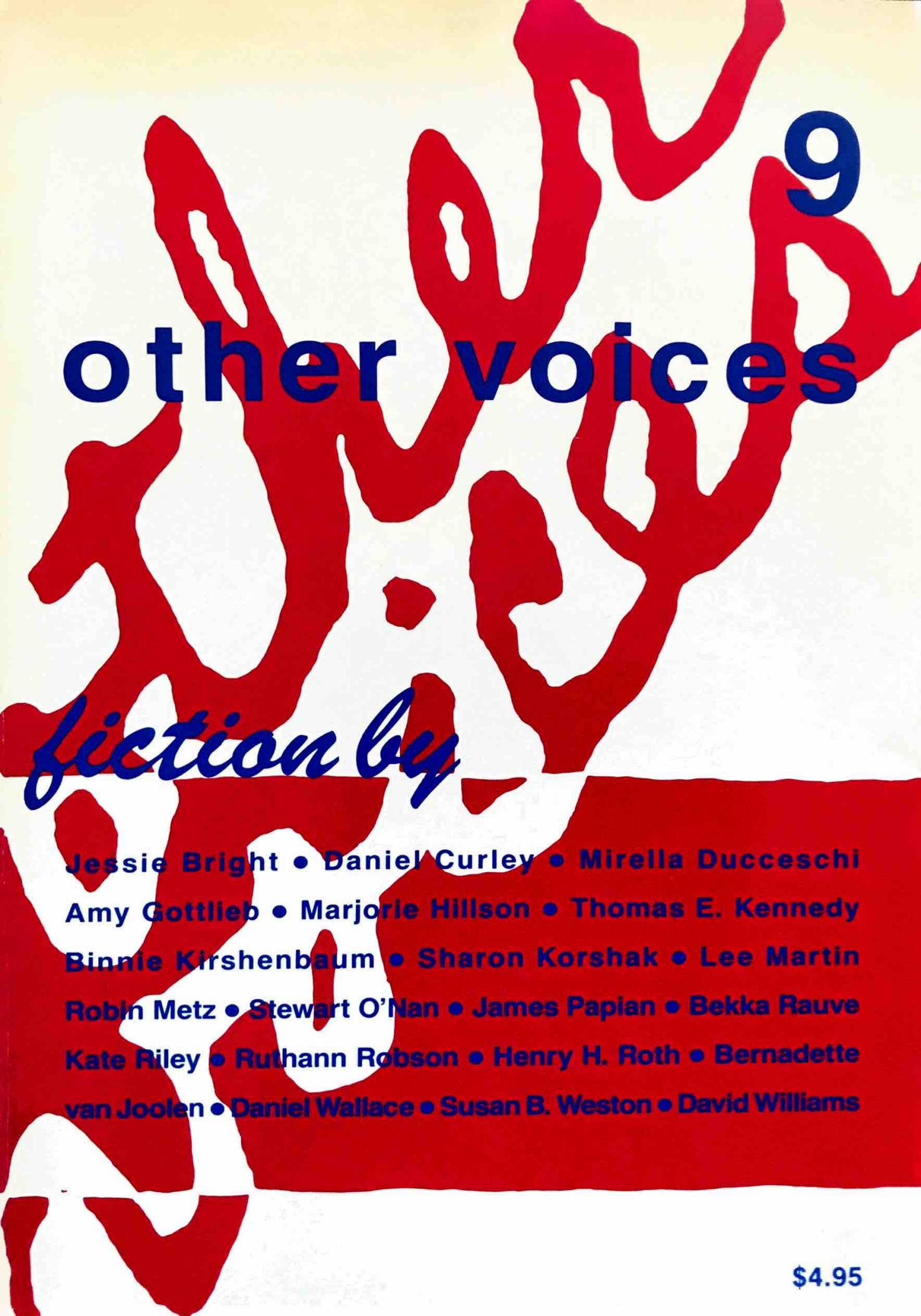
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Illusions of Byzantium

Kate Riley

The illusion.

Whenever he goes out for anything—yogurt, diarrhea pills, *The Herald Tribune*—she grows restless and terrified that the revolution is beginning below the hotel window. Any sudden noise of cars or their absence or a loud crack in the distance seems abnormal. She is sure he's been detained.

He insists that the city is modern, full of people intent on day-to-day lives. If they were milling for some apparent purpose, showing signs of concentrated discontent, he might feel more concern, he assures her. There is nothing, even in the air.

But she has seen the soldiers in green, armed with machine guns, prowling at street corners, circumnavigated by the average Turkish citizen like lamp posts. What if even one grows crazy with waiting on the alert for a thing that will not happen? Tensed jaw, cords in the neck, blood bulging past vein capacity, pointing his gun at the sky; people pass beneath.

The businessmen of Ankara in gray-vested suits, shoes polished by a shoe-shine man with a painted, carved-wood box, drone in herds from food stand to food stand of the renovated brick bazaar. A few women too, in this section of town, walk in pairs in tight-hipped dresses, nylons and satin pumps. The young men in polyester pants and black jackets eye them openly, idly, food bits dangling from ill-shaven lips. The soldier too could partake of this proffered relief amid the hum-drum, but he persists in his watch. Whereas the kid across the street (his martial equal, in same greens as his, tucked into high-tied black boots) has gone slack with taking it in: where he comes from, women's figures are all veiled.

Two tourists, a man and his girl, squatting on the doorstep of a bank, take out a paper sack from which they draw—the older soldier steps closer, muzzle dropping—tangerines. The girl is blond, but the man dark. If she weren't with him, no one would guess he's not a Turk. They put the orange peels in the bag, then gingerly remove the strings and let them fall, white filaments on black mud.

The soldier walks away, stands against a wall, then walks again. Noon-time eating. He strokes his cheek grown chubby; he strokes it taut

as his countrymen eat. Dark faces, half-moon eyes, they chew ground meat-stuffed pita with flashing teeth. Dark-clothed Turks behind dark doors, unfolding dark schemes, defiling Ataturk's glorious name.

He does not aim but fires into the crowd, at the young soldier and the tourists eating tangerines, their blond-red mouths stopped fast in horror.

Moving her leg she feels the sheet wet with her excrement. Yesterday, when this began, she thought she was bleeding inside. There was such pain, and blood in the toilet. Instead it dawned on her: her period. She has never kept track of the weeks like other women, and she's only had cramps once before. She was so frightened then; she thought they would never end. When they did, she thought she understood at last what it is that women share: the knowledge that some pain passes, and so can be borne. But real knowledge is learned through practice. She has had so little practice. Besides there is now this other factor. She does not know what is causing which pain.

The solitude.

Outside it is gray, bone-chilling. He's been out today once already, but the sights of modern Ankara are not compelling, and from this bedside he thinks more kindly of the still-standing monuments to antiquity in Istanbul. Of Aya Sofia, the loneliest structure on earth, crouching in the center of the old city, dank testament to transgressing generations. It began as a Byzantine church raised by Constantine to the glory of a colossal God. The flesh of the face of Christ in the apse, arms spread, was toned by tiny stones, muscles apparent and eyes encrusted with dark lined lids, hollow but pierced by one central gem. Then the Muslims swept into town and, needing a mosque, they followed the geometrical lines but painted out all human forms with a dull rust orange. At the start of the 20th century, Ataturk uncovered the original mosaics. But in his attempt to excise Islam from the heart of his young republic, he let the chandeliers go dark, grow cobwebs. Suspended from the dome by long, rotting chains, they tilt here and there at head-level like shipwrecked hulls. The vast vacancy of the architectural cross seemed more of a wind-swept ruin than any Greek temple out on a rocky crag and destroyed by natural agents. It was like entering the skin of an elephant, dark and corroded, a carapace of myth and memory.

He is dressed and has made his bed but sits on it, holding his book as if to read. Instead he watches her sleep. Soiled sheets are piled at the foot of her bed where she yanked them off in the night. She woke him early with groans, as she made her way, tottering to the toilet, her head held way forwards on her neck.

He turned his back, but could not fall asleep again. Yesterday they came together for the first time ever; then she began to cry. She apologized, but she couldn't stop. Even in the street, after checking out, her pack on her back, she continued to gulp and sob. He'd never seen her like that. Honestly, it scared him. But then it turned out she was sick.

Now watching the drops of sweat at the roots of the cropped blond hair, the face, sleep dowsed, pale in an instant, so flushed the next, he thinks of Victorian novels. He thinks of kissing her. He knows she hates her helplessness and, even in her weakness, makes only hesitant demands. It is true, though, what he said then: he would do anything for her.

In Sicily he cut her hair because she asked him to. She said she was sick of dark men's stares. Still they are drawn to her, to the bright neuter speck she presents in a crowd, an anomaly attracting indigenes in public places, like the honey on the table in Crete that trapped yellow jackets under the still warm sun. That week on the beach was the last time they felt relaxed, unnoticed, commonplace.

Now when he goes out alone, no one offers help. Men talk Turkish to him as if he belongs.

The trap.

It began before Turkey: in every small town in Italy and Greece, boys gathered round if they just stopped in the square to put their legs down. The Yamaha 125, though small and dusty, was an object of desire, as remote as a movie star, to be eyed with grave longing. She did not feel so trapped by that though; they could still drive away.

But they sold the moto in Crete because the weather was turning cold. They did not know it was stamped into his passport: impermissible to sell such items or take the drachmas out of Greece. They were thrown off the train in the middle of the night fifty miles from Turkey. She was prepared to follow orders: return to the island and buy the bike back. He stalled, believing in some other better way. Walk across? Hire a boat?

Next morning, over *cafe greque* and *baklava*, she suggested dabbing honey on the incriminating page. He tried, and it stuck. Then it took two hours at the border cafe for him to work up the nerve to cross. He read the fine print out loud about willful mutilation of US property. She did not blame him, but she was eyeing the guards who patrolled the wide and brambly river dividing the hostile countries. She was grateful they'd decided not to try to sneak across.

Then customs took two minutes. They handed their passports over; the officer rubbed each page to be sure he saw each one. The honey held; they walked on through to the other side.

They had not thought past this point, but she put out her thumb and a trucker picked them up. He offered to take them home for the night, then drop them off in Istanbul next day. Feeling exhausted, they accepted. But it was nine before they reached his town. He stopped at a clean, modern bar with a wooden counter, stained glass windows and a fishermen's net hung from the ceiling. For three hours he plied them with whiskey straight, peanuts and potato salad—'*Salate Americani*' as he called it. They struggled against fatigue to communicate with a pen, a napkin and a pocket Berlitz.

The tab, which the trucker paid, only came to four dollars. But this was as much as he made in a day of driving; nor could he afford to come home more than once a week, he told them. By then she was too drunk and unclear about what to do, much less how to say it. It was midnight, and his sleepy-eyed wife (not the woman in the photograph taped to the sunvisor of his cab) was already making up beds with soft comforters for the unmarried couple her husband had just spent a day's wages on, the one night he could have spent at home.

Early next morning they were up and seated on mats at a low table eating bean soup, pickled peppers and garlics. Their host was out loading his truck with the day's deliveries, but his wife and two small shy children, her mother and her mother's mother, were all sitting around, watching, not eating. His father, crouched on the one chair in the house, his body askew, stopped moaning only long enough to exhibit the hot brick wrapped in a towel which he kept pressed against one kidney. She tried the word for bread when a warm white loaf appeared in the little boy's arm—she was so grateful to have this familiar food. But the oldest *ana* just laughed. Kneeling on her cushion, she'd been muttering non-stop; the ashy wrinkles of her face hardly moved, tied up tight in the scarf that criss-crossed her breasts. The women all wore loose t-shirts, ballooning tie-pants, and no veils. Only the young wife took pity and came forward to demonstrate how garlic can be eaten unsheathed so it tastes less strong. Still, a whole bowl remained.

Then no toilet, only a hole in the floor with a hose running in through the wall to rinse with. The front yard was mud with chickens running loose and a goat. But the cement block house was excruciatingly clean: sunshine entering through clear windows, the beds and walls draped with brightly dyed and embroidered cloth. She almost wanted to stay.

That day the highway extended endlessly through flat fields, autumn gray and flax. He asked what truckers in America make. They made a guess, then she told him the price of bread. But his eyes already gleamed, glancing at her with a morsel of the gold dislodged from the cobbles that paved the purple plains. Could he go there to work?

He drove right past Istanbul over the Bosphorous to a bakery up on a hill in an Asian suburb of the city. Unloading the bags of flour took all day; she felt trapped in the roomful of men playing cards, drinking tea, and watching independence day parades on TV.

By late afternoon it was raining hard. He set them down three miles from any hotel in Istanbul.

The exchange.

Inside the Blue Mosque a man offered in English to explain Islamic symbols and practice and held the gate open in the wooden rail, distinguishing them from other visitors. Chosen, they followed barefoot, crossing rug after rug to the step where the worshippers gather at prayer time. Their guide gestured at the staircase to a high pulpit from which the singers chant, then mentioned that the emblazoned discs placed high up at the corners of the central dome represented four prayers. All this he'd figured out himself that morning, when they wandered into a less touristed mosque at prayer-time.

He told their guide that he admired the shoes-off custom in the sacred buildings, and the colors and softness of the wall-to-wall patchwork of rugs. Nodding then, and as if inspired, the man suggested they go to his cousin's carpet store. This he'd half-expected. Such arrangements he understood but disliked since he could not fulfill their half of the exchange. Anyway they went.

The small store was warm; they were given glasses of tea. Rugs curled open, along walls, across the floor, laid down and leaning over, never exposing their coarse backs or hairy edges. But the man grew impatient, wedged between columns of carpets, beginning to yawn and answering their questions with shrugs. Apologetic, he appealed to the cousin's common sense: how could they carry a rug in a back pack? But their guide lost his temper, forgot his English and showed them the door.

They bought a yogurt drink and returned to the privacy of their hotel room to negotiate their present course. She admitted she was tired of just going without a goal, without predetermined mileposts and some idea of what they'd find.

Three months into the trip, in Greece, they'd sat down with the map to trace out by finger a more definitive route. Even then there were considerations. They should probably choose Lebanon or Israel; they could not very well visit both. Also there was a rumor: a Magic Bus en route from Athens to Calcutta had been stopped in Afghanistan, and twenty-two world traveling hippies taken out and shot. So they decided then to skip India and follow the map-blue line on 'round the Mediterranean, hoping the vista would grow vivid, tangible as they

lived it. The sea would be wine-dark, and magic must still happen deep in the deserts between the Bosphorous and Gibraltar Straits. He did expect something to happen.

He never expected cornfields in Turkey, much less cornfields reaped and turned hoary with frost. They were wearing, by then, every piece of clothing they'd brought. Things were happening, but not with the black-veiled intimacy he sought. Small adventures, little inroads into slightly alien ways of life, but no real contact. He admitted, he'd wanted to go all out, become submerged. he had come in search of knowledge, to be changed, to be deeply moved by contact with the exotic, the mysterious Other. Perhaps this was naive, even wrong. But now in return he felt mistreated and misunderstood, forced to barter for services with his own insecurities.

They reached no conclusion that afternoon.

The sacrifice.

It was a feast day; sheep were being slaughtered in the streets. The cobbles were not running with blood as one young waiter had boasted, but they saw some fires in front of houses, several large cauldrons of boiling water and a carcass.

She wanted to go to the Bazaar and so they spent two hours climbing and descending hills, lost in the maze of endless, unnamed streets, crisscrossed overhead by bunches of wires tethered between rotting wood structures. Finally a well-dressed young man asked if he could be of assistance. By then they just wanted out, but they asked for the Turkish Baths. Beckoning, he ushered them beyond the main throng. Then with a few English words and a newspaper in his hand, he let them know he was a journalist and would, he signalled with their map, guide them to Ataturk's palace on the other side of town. He nicked off an hour and a half on his watch with his thumbnail: his work began at two.

After the crowded Bazaar and bus, she felt relieved walking down broad avenues between tall sycamores. The palace, however, was closed for the holidays. The journalist, distressed, wanted to take them out to eat. But on the ferry back, they conferred; she was not up for it.

As they disembarked, the journalist gestured towards the tubs of onions cut up to eat with the fish sold fresh out of small boats and fried over barrels. She said, no thank you. Thank you, but no. They weren't hungry. They just wanted to bathe and could find their own way now from the pier. The journalist raised his hands in the air, shaking his head and muttering: Americani. Already it was three and he an hour late, if what he'd said was true, and she'd correctly understood.

At the baths they paid the tourist price to be done in full, and

were led off to separate rooms, to be apart more than a minute for the first time in months. Seated on warm wet marble, she was scrubbed and soaped by an *ana* with pendulous ivory breasts, until dead skin peeled off. She tried not to stare, but she'd never seen such an old woman nude. She wanted to crawl into her lap, but the *ana* moved off to cleanse another young tourist.

Lying and looking up at the glass-studded dome, she breathed in the steam, thinking of little. It was there she became aware that the walls that marked her off from her surroundings, the walls she, until then, had referred to as "home," were crumbling. Five months ago she bragged she could continue life, read books, make sense of events, even amid the turmoil of an unscheduled, uncharted journey. They'd only met three months before that, but setting out together had not seemed absurd. They shared a romantic ideal about cross-cultural difference and the need for exposure to gain understanding. Besides that, they were in love.

Outside the baths, they came across a curved horn, sawn off and left, trickling blood on the curb. She could not mention to him what she'd realized: that she'd met her limit in all the small changes, in the insidious discrepancies of slow boundary crossings, creeping up on her unaware, undermining. She knew his resistance: he would not give up. They went back to the hotel to pack and took the night train to Ankara, the heart of Turkey.

The leader.

The capital depressed him immediately. The museum was full of Assyrian stelae, but it was all so out of context and unreal. Realizing that he must accept present-day reality, he suggested they visit the modern monuments.

They were led around Ataturk's mausoleum by an ex-soldier, still in fatigues, but a self-proclaimed socialist. Look at this! Ataturk was no democrat! he raged, shaking his arms at the concrete vastness to make them see, a structure so empty he was afraid they'd miss its banality. Two huge gate houses, vacant except for visitors' whispers and a few documents under glass, were guarded by a triumphant triumvirate: Ataturk linking arms with the Common Man and Common Woman, faces stolidly beaming. *Ein Mann! Funf* million dollars! He'd worked two years in Germany, so he used this language; they'd studied it in school.

In the tomb itself, shaped like the Parthenon and just as large, loomed a fifty-foot statue of the dead president. It looked like an Egyptian pharoah, missing only tunic and shoulder length hair. *"Die neu Gott?"* He shrank to hear his words resound in the apse-like room.

Their heavy-booted leader turned and, eyes laughing, pressed finger to lips, as if the pilgrim families in their provincial Sunday bests might know German.

Waving them on into the reliquaries room, the young socialist paid their way, then stomped from glass case to glass case, pointing and giggling at the combs, gilt razors, and letters signed with Ataturk's name. Whispering in excellent German mixed with Turkish expletives, he rent the clusters of devotees and left whirlpools of consternation in his wake.

They followed as they could. The gold, ruby and emerald *objects d'art*, given to Ataturk by foreign emissaries, seemed no different than the silk couches, ivory elephants and china samovars—gifts to the Sultans from kings of other lands in their day, now on display in just the same way in the Topkapu Palace. Didn't Ataturk put an end to the barbarism of riches? he tried in his best German. Their revolutionary leader snickered at his disciple's wit, then led them out, shook hands, and that was it. They spun off from his gyration, going the opposite direction, but headed nowhere special.

That was the day they heard that American hostages had been taken in a neighboring country. He felt her fear, but he was resolved to leave this modern metropolis next day and pierce the interior to discover ancient Persia where it yet persisted. Even if they went no further than Turkey, they must come up against something more.

But next morning in the street, all tears, she clung to his arm, her back pack dragging one shoulder down.

"Do you want to go home?"

"I don't know. I don't know what's wrong."

"This has been too much? You've had enough?"

"I guess. I don't know. Maybe I'm sick."

He took over and found this hotel, a real one with hot water and a bath, clean sheets and towels.

The led.

They were always being led about, led about, led about. Lying in bed, she grows dizzy remembering. Always there would come a man, any man, some one man would take them in hand. A generous gesture. A helpful intention, perhaps. Do-gooder, they called him; he offered directions if they looked just slightly lost, and ended up taking them the long way round. Lonely maybe, and his for the day, he showed them off to family and friends. Americans with whom he could barely speak provided company as well as any, when sitting down to eat or drinking tea. But it was never simply that.

Which was worse: to be rubbed in a crowd by the young reporter's

groin (he asked if they were married and thinking he was like them, she did not lie), or to be elbow-led by him across the street when she went to buy tangerines. He handled the transaction with the vendor, too. Which upset her more: to have her thigh stroked under the counter (over whiskeys the trucker claimed to view women as equals), or to be shepherded to the bathroom, squatting to pee as he stood outside, wedging the door shut? Pawing at her shoulder, he scolded her friend: Turk men will take her!

But aren't they just two sides of an iron-age coin? Does one have to be worse? She tosses between damp sheets. The fever is less, but her bones hurt more, and her stomach has not settled. She eyes him over there, reading in a cone of light. Has it made her feel different? He treats her nicely enough, but as if she is polluted. He has not touched her since she entered this bed. She wishes he would help her to the bathroom, hold her head in his hands.

But even before, she was wanting him to take her arm more, to show possession in public, to let these men know. These men! In delirium, she felt herself raging inside, chanting: Go away, get away, I'm not yours, I won't play.

She watches his face, dark like a Turk's, as withdrawn at times. How do Muslim men feel about the women they possess? If only more women were in the streets, even veiled. But there are always so few, and none at night.

The act of staring at another, without return—if he turns now . . . now . . . even now, she could still smile, as if only this moment she chanced to glance, as if it means nothing. But always he turns too late. As if aware of her gaze, he only slowly responds, then twists to catch her eyes.

"You think I'm weak and dependent, don't you?" She has managed to go downstairs for a meal.

"No, not that exactly. It's that I don't know what you want anymore." He's eating steak and potatoes and string beans—the American menu.

She's having vegetable soup. "So how do I stop?"

"What, your feelings? Leave them behind."

"It's not that easy. You think things are so easy."

Anger put into words becomes a thought. Dependency expressed will spawn effects. When one person loses power, the other seems more real.

The withdrawal.

Third morning in the Turkish deluxe hotel, he wakes to find her staring. The smell of morning Turkey floods the windows. In the distance dross from the factories' night activity belches from smoke stacks in yellow gray plumes.

"I slept through the night. I want to leave."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Home."

He's not sure where she thinks that is, but he helps her pack and try to escape without admitting what she has soiled. But when they emerge from their room, the laundry man is there. They hurry down the hall, but his suspicions have been roused. As they wait for the elevator, he emerges from their room and calls to them, sheets in hand. She flops on a chair, chin sunk on her chest. He goes back to deal with it.

"Five hundred lire."

"Too much," she says, irate.

"It was a bad stain. I thought you ruined the pad." He verges on anger too.

"Shit!" She stalks through the opening doors.

"Yes. Exactly." He follows.

Outside the crowded station he slinks down next to his pack, rocking on his shanks, back up against the cold metal rail, in line with other dark-haired men in drab-colored clothes. Only he does not smoke or affect toughness with a cigarette-cocked hand—one of the things she appreciates in him, he knows.

She sinks beside him, bright in magenta jacket. Other men eye her, but her head is down. He forces his eyes to stroll, to avoid every stare, each blink of consciousness. They are aware of him again, too, now that she is with him, and will approach if he allows it. But he keeps gauze curtains drawn so that it almost seems that all he sees is the air between, tinged with slight color, like the thin mist covering fresh newsprint. In reality, cigarette smoke fills the air, as well as human breath mixed with the chilly drizzle that has begun to fall from a moth-eaten sky.

He wanted to feel submerged, but not this way. He wanted to engage, but how and with what? Where is it? Something urges him on. Just a little further: Egypt, Tangier, south of the Sahara if Morocco is built-over. He's not ready to say Uncle.

A man walks over, piercing the film: graying middle-aged, with a long taut face and wearing tight creased pants, a shiny leather jacket. He stands before the man can ask: "Americani?" or gesture at all. Sticking out a hand, he says loudly: "How you doin'? Glad to meet you." The man shakes energetically, beginning to speak. But releasing his hand: "So long. It's been great." He has his bag on one shoulder and hers on the other. Without glancing back, he passes the food

stands with bread sticks, bottled soda and the cooked ground meat he thinks made her sick, all brashly lit and so noisy. The dining room is almost empty with white cloths on the tables. He halts and looks around. She's right behind him. He goes in.

Sitting heavily, she asks with a voice that hardly contains breath: "So why don't you go on alone?"

"What?"

"You want to see the pyramids, don't you?" She speaks up, but his mind goes dark. His head shakes twice, like a twitch.

The dissolution.

Arriving in Istanbul at five in the morning, they walk to the park and sit on a bench with their backs to the mosques awash with slurred dapple blue, parrot green and artificial sunset pink. There they plan to wait for day, but the sun does not rise.

She wants to go, so they find a tea room that has opened its doors: a room of light on the otherwise night-dark street. Going in they sip from tiny, bulging glasses that, shaped like fertility goddesses, never vary from one tea room to the next. And eventually a gray tumescence spreads visibility like cracked eggs into corners. But this day never goes so far as to show itself or the world naked.

The headlessness with which they then proceed could be due to their sleepless ride. The image of their bodies cramped into tiny bus seats, twitching against each other all night, whacking and flapping intermittently like a pair of exhausted but not-yet-dead fish out of water, remains with her throughout the day, producing feeling, thought, even action. Without this memory of movement, she might not feel compelled to go through with the necessary motions. A mechanical activity done day after day, such as weaving or typing, will remain in the brain, woof passing, keys clacking, imposing its patterns on the night light of dreams. In just this way she is aware of their passage from train station to youth travel agency to embassy to airline office, their packs on their backs: two hump-backed fish still flapping, still whacking.

When it proves too difficult to get a visa to pass through Bulgaria and Yugoslavia by train, she follows him to the student travel agency. There they are told they can get her ID ratified by the American embassy and cut her flight price in half; she goes with him through the small, mud-slicked streets. The entrance is in a high iron fence. He nudges her into the booth when the marine asks for one at a time. Inside the spacious, well-lit building of clicking typewriters and ringing phones, she goes in search of water and is let in by another

marine to the fountain whose cleanliness is attested to in a paragraph glued to the tank. She drinks four Dixie cups full and returns to a pillowy chair to face the present president's toothy smile.

She hears him appealing to a higher-up. The woman at the desk was going to reject their request, but really, they aren't up to anything. Just trying to cut through red tape. She turns in her seat to see. The official, dressed casually in a sweater, tie and gray wool pants, laughs, understanding, and tells the typist to get out a letter in Turkish validating the cracked plastic card that she's been carrying for seven years, on again off again through college, Europe, now into Asia, bearing a photo about which bank tellers exclaim: This isn't you!

He deals so efficiently with all the details of her destination that she does not realize he does not intend to go where she goes until the airline office where he buys one ticket to Paris and one to Cairo. "I have to stand at the Sphinx' toes at least. We've come so far."

She nods. After all she suggested it. What hurts is her sense of his subterfuge. Why did he let her think otherwise? "You can have the toothbrush," she manages to say.

With two days to go before either can leave, they head back to the hotel district. The bus is not crowded when they get on and sit down, but it quickly fills and people begin to press closer and closer all around. Before their stop she attempts to dislodge her pack from between her knees; her shoulder butts into a stomach beside her. Excuse me, she says in Turkish, as she gets the pack up in the air, over her head. The bus stops, and her body grows thin, lifting and prying between hips and backs. Men smile; the one woman's face is bawdy with laughter. Wherever she edges through, flesh snaps shut behind. She wants to look back, but she's been cut off. She will get out at one stop and he a mile later. She has no money, no map, has quit carrying essentials: her tie string pants have no pockets.

She is two yards from the door; ten faces keep her from it. The bus begins to move again. She feels the thrashing inside, engorging her arms and legs. She is mumbling the word for please, but the people have grown sullen and begun to knead her with elbows and pelvic thrusts. But she reaches the door; at the next stop she's expelled. He pops out after her. The doors suck the bus' guts back in like a sigh.

She dashes across the wet, empty pavement, stops, whirls, heaves her pack off her shoulder against a lamp post; it shivers with a tinny thud, and the white plastic bag with their toothbrush and soap flutters out, and down into the mud. Immediately she bends to pick it up. She is shuddering all over but not crying. She feels his lack of response like the vacancy of a tortoise shell upside down on the beach.

The reversal.

They check back into the same hotel they stayed at before. It still smells. Wind blows, and the windows let in Turkey. He asks himself: How is this smell made different from all other smells? From American? From Greek? From Hebrew? It is not the smell of cooking. Not burnt flesh, nor spices boiling. Paper curling. Oil fuming. Cement turning. Sewage rats caught between two cobbles rotting. Not the old smells, the underground smells, of mildewed pillars or of piled up dust turned grime, of piled up grime turned hardened on thick glass or peeling iron. This smell like no other flecks the nostrils and clings. Like Turkey clings here, here, close in, reluctant to let go. Like the bear leashed through its nose and led around the Hippodrome. Hardly a beast now, more like a stuffed thing: peed on, drooled on, fur matted and dulled by years. The bear, stunned by bating, by iron's cold nose-piercing, walks, stands, puts its paws on a tourist's chest for a photo, meekly, and that is all. This sticks in his mind. Like belly-dancers or smoke-filled tea rooms or Turkish baths: the vestigial exotic, oddly still lingering, led by a dirty lad in tweed jacket, tattered and patched.

For two days they avoid all contact with anyone other than the hotel clerk and the waiter at The Pudding Shop downstairs, where Dylan and Hendrix are still blasting away and everyone looks strung out whether thirteen or forty, German, American or Algerian.

Yet the sky for this period turns perfectly blue. They take shots of each other inside the hotel room painted blue. They use up two whole rolls of film, having barely filled one in the past five months. And they make love three times, more than they have in the past six weeks.

Then they splurge on a taxi to the airport.

The escape.

Wind of sensation—liberty to feel. The water is like blue glass, and the mountains of Asia smoky, a backdrop cut from tissue paper. The music, broken into by static, is oddly, recognizably American jazz. The taxi-driver, stiff in a coat and turtleneck, wire-rimmed pincers, w's like v's, spent time in West Germany in a textile factory, which he yearns for after all. Istanbul is not good place for textile, as they see: he drives taxi. He would go back. Particularly now with soldiers in the streets, and tanks.

She tries to listen. What is here. What is there. What is. So we have come, sailing, singing. Souls of gold on a filigree tree. In the harbor are fishermen fishing. What? Where? All the boats are fishermen's boats? Yes, yes, all, all.

Beyond distraction to listen always. They are too broken . . . his words like undone threads of a metal screen . . . to pinch together into

sense. So like gold birds on boat yards. Like spare planks for dead bards. Let us go then you and I. No, you, not I. Not I, nor you.

Behind them lights flick on; spanning the Bosphorous, they stud the steel suspension bridge, newly-constructed, Turkey's pride. The sun's last rays filter his image, aloof, half-absent already.

He takes her hand from the seat between them. "So I'll see you at home, in a couple of weeks. A month at most."

"Yes, okay." Whatever you say. Then again, maybe not.

Every fine story must leave in the mind of the sensitive reader an intangible residium of pleasure, a cadence, a quality of voice that is exclusively the writer's own, individual, unique. A quality which one can remember . . . can experience over and over again in the mind but can never absolutely define, as one can experience in memory a melody, or the summer perfume of a garden.

—Willa Cather