

Your coffin is in the ground. You wanted to be buried in Prizren. For a month I've covered my hair with a white headscarf every Friday morning and said the *Yasin*, the prayer for the dead, for you.

From the seventh-floor window I see Anne leaving the building. I know there's a Marlboro stuck between her lips. In her purse, which must be older than I am, there's at least one of those red and white cigarette packs. She's barely outside when she lights a cigarette with a lighter that she's been warming in her hand. She takes a drag on it, narrowing her eyes as though it's too bright. Her chest heaves. When she exhales, she disappears for a moment in the cloud of smoke. She doesn't like smoking alone, she never did, and now she stands there like a stove that nobody needs in summer.

Baba wanted her to quit. Anne blew smoke in his face and said a cigarette goes with a good wine, and when she stopped drinking, she said a cigarette goes with a good cup of coffee.

The purse is made of black pigskin, pigskin is cheap. It's big and has a long strap so that in winter it will go over her padded shoulder. When I search for a pair of tweezers in it, I find a little inside pocket. The zipper looks like a wound, a wound that was stitched but the thread was never removed. Tooth by tooth I open the pocket and find a wooden comb that belonged to you.

Anne takes a collapsible cane from the purse. I watch as the cane sweeps wide from left to right. Today two new canes came in the mail; the tip of the old one had worn out.

You would like our new apartment. The floors aren't carpeted, and from the seventh-floor balcony you can look out over the rooftops and see into other apartments. You always did like Bümpliz. You used to come here for shopping, a lot of your friends lived here, and you went to mosque for the Bairam prayer in the

basement of a high-rise building with a large group of Albanian men.

Five years we looked for an apartment. After you died, we found one in a high-rise on the outskirts of Bern, where twenty-seven foreign and three Swiss families live.

"My, but your German is good," the landlady said to me, very loudly and distinctly.

"We've lived in Switzerland since I was ten," I replied. Ever since we moved in, we've intended to put pictures on the walls. They're still bare.

Anne goes to the school for the blind by herself. She goes shopping at Alima, the Turkish store, and takes the train to Biel to visit her friend Emine. Once a month, Franz comes to teach her new routes, which she then proudly shows off to us, leading the way while the rest of us follow. "The duck family," Maria yells from the fourth floor. She knows who in the building has had a fight, who didn't clean the washing machine after using it, who didn't remove the lint from the dryer.

My brother is twenty-two now, two years younger than I am. He wants to be a graphic artist, sleeps half the day, and his room is always dark and dirty. My sister, to whom I'm more of a mother than her own mother—my mother, our mother—is ten years younger than I am. Anne protects her as though she were a delicate piece of jewelry. She never treated us that way. When my brother was little, for a long time she beat his behind with stinging nettles when he wet the bed.

I look for more things in the wound and come across a folded piece of paper. It's the letter you sent us from Istanbul in the summer of 1991. Fifteen years have passed since then. It says you want to enter Switzerland, you ask us to follow you, to trust you. You write in capital letters.

The letter is folded into four rectangles, the paper a little brown around the folds, the writing is neat.

"A doctor's handwriting," I can hear you say. You didn't become a doctor, you cleaned doctors' offices, and when we came to visit, you put on the white lab coat that hung behind the door, we sat on the examination table, which you had covered with white paper, inhaled and exhaled deeply so that you could examine us.

When the letter arrived, Anne sat down on the sofa in our small apartment in the Kurilla quarter in Prizren and cried. My brother was sleeping on his pillow under the table. I was standing beside the open door of the house. The wind carried yellow leaves into the room. It was a warm wind, it tickled under my arms. When Anne got up and went past me over the threshold, my head turned toward her and away again. A brown eye peered from under the table. Anne's voice sounded far away.

"Baba isn't coming home."

When I licked my lips, I tasted salt.

"People are salty," Dede, my grandfather, once told me.

"Where is Baba?"

"I don't know, I don't know, I don't know!"

Anne put her head between her hands. Anne read the letter to us and wrote a letter back to Baba. Today her words slip through our fingers, and her eyes see through our words.

Anne walks as though she can see. When she stops suddenly, and I lean out the window.

"Is something wrong? Should I come down?"

She laughs, turns around, and disappears into the entry hall. Worried, I hurry to the elevator.

"You forgot to put on my makeup."

Anne "clapses" her cane, which is how she describes that action. She doesn't need it in the house. She goes into the bathroom, puts the toilet seat down, sits on it,

and closes her eyes. I spread the powder on her face with my fingers, trying to cover the red patches on her cheeks. Her skin feels slightly rough.

“Open your eyes.”

“How do I look? I haven’t seen myself in ten years.”

“You look like Fatma Girik.”

She pulls the white scarf over her black locks.

I was ashamed of it. No one in our family wore a headscarf, so why did she have to wear a headscarf now, here, in Switzerland, I thought, and I told her so. Anne said I should think before I speak. That’s the reason I started writing. I could write what I thought and no one told me to think first.

I was already ashamed that we couldn’t buy new clothes, that we cut each other’s hair, that we were the only ones who had no car or telephone, then Anne had to go and wear a headscarf, too. We had already been different before that; now we were the others.

In the kitchen Anne takes a bottle of Coke from the refrigerator. She says she could gain weight without eating, that she could double the kilos on her hips just by looking.

I think about the photos she carries in her purse. I don’t have to conceal the fact that I’m going through her purse; I can do it under her eyes, which can’t see me while she sips her Coke and laughs. I’m ashamed of myself.

The photos show you and Anne dancing, holding each other tight. There are lots of wine bottles on the table, and the mascara under Anne’s eyes is smeared. Her lips are red. Her nails are red. In one photo you’re kissing. In another one she’s sitting on your lap and laughing with her head thrown back, one arm around your neck. Anne’s cheeks swell. Her lips part slightly, she lets out a burp.

“That’s gross, don’t ever do that again.”

I go to my room and slam the door behind me. I can hear her laughing.

The apartment door clicks shut. I get up right away, go back to the window. Winter is in its annual war with autumn, the battle will soon be won. I wait till she comes out of the entrance hall, lights her cigarette, and rummages in her purse for her cane. Left, right, left, right. Just before the last bend she turns and smiles broadly. She knows I'm waving to her.

Some days the first of September seems so far away that I can barely remember it—not your face, not your smell, not your hands.

Your voice, too, is gradually disappearing from my ears.

I'm afraid that someday you'll disappear completely.

From my memory, from my mouth, from my face.

Aga says I look like you.

On other days it's as if you've been dead only a few days.

You lie lifeless on the bed.

No laughter in your face.

No movement in your hands.

No sight beneath your fallen eyelids.

Your jaw is tied up with my pink scarf.

Anne was standing beside Baba.

My sister sat on the chair beside him keeping her head down. Her hair covered her face. Now and then a tear dripped from the tip of her nose onto the back of her hand.

My brother tried to be strong, tried not to look me in the eye, to say nothing, tried to breathe evenly. My brother was trying to be a man.

I saw his chin tremble; mine did, too. Baba's hand was in mine. I don't know how long.

At some point it was dark; the room in the *Inselspital*, the University Island Hospital, was brightly lit. His hand had turned cold and pale. I bent and kissed it three times, bringing it first to my mouth, then to my forehead, then back again.

"I forgive you for what was on earth; please forgive me, too."

Sometimes Baba bought things on credit at the bakery in Neuenegg. I was with him once. I was behind him at the cash register as he bent forward slightly and quietly asked the cashier—whom he barely knew, who always smiled at me, whose breath smelled like cat food, who had a Serbian husband who ran the bakery, who was very nice to us—whether he could put the purchase on his tab. He said thank you with a smile, placed his hand over his heart, and inclined his head forward. I had put the bread, butter, the Nutella, a few vegetables, and the milk into the shopping bag. Baba reached for his pack of cigarettes immediately. We were hardly outside when he lit one. He blew smoke rings at the sky, I laughed. At precisely that moment—I was twelve—as he stood beside me with shining eyes, I swore I would one day have so much money that Baba and Anne would never again have to charge anything.

I swore it to the heavens between the smoke rings as loudly as I could.

Anne and I exit the Globus department store where we've been looking at nice dishes and silverware, sniffing perfumes, stroking cashmere sweaters. It's gotten cold.

Anne asks whether I have a warm sweater, I say yes, she asks what it cost. Anne asks what everything costs. She says money comes from the devil. With money you can distract people from life, lead them astray, deceive them, make them happy, kill them.

We drove into town, wandered through the stores. First Loeb's, then Voegele, later C&A, and finally EPA. Each of us was allowed to get something. I always reached for the price tag first. But I didn't want to run around in the same clothes all the time, the same shoes, so I chose violet leggings and a big T-shirt with a flower pattern. I wanted to keep them on right then and never take them off again. My brother bought candy and a wig, which he put on right away. Anne bought my sister a blond doll, and Baba got a ring for Anne—which made her finger green after a few days and lost its gold color. She never took it off. The plastic jewel fell out several times, he always glued it back in. Every month we drove into the city as soon as Baba's pay was in the bank. We all knew we couldn't spend much, but this day was the best one. We ate at McDonald's, sometimes in a pizzeria. Baba loved pizza. I watched as he cut it into real little pieces and folded the little pieces with his fork before he put them in his mouth. I tried to copy him, but I was too greedy and ate the pieces whole with my hands.

When we had money, Baba and Anne laughed a lot. When we had no money, they smoked a lot and we sat around at home. They fought, we cried in our room. My brother and I said if the light goes on right now, we'll be real rich. Or: if it starts raining right now. Or: if Baba wins the lottery.

Anne clings to my arm. When I'm with her, she doesn't need the cane. My arm gets warm where her hand is. She's wearing the ring with the green jewel that you gave her on her ring finger. The color has stopped coming off on my finger, she says, when I twist it around her finger a few times. Anne always has warm hands. She says people with warm hands get lots of love. You loved her a lot. When I say that I always have cold hands, she takes my hand in hers, warms it, and says, "No they aren't, don't say such dumb things."

She asks me whether her hands are wrinkled. No, I say, you don't have any wrinkles, not even in your face. She smiles and knows I'm lying.

I didn't know it would be my last five minutes with Baba. He was sitting on the couch listening to music. We were talking about the apartment he wanted to go see with Anne. Next morning he complained about pains in his shoulder, so Anne wanted to postpone the appointment. Baba wanted to see the apartment no matter what. They got into the red Mercedes and drove toward Bümpliz. After five minutes Baba's heart stopped beating. Then Anne screamed.