarity. As a member of a minority group, you can be as industrious as an ant, even hit the jackpot and acquire a considerable fortune, but someday, just because you presently and will always belong to the same community, you could in an instant find yourself on a par with those of your community who have idled their lives away since birth. That is why the affluent among the minorities are never affluent enough; neither are their exceptional members ever sufficiently so. In the Turkey of the 1950s in particular, the moment a rich Muslim bumped into a poor one, what he would see on the latter's face would be 'someone so very unlike him,' whereas a rich minority member running into a poor one would encounter on the latter's face 'someone so very unlike him and yet treated alike.' Accordingly, the same misery might awaken compassion in the rich Muslim who has the comfort of knowing that he will never sink to that position, whereas for a member of the rich minority it might easily trigger angst, with the unease of foreseeing that he too might unexpectedly end up there. Once a person starts to fear injustice, however, he can end up missing the real target and mix the results up with the causes. Hence, while the gentry of the Muslim majority may demonstrate a tender mercy toward the miserable in particular and to misery in general, the cream of the minority will approach the materially and spiritually downtrodden of their own community with chilled unease.

All these nominal distinctions go no further however. At the end of the two and a half month period, only a sprinkle of tombs were transported from the Orthodox Armenian cemetery; the majority of the minority had thus remained behind. As for the Muslim cemetery, far more tombs had been transported: the minority of the majority was left behind.

These two clusters of dead, with not an iota in common regarding family trees, upbringing or profiles, nevertheless concluded the very last stage of their presence in Istanbul alike. One could bestow upon them a common rank: 'Those Unable to Depart'. The worst part of being one of those incapable of leaving a territory is less their inability to *depart* than their inability to *reside*.

It was at precisely this stage that a twist of fate occurred. Way ahead of the bulldozers, thieves looted the tombstones, dogs embezzled the bones of a number of Those Unable to Depart. Among some couples long buried together, due to name similarities or the negligence of cemetery officials incapable of deciphering the Ottoman script on the old tombstones, one ended up in one corner and the other at another. Some of the dead got mixed up and landed in different tombs, while a large majority were done away with silently, stealthily, systematically. Yet ultimately, it was simply fate that would determine the destiny of many of Those Unable to Depart.

Once these procedures came to an end, all that was left of that vast land was a field replete with holes, as if fallen prey to a horde of moles. When the time arrived to level the ground in its entirety, however, the authorities would be startled to discover two tombs had fortuitously remained intact. Their stone sarcophagi were made of crimson-veined white marble, decorated with *cintemani* and plant motifs germinating into three wheels of fate, their turbans almost as big as cart wheels, the distance from the base of their tombstones to the headstones measuring approximately one hundred and forty-six centimetres in height, surrounded with railings as sharp as arrows and painted a green the colour of raw leaves. While both were in the Muslim cemetery, one of the tombs was located at the southern slope and the other at the northern edge, at the bottom of the wall separating the orthodox Armenian cemetery. This detail aside, they were exactly alike. On the outside surface of the accompanying stone, both had hyacinth and tulip motifs. Exactly the same turban on their

heads, the same sharply pointed arch around their seats, the same heading, '*Allah bas baqiya hawas*,' in Ottoman *cel sulus** script on their tomb inscriptions. Odd as it was, next to each one rested a rusted sign, probably posted at the same time by the same people: 'Here lies Saint "Hewhopackedupandleft" who performed countless heroic deeds for the conquest of Islam while serving in the army of Ebu Hafs-i Haddad and who reached God's mercy before witnessing the fall of the infidel city. A prayer to his soul.'

When ordered to remove these two sarcophagi, the worker on the bulldozer had to leave work early with a awful pain in his groin. Though the pain had abated by the following day, he refused to drive the bulldozer all the same. On the third day, instead of the worker, his grandfather, who had no teeth in his mouth and no might in his muscles but ample 'oomph' when it came to words, turned up instead. He narrated to whomever he came across spine-tingling stories about the dire fate of those hapless souls who had attempted to plunder the tombs of saints. By the morning of the fourth night, not a single worker was willing to drive the bulldozer. If truth be told, no one except them seemed much interested in Saint 'Hewhopackedupandleft,' and things would have remained so had the authorities not taken a sudden interest in the topic, upon being warned that their political opponents might use the current state of affairs against them. The year was 1949 and the political balance extremely fragile. Both the newly burgeoning opposition as well as the government itself constantly tainted one another with the brush of alleged 'insolence toward religion'. It was at this point that 'The Three Consultant Buddies' showed up.

The First of the Three Consultant Buddies came up with the idea that in order not to disturb the saints' tombs, the avenue should take two separate twists at two points. His suggestion might have been considered had it not been the * '*Allah bas, baqiya hawas*' means 'God is strength, the rest is folly' and Ottoman *cel sulus* script is a historical Turkish script of the Ottoman Empire.

case that no one took him seriously; not since that ominous day when he had been given a ruthless tongue-lashing at his workplace by his wife, upon her discovery that he'd spent their entire month's rent at a nightclub. The Second of the Three Consultant Buddies, in turn, proposed the avenue continue in a straight line, right up to the two tombs, where it would bifurcate like a piece of string cheese. Though everyone knew he managed, albeit with difficulty, to gain the upper hand over his wife, even dared raise his voice at home and smash unsavory food against the wall, his idea was not accepted as no one wanted to take responsibility for possible future traffic accidents. It was then that the Third of the Three Consultant Buddies asserted in a meandering speech, that they were committing a grave error by rushing to a solution. First they had to grasp what exactly the problem was and, had they done so, would indeed detect more than one peculiarity in this particular case. Thus he paraphrased his oration: 'First diagnosis, then treatment!'

The points of emphasis the Third of the Three Consultant Buddies wanted clarified for diagnosis were as follows:

1. What exactly was this army of Ebu Hafs-i Haddad? What was it doing in Istanbul?
2. If this army was one of those Arab forces that had long ago come as far as Istanbul with the intent of conquest, what was someone like Saint 'Hewhoppedupandleft' – whose name did not at all sound Arabic – doing among them?
3. If Saint 'Hewhoppedupandleft' had indeed been martyred while fighting for the conquest of Istanbul on the side of the Arabs, why on earth did he have two tombs?
4. Last but not least, which of the tombs was genuine?

Meticulously elaborating each point on his agenda, the Third of the Three Consultant Buddies arrived at the conclusion that

though there was no harm in skipping some of these points so as to save time, it was absolutely essential to clarify the last detail to ascertain which of the two tombs was the real one. Indeed he was a better orator than the others and a bachelor to boot.

Be that as it may, digging a saint's tomb at a time like this was analogous to accepting a gift package with unknown content from an anonymous sender: it probably did not contain anything harmful but what if it did? Just to make matters worse, right at this time, a foul-mouthed journalist notorious for stirring bread into his *raki* for breakfast but nonetheless alert enough to have his ear to the ground, had already picked up the scent and written a piece in the leading opposition newspaper entitled, 'Government's Gravediggers in Business Suits.' Though the editorial itself was not as accusatory as its title hinted and the claim behind it rather hazy, these could be due more to the journalist's having passed out before finishing the piece than to his concern not to further poke his nose into this business. There was no way to tell that once he sobered up he would not write another editorial, this time even more aggressive.

Still, the tombs were dug up all at once and without any prior notice. Set to accomplish this unpleasant duty in the fastest way possible and without any onlookers present, two officials, three guards and five workers gathered with their briefcases, flashlights, pickaxes and shovels before dawn. They dug up the tombs of the saints under the stunned looks of a few vagabonds who had settled in the vacated cemetery once the thieves and street dogs had stopped coming. Nothing came out of the first tomb; neither a coffin, nor a shroud, nor bones or a skull, nor the personal belongings of the saint. At least there were tree roots, cracked rocks and worms – even these were missing in the second tomb. It was at this point that the authorities committed the fatal mistake of supposing the problem had thus been solved. With too much sanguinity, they removed the stone sarcophagi and took down the surrounding railing.

The following day, an unsigned editorial appeared in the leading opposition newspaper with the title, 'Government's Three-Piece-Suited Assassins of Saints' – only this time the beginning and the end of the piece had been connected into a meaningful whole. It contended that the government, which had hitherto demonstrated at every opportunity what little respect it had for the Ottoman cultural heritage, had now taken upon itself to one by one raise to the ground all the saints' tombs in Istanbul; that some politicians who feigned in public to uphold customs and tradition secretly belittled everything about the populace; that the faith bursting from within the nation was sacrificed for the sake of an abstract Western model; and that in the name of cleansing religion of superstition Islam was altogether opposed. Towards the end, an open call was placed to all Muslims to safeguard their saints.

Despite the fact that the piece did not lead, as feared, to an upsurge of emotions, still like a signal rocket it triggered into action all sorts of individuals and organizations all around the country. It was as if all these people had suddenly assumed the discovery of what had happened to the two saints' tombs in the vacated cemetery as their sole purpose in life, demanding an explanation from the authorities. The issue was not only extremely sensitive but also remarkably exploitable. The discussants started with 'the negligence of modernization' and concluded with a suggestion that instead 'modernization itself be neglected'. Like a diving beetle that skids on water, they hopped and skipped on ostentatious notions, such as 'the oblivion of the nation,' 'contemporary *Bihruzes*,' 'enforced Westernization,' 'sinister secularization' and so forth, thereby traversing a whole lake of antagonisms, splashing water around all but themselves.

A local newspaper that came out in the provinces but happened to be particularly interested in what was going on in Istanbul even though it had no distribution there, thus declared: 'What is termed 'Westernization' is nothing but a loving marriage between the East and the West. Yet, one should

never forget that in this matrimony the West is the woman and East the man. The latter is therefore naturally the head of the household. For that reason it should be those swanky streets built for a few overindulged ladies to gallivant on and for dressed up dandies to show off their cars that show respect to the saints, not the other way around.'

With the detection of a crime necessitating the disclosure of the criminal, the time was ripe to get some people into trouble. After a brief consideration of possible options, trouble flew around to finally perch on the heads of the old and loyal cemetery guards. Having managed to hide all traces of nightly disturbances at the cemetery from people who visited in the morning, they were not able to hide themselves from the notice of their chief, and after being found guilty of trampling the tombs of saints, were laid off temporarily. Of the three guards, two were elderly men who believed there was a silver lining to every disaster. Of these two, one returned to his village and the other retired to his house to dedicate the rest of his life to his grandchildren. Yet the third one, relatively younger and not easily content with little, could not accept the injustice that had been committed. In the months to follow he penned reproachful letters to the directory of the cemeteries, the mayor, ministers, prime minister and high ranking members of the military, all the while complaining to each and every person he encountered. During this time, there was a change of government and the opposition assumed power, but all the same, his letters remained unanswered and the authorities indifferent. As they became increasingly deaf to his pleas, he became muter, drifting inward. Everyone expected him to eventually get over the past, but just when they thought he had, he did something utterly unexpected.

Now this man had a wife whom he had not touched in years and whom he had banished from his bed for snoring till daylight like an elephant. One day out of the blue, it was this woman that he started to chase around the house utterly unconcerned about the blame neighbours would place on him

for such lust at this age. He finally caught his wife after a long, scream-filled chase and, paying no attention to her excuses, objections, entreaties and curses, with total doggedness and the help of fortune impregnated her at the age of fifty.

He did not waste a second to rush to the registrar's office as soon as the baby was born. In order to make sure neither he himself, nor anyone else would ever forget the wrong done to him, in spite of all the protests of his wife and after giving fistfuls of bribe to the civil servant on duty, he officially named the son God had given him after all this time: 'Injustice'.

Long before Injustice had become implanted in his mother's womb, however, the scandal of the saints started to fade away. Within two weeks after the removal of the tombs of Saint 'Hewhoppedupandleft', the political agenda had entirely altered and both the government and the opposition focused their full attention on the forthcoming elections. The municipal authorities who had meanwhile speeded-up the road construction project could thus assume the case closed and easily finish up the project without further trouble. What was done was done since the stone sarcophagi were removed during the excavation of the cemetery. Even so, during those prickly days when every event clustering more than ten people was bound to be crowned with a propaganda speech, the Third of the Three Consultant Buddies would have no difficulty in convincing his business partners not only that the saint's file should not be closed, but also that it should be fully utilized for a public ceremony.

A few weeks before the elections, a brief ceremony attended by a large number of spectators occurred on the southern slope of the old Muslim cemetery. Since the uneven ground next to the wall that once separated the orthodox Armenian cemetery was not suitable for the occasion, the question as to which tomb would be treated as genuine was automatically

answered. Some among the spectators were people hired specifically for this purpose. As for the rest, they were either totally unaware but curious passers-by, or, on the contrary, conscientious citizens who wanted to see with their own eyes how the scandalous event they had followed from the newspapers would come to an end.

The ceremony comprised of three main parts. In the first part, two men, one young with an aged voice and the other old with a youthful voice, recited verses from the Qur'an which they had committed to memory in its entirety. During the second part, an official dressed up to the nines delivered a rather indicting but essentially passionless speech in response to all the accusations so far voiced. The third part was the most complicated. Pieces of the saint's stone sarcophagus and an empty coffin – brought along at the last minute so as not to confuse those with barely any knowledge of the situation – were carried on shoulders and loaded onto the hearse. Then everyone got on buses heading to an empty, rusty-soiled lot surrounded by dilapidated buildings. There, immersed in mud, orations and applause, the empty coffin of Saint 'Hewhopackedupandleft' was first buried, then the pieces of the stone sarcophagus joined and erected, appearing far more magnificent now surrounded by a tall ornate wood railing. The Third of the Three Consultant Buddies had prepared the text of the speech he was to deliver days in advance. Yet that morning, having finally mustered the courage to propose marriage to the daughter of his maternal aunt with whom he had been in love for years, he had been so badly rejected that he took to the streets wandering aimlessly, thus failing to get both himself and his speech to the ceremony on time.

Upon arriving at the site of the ceremony with a delay of almost an hour, the Third of the Three Consultant Buddies could not find anyone around. Only scattered cigarette stubs and tangled footprints remained of that boisterous crowd. He sat down by the tomb in grief and, wiping his sweaty forehead, started to read the text that had consumed so much of his time

aloud to himself. There was actually no need for the paper since he knew every single line by heart. In a voice that quivered at first but got stronger eventually, he declared how the person lying in the tomb was a most distinguished saint who had kept his appetite for worldly pleasures captive in the turquoise-covered ring on his finger. He declared also that the saint had, in accordance with his convictions, refused to sleep under the same roof for more than one night or eat from the same bowl more than once; used a brick for a pillow in perpetual pain; never gotten married to leave behind any descendants, or any property or goods; wandered all year round deeming the earth his house and the skies his roof; in short, the name Saint 'Hewhoppedupandleft' had been bestowed upon him for spending his whole life with no roots nowhere. Hence it would not at all be contrary to tradition to move the tomb from one place to another and whomever argued otherwise should be mistrusted not only as to their intentions but also the depth of their religious knowledge. At the conclusion of his speech, turning pensive he distractedly caressed the words '*baqiya hawas*' on the inscriptions of the stone sarcophagus. Then, as if responding to a distant call, he sprung up and hurried in the direction he had come from.

It wasn't until this point that the graveyard of Saint 'Hewhoppedupandleft' achieved the unspoiled calm and composure it had yearned for so long. Leaving aside the visitors occasionally praying by his grave who rubbed their bus, train, ferry or plane tickets on his tombstone, not a single event would occur for about thirty-six years to upset its turbulence-free peace. Probably because of the ad infinitum movement of the saint's tomb from one location to another, it became a custom among travellers setting on a long journey to stop by this place a day before their departure to seek his blessing and to thumbprint a corner of their tickets, as if getting the approval of an imaginary customs officer, with the rust-coloured soil of the tomb. After the second half of the 1960s, these travellers were gradually replaced by 'guest-

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workers' off to Germany and their relatives. During those years, the most faithful visitors of the saint were the women left behind by the guest-workers going abroad. Since in their case there were no tickets to be had, they ended up rubbing the rust-coloured soil on their fingertips or palms, which resembled henna when dry. In time, most of these women went to join their husbands so the number of visitors gradually diminished. At the end of thirty-six years, first the wood railing, then the crimson-veined white marble and finally the rust-coloured soil of this imposing tomb were secretly swallowed-up by the stores, workshops and restaurants engulfing it in the ever-shrinking circle of a chase or hunt. Thus the tombs of Saint 'Hewhoppedupandleft' that once numbered two and then reduced to one, finally reached nil.

As for the hilly land of the two old cemeteries, it was there that the fastest transformation occurred upon the completion of the avenue. Along the slope on the northwest side of the orthodox Armenian cemetery sprung up graceful apartment buildings, tailed by, like kites with multi-hued ribbons, stores with glittery windows, sidewalks to promenade with flair, new locales throbbing with rhythm. When the value of the buildings skyrocketed, those who had a house or land in this area pocketed large amounts of money in no time. Many of the flats facing the avenue were rented out to businesses; mostly to doctors or lawyers. Such offices mushroomed so far and wide that before long there would be at least one doctor or one lawyer in any shared taxi operating in the neighbourhood. So much so, that in each of these shared taxis, one frequently encountered people with plenty of health complaints or legal problems but no money, only there for a free consultation with the doctor sitting next to them or the lawyer behind. Some of the minibus drivers themselves, thanks to their eavesdropping on such conversations from dusk till dawn, accumulated an

impressive amount of knowledge on both medical and legal matters. If truth be told, one highly fashionable general neurologist, whose constant use of a particular route meant he became the best of friends with one of the most astute of the drivers, had actually got into the habit of referring some of the queries he received to this driver. Though the elderly mischievous doctor had originally proceeded with this game out of boredom, he eventually got great enjoyment from it. The young driver was one of the few with a mind sharp as a razor and a tolerance unique to bohemians. Besides, having little regard for the physician's rules of etiquette or for weighing each word, he blurted what he thought right out, utterly oblivious to the hopes he might shatter in doing so. As he drove the shared taxi, he would mimic the obsessions of neurotic ladies and angst-ridden gentlemen, even managing to get them to laugh at themselves. His performance so impressed the elderly doctor that after a while he offered him a job. In spite of their good intentions, however, the witty friendship of the two could not survive the rigorous formalities of the office environment, and the young driver ultimately returned to his minibus.

In no more than fifteen years, the appearance of the vicinity was entirely transformed. Not a single person remembered that there had once been, and still were, hundreds of graves under these grandiose offices, stylish stores and fancy apartments shining along the avenue with the perfection of porcelain teeth. Most of the flats had narrow, double-door, carpeted elevators. Had these elevators operated not only between the ground and upper floors but also further down into the ground, one would have seen, like slices cut from a colossal cake, all the segments of life's inner workings. At the very bottom, there would be layer upon layer of the earth's crust, then rough, knobby soil; upon that a stratum of decimated graves, followed by a very thin line of tarmac road, a couple of flats piled up on one another, a layer of red-brick roof and, on top of it all, a sky of endless cerulean plastered and diffused all over. Occasionally, some people were heard to mutter softly as

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if to themselves, 'Once upon a time there were graves all over this place...' Yet these words had a somewhat surreal sound to them though the time referred to dated no further than fifteen or twenty years ago. It was reminiscent of saying, 'Once upon a time, girls more beautiful than fairies took baths of light in the thousand room crystal palace of the sultan of the moon.' That is how real it sounded, a past that had never been experienced or an ethereal silver setting somewhere outside the mundane flow of time.

Bonbon Palace, its garbage cans knocked over by Injustice Pureturk on Wednesday 1st May 2002 while parking his van, was built in 1966 in this neighbourhood which had by then little left of its former splendor. As for the husband and wife who built the apartment house, though they were foreigners here, they had been to Istanbul previously.