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### Abstract:

This multilingual short story is a multifaceted gem of contemporary fiction. Tracking habits and ruptures in the daily lives of her neighbors and interlocutors around a German courtyard, a Turkish migrant begins to model-whimsically and with punning poignancy-something approximating postnational intimacy. In this imaginative and multi-medial landscape newly global functions of reading print literature are also probed.

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***Translating “The Courtyard in the Mirror” by Emine Sevgi Özdamar: A Foreword***  
by Leslie A. Adelson

Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s multilingual short story, “The Courtyard in the Mirror,” is a multifaceted gem of contemporary fiction. Tracking habits and ruptures in the daily lives of her neighbors and interlocutors around a German courtyard, a Turkish migrant begins to model—whimsically and with punning poignancy—something approximating postnational intimacy. As I argue in *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 41-77), the imaginative landscape of this story is also “a dynamic ethnoscape in which reading literally takes place” (p. 76). The story’s emphasis on reading as an effect of print literature in particular is both striking and misleading. It is striking because this courtyard tale, which itself first appeared in the medium of print, seems to favor the relational vectors of print literature at a time when new electronic media are widely celebrated as indispensable to globalization, for better or for worse. And the apparent emphasis on the favored medium of print is misleading, because the reading that takes place in this story is richly saturated with a complex history of modern media ranging from scissor-cut silhouettes, mirrors, and photography to the telegraph, telephone, radio, cassette recordings, television, and film. What the story’s narration renders in one medium is often immediately translated, as it were, into another and sometimes yet another again—all in the print medium of the story itself. The synaesthesia of the courtyard is similarly artful. While the migrant subject of narration pays keen attention to habits and ruptures she can track with her eyes, readers are subtly encouraged to track how vision—including what can be seen on the printed page or in the mind’s eye—is often mediated in particular through sound (of steps, whistles, music, and poetry, for example). Yet the courtyard ethnoscape where reading takes place is also a world of smell, taste, and touch, as curious readers will soon discover. Translation too is an ever-present though sometimes hidden motif in this story of mobility and entanglement. Poetry by Heinrich Heine appears in its original German in the original German of Özdamar’s craft, while poetry by Charles Baudelaire appears only in its original French and is thus not subjected to translation at all—unless one counts the translation from poem into embedded dialogue in the medium of prose fiction. Turkish-language poetry by Can Yücel, however, is rendered in German translation by Recai Hallaç, but not tagged as such in the German diction of Özdamar’s original tale. English-language literary citations (from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* or Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, for example) likewise appear in German translation in Özdamar’s portrait of a courtyard. Whatever begins to approximate something like postnational intimacy in “The Courtyard in the Mirror” thus relies on the labyrinthine entwinement of, not only people who move, but also media technologies, sensory perceptions, and language bodies in flux. This story about a single courtyard in the German city of Düsseldorf is for multilingual readers on the move.

The complex roles that accrue to translation motifs and actual translations in the original diction of the courtyard story raise some tricky questions for anyone who attempts to translate the story itself. For example, Özdamar cites Christian Enzensberger’s German translation of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. When I translate the courtyard story into English, as I have done for this electronic publication,

should I simply insert Carroll's original wording unchanged, or does the Enzensberger translation include any nuances that are arguably more important for the courtyard endeavor than the English-language original? A similar question arises in reference to the poems by Can Yücel, which have been published in the Turkish original together with English translations by Feyyaz Kayacan Fergar. But Recai Hallaç's German translations of the Yücel poems cited do include many subtle notes that are pivotal to the courtyard narrative, even though these particular subtleties are not reflected in Fergar's translations, which were published before and independent of Özdamar's text. For this reason I have opted to provide my own English translations of the Yücel poems featured in the story (e.g., "Casting Net," "Public Enemy Number One," "The Green Poem," and "Dust-Bath") and to base them on the German translations by Hallaç favored by Özdamar. The quotations from *Alice in Wonderland* are true to Carroll's original except for the final line cited, where Enzensberger's German translation includes both deictic and extra-European references that echo crucial refrains in the courtyard narrative. I have similarly relied on Hal Draper's published translations of the Heine poems cited, with one exception. Where Draper has a lyrical "you" in one Heine poem ("Abroad") "stare with wondering eye," I have changed the verb from "stare" to "look around" in an effort to keep faith with courtyard diction. The English translation provided here for the "Klopslied" or "Meatball Song," a Berlin folk song once set to music by Kurt Weill, is my own. Bibliographical documentation for all source texts cited in the courtyard translation follows the text of the story.

One final word is in order about competing visual and aural cues in translating "The Courtyard in the Mirror." The collection of short prose in which the German original was published in 2001 was dedicated jointly to the author's father, to John Berger, and to Can Yücel. A Turkish poet named Can also appears in the courtyard story, as do several poems and poetic fragments that can clearly be attributed to Can Yücel. Because the spelling of the real and fictive poet's first name would most likely prompt English speakers to mistake its pronunciation for that of the English word "can," which begins with a harsh-sounding consonant, I have aimed here for aural rather than visual faithfulness to Özdamar's orthography. This too is a choice inspired by the synaesthesia of the courtyard that Özdamar conjures for our readerly imagination. The story in its English translation thus gives us a Turkish poet named "Jon."

**The Courtyard in the Mirror**

by **Emine Sevgi Özdamar**

[“Der Hof im Spiegel” by Emine Sevgi Özdamar

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*translated by Leslie A. Adelson © 2006*

I thought she had died. I was standing in the kitchen with my back against the radiator, waiting for the sad light in her room, in the house across the way, where she lived, to go on in the large mirror that was attached to the wall over my kitchen table. For years her light from the house on the other side of the courtyard had been my setting sun. Whenever I saw her lighted window in the kitchen mirror, and only then, I turned on the light in my apartment. Now I was standing in the dark and had a cookie in my hand, but wasn't eating it. I was afraid I would make too much noise. If she had died ...

The light went on in the stairwell, someone was going down the stairs. Through the milk glass window of the door to my apartment, the light was shining into the kitchen, and I saw my waiting face in the mirror. That must be Mr. Volker going down the stairs. His steps used to be much louder than they are now. He was living together with a young man then, a beautiful young man. Upstairs, on a sewing machine, the young man sewed beautiful suits for himself and for Mr. Volker. The rattling of the sewing machine made Mr. Volker's wooden floor tremble, and my ceiling trembled along with it. And because of the trembling ceiling, even the plates piled on top of each other in my kitchen cabinet began to tremble, too. Whenever he took a break, I thought, now he's tearing off the thread with his teeth between the fabric he's finished sewing and the needle in the sewing machine. That's how my mother always did it when I was a child. A few threads always hung down in her hair, she laid the right side of her face onto the sewing machine, in front of the needle in the machine, and tore the thread connecting the fabric and the sewing machine needle off with her teeth. She had told me that, one time, the middle finger on her right hand had gotten under the needle while it was still moving over the fabric. And then the needle broke off in her finger. The doctors said, “We can operate, but don't worry, the needle won't move and travel to your heart. It will stay stuck there in your finger.”

As a child, again and again, I had felt her finger for this half needle. Sometimes I woke up at night and went to feel her middle finger in the dark, to see if the needle was still there. Or was it on its way to her heart? For years I was the guardian of a broken needle. When she died, I stood at the cemetery, not under the tree where the men let her into the ground, but under the next tree, for girls were not allowed to stand at the open grave of the dead, only the sons. The men took her out of the coffin, grabbed her shroud at the four corners, suddenly I saw her heels peeking out from the shroud. She is swinging, I thought, here is a garden, she is swinging in a swing that someone has attached to the two trees, I'm standing down below and seeing her heels.

When she left the world, she took only half a needle with her. Whenever I had hurt her, she would say to me: “My daughter, first you must prick your own flesh with a small needle. If it doesn't hurt, and only then, you can prick the flesh of other people with a needle.” Or she would say, “What is a human being? You can't eat his flesh, you can't wear his skin. A human being has nothing but his sweet tongue.” When she died, I thought, how many words did she take with her under the ground? I had a great yearning

for her words. She had said: "If you consider the numbers of the living and the dead, the world is the world of the dead." How many words were lying down there now?

I sat in the plane and haggled in the sky with death. "When I arrive in Istanbul, my mother will open the door for me, the room will smell like the stuffed grape leaves that I love being cooked." When I got out of the taxi on the steep little street in Istanbul, the curtains up on her window were moving because of the wind from the Sea of Marmara. For days I searched the streets for women who looked like her. I found only two. The gypsy who always sold flowers where the long steep little street began, and who rolled thin cigarettes, one after the other, and smoked them until they were gone, with no butts left lying around her on the street. I rode in trains and asked people if their mothers were still alive or how old they had been when they died. But no matter whether their mothers had died younger or older than my mother, it didn't help me. Once the train stopped at a small station. There, sitting on the ground, were Kurdish women and children who had been brought there as seasonal laborers. But it had rained a lot, and the cotton they were supposed to pick had gotten wet. One of the Kurdish women was crying loudly. Her crying was similar to the crying of my mother, but the train pulled out, and I still heard her crying voice.

Before my mother's death I had never seen my father use the telephone. Whenever the telephone rang, he would speak very briefly with one of my siblings, "Come on over, my son, we're home," and then hang up again. Now he was looking in the apartment for notebooks with all the telephone numbers that he had gathered over the last fifty years, dialing these numbers, telling those who were still alive about my mother's death and saying, "Look for a woman for me." Look for a woman for me. I was sitting on an armchair. On the armchair across from me I could still see the impressions where my mother had sat. My father was on the telephone, sitting with his back to me. His shoulders were hanging low. I ran over to him, laid my hand on his shoulders and wanted to stroke and massage them a little. From the receiver I heard the voice of a man whom my father had met twenty years earlier and whose number he had first made a note of in the sand, until I had brought him his pencil and his pack of cigarettes from the beach cabana so that he'd have something to jot down a note. Suddenly this voice was screaming in the receiver, "Mr. Mustafa, earthquake, earthquake!" And the ground was carrying me, my hands on my father's shoulders, one meter forward and then back again, I landed again exactly where I had been standing a second earlier. But my father, the receiver in his hand, said he hadn't noticed the earthquake at all. The next day he went to the drugstore at the corner of the steep little street and wanted the druggist to find a woman for him. Then he ran to a nearby cemetery, where Armenians from Istanbul were buried, came back with a bottle of raki and gave me a glass. At night he lay down on the side of the bed where his wife had always slept. Just at that time, many Bulgarian Turks were fleeing to Turkey from Bulgaria. They were living in tents, and it was rumored that Turkish border police were raping the women who were escaping from Bulgaria into Turkey. My father said to my brother, "Go, my son, find a Bulgarian woman for me. She needs a roof over her head." Then he went back to the drugstore to tell the druggist the same thing. But there, a truck had run into the drugstore. Its brakes had failed suddenly on the narrow steep little street, and it had destroyed all the medicine bottles standing on the shelves. Cough syrup and

cologne were running down the truck's radiator and mixing together with the smell of iodine. The old scale on which my mother and father had weighed themselves now and then lay crushed on the ground.

"Father, tomorrow I must go back to Germany."

I gave all my mother's clothes to the gypsy who sold flowers out front on the steep little street, and then I left Istanbul. When I saw the telephone here on the table in Germany, only then did I begin to cry. Now I understood my father's pain and restlessness. Some time ago I had seen a film about Glenn Gould. He was composing and very depressed, and he kept talking non-stop to his friends on the telephone. One time he asked a taxi driver to pull over, went into a telephone booth, and talked on the phone for maybe an hour with a lady friend, and the cab waited. No lights. The taxi driver was smoking in the dark. For years, like Glenn Gould, I too had always spoken with my parents or friends by telephone. As if the birds that alight on telegraph poles could pick up the love of these human beings and bring it to me in their mouths and with their feet. My father's telephone in Istanbul was always busy now. Only when my father also died a few days later was the telephone no longer busy. Like a bird blinded by longing, in a closed room, he had butted his head against all the walls, sought all the voices from his past by telephone, laid his feathers onto the table, one by one, with each telephone conversation, and then he was gone. One time I had reached him by telephone.

--Father, what are you doing?

--I am sitting here in the dark.

--So am I, father.

The dark room. Like the fortieth room in a fairy tale. You may open the doors to thirty-nine rooms, but you must never open the fortieth room. That's where death is. But the hero always opened the fortieth room.

Mr. Volker's steps in the stairwell were not as loud in recent months as before. The beautiful young man, who had sewed beautiful suits on the sewing machine for himself and for him, had left him, and Mr. Volker had lost twenty kilos. When he went up the stairs at night, he would sometimes brush against the door to my apartment with his body. Then, when he had closed his door upstairs behind him, I would open the door down below, and the stairwell smelled of alcohol. One night, when he was banging on the wooden floor upstairs and crying loudly, I went to him. He told me he had lain down on the wooden floor next to the telephone so that the telephone would take pity on him. But the telephone took no pity on him. "He doesn't call." He told me: "In *The Heart of Darkness* Joseph Conrad's character Marlow says: 'The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells too, by Jove!—breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don't you see? your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in--...'"

I went downstairs and called him. "Mr. Volker, your telephone is taking a little pity on you after all." He laughed upstairs.

A friend in Paris was working at the university as a professor in urban studies. He came home, gave his wife and me two empty sheets of paper, and said: "Today I learned from one of my students what he's doing for his dissertation. He's distributing sheets of

paper to lots of people in Paris and telling them, 'Draw your personal city map of Paris.' All the drawings were completely different. In a city everyone has his own personal city." His wife and I drew the places that meant Paris for us onto the paper. These too were very different. If I were going to draw my personal city map in this city here, then it would look like this. First, the parrot shop on the big street. Back then, when I had moved here, I went into the store. "Excuse me, how many languages does your parrot speak?" The saleswoman said, "We speak German." Then the bakery where the baker woman almost opens the door for me with her large breasts whenever I come in. "Hellooooo!" When I go to her a little before closing time, she tells me about her love affair with a Polish man and gives me cake. "Take it, otherwise it goes to feed the pigs." Then the bookstore where Oriana Fallaci and I had readings. That's where Mr. Rupp was, the handsome book dealer who looked for work in another city after the bookstore had been converted to specialize in travel books.

Then the bum who sat at Christmas on Kings Boulevard, the street for luxury shopping, directly across from Armani on a wooden bench, under the light bulbs hanging in the trees, alone with his plastic bags. The three kings would have to come his way too some time. On this evening there was no one besides the two of us on this famous street. I gave him three hundred marks. The bum said, "Oh, oh, oh. Are you from this city?" "Yes, but I do not love this city." He was still holding the money in his hand. His face, which had forgotten how to laugh, tried to find the muscles to express joy. His face couldn't do it, but his voice, his voice suddenly became the voice of a eunuch and said, "The city itself is very nice, but the people are dumb." I said, "You know, maybe it's not the city's fault. In other cities I always used to work in the theater. In this city I have no theater, I have no friends, I just work at home." Sometimes I would search the streets for this man. I encountered him two more times. In the first encounter he said to me, "I can't stand it any more."

A few years later he didn't recognize me any more and screamed at me, "I want my peace and quiet."

Then the Butchers Carl. The building was painted pink, and hanging over the entrance to the butcher shop was a pink sculpture of a pig. The old butcher woman, her son, and her daughter-in-law worked there. Whenever I walked by on the other side of the street, they greeted me while they were weighing hamburger or cutting chops. One evening the old butcher woman was standing in the shop alone and holding onto the counter, as if she were in a room without air, so as not to fly back and forth in space. Normally the butcher shop was always full of customers, but on this evening she was standing there alone. She looked into my eyes, and, although I didn't want to buy anything, I went into the shop. Kling, kling. The door opened and shut. In the glass refrigerator I saw nothing but a few frozen chickens.

"Don't you have any fresh chickens today?"

"No."

The old woman looked into my eyes for a long time. After an hour I went back and bought a frozen chicken. She reached both of her hands into the refrigerator in order to retrieve the chicken, and for a few seconds, under the neon light, her hands looked like marble. When I saw her alone in the shop again the next day, I went to Omar, the Moroccan cobbler. "Omar, where are the young butchers?" Omar's cobbler's machine was very loud. He was just finishing off the sole of an old cowboy boot and spoke loudly

against the noise of the machine. “They died in a highway accident with their BMW. There had been a heavy rain, a tree limb was on the road, and they died in the woods.” I brought the old butcher woman three flowers. “Oh, the actress,” she said when she opened the door. From her dark apartment behind the butcher shop came the smell of meat cooking. The next day I saw the three flowers standing in the shop window. One evening in spring I saw the old woman talking with a man. She had lost a lot of weight, and the flesh of her upper thighs was hanging over her knees like a pair of panty hose that hadn’t been pulled up but was falling in large folds at her knees. She looked at this old man, smiled, and nodded. It seemed to me as if she were smiling in high fever. The man with whom she was talking was a minister. Soon she died, too. Someone removed the sculpture of the pig that hung over the butcher shop, and the building was painted white. After she died, I cried and talked with my mother by telephone in the kitchen mirror.

“Mother, the old butcher woman is also dead. Why did she have to see her children die before she did?” My mother cried in Istanbul and said, “Poor woman, poor woman. People die, my daughter, that’s what they do.”

“Mother, I want to die before you do, I couldn’t bear it if you weren’t there any more.” My mother said: “My child, the sentences that you said, may a strong wind carry them away from your mouth. Don’t ever say any such thing again. Do you know what it means for a mother to lose her child?” “Mother, what did my brother die of?” “Don’t know. At a wedding he was still dancing on the tables, the next day his neck swelled up, and he couldn’t breathe any more. The evil eyes had gotten to him...”

When my mother told me this on the telephone, in the mirror I saw a bee crawling along by the kitchen window. Maybe a bee had stung my brother’s tongue.

My mother told me: “After that, I was sick for two years. The doctors said: Tuberculosis in her bones. I walked on crutches, and the doctors thought that I couldn’t have any more children. One night one of my father’s wives saw the blessed Ali, Mohammed’s son-in-law, in a dream. He said about me: ‘She will once again have a son. Then she must name him Ali after me.’ Eight months later I did in fact have your brother Ali.”

“Did you scream a lot when you gave birth to me, mother?”

I turned on the cassette recorder, and my mother imitated on the telephone how she had screamed when she had given birth to me. Then she laughed just as long as she had screamed before. “You really should have been a boy. You would only play under the bridges with the other boys, and your brother helped me with the cooking. If we had let you, you would even have slept under the bridges.”

Even in this city here, I love the bridges. I run across them over to the other side of the city and hold onto my skirt. Joseph Beuys used to live on the other side of the river.

These bridges too are part of my personal city map, as are the house where Heinrich Heine was born, the Bambi Cinema, and the main train station. If you sit in a café in the concourse at the train station, people race in front of you en masse, to the trains. They look as if they had an electrical conveyor belt under their feet, carrying them forward. Then everything empties out, and you see just a few bums, drinking beer in a group. Then the belt begins to run again and carries the masses back in the opposite direction.

Below me, in the building where I lived, two men repaired television sets on the ground level. All day long many televisions were running there. Sometimes films were running, others showed only snow. Once the shorter man rang my doorbell and said: "We all were almost burned alive just now. A television exploded and went up in flames. Right below here." I felt the parquet floor, it was really hot. Earlier, these two men had been pilots in South Africa for rich whites. "What goes on there, no television can report," they said. They were a television news service. They knew everything about the people who lived on the street because many people brought them their television sets to be fixed, bought a new television set from them, or the two of them made house calls to people's apartments. When I wanted to know something, I went to them. "Is Mr. Volker sick? Why has he gotten so thin? One of the two men was channel-hopping just then, and between Horst Tappert, Detective Schimanski, Linden Street's soap operas, Milka's chocolate cow, Dutch guys behind the cue, Fischer's folksy choir, Most Wanted, and Heidi, he answered me. "Don't you know? His young friend has left him. Volker has suffered a lot." "Who are the women who live in the corner building on the courtyard?" "Six nuns. And a minister. The nuns have borrowed a television set from us for the oldest nun. I was in her room. Do you know what book the old nun was reading just then? *Alice in Wonderland*." "I love *Alice in Wonderland*."

Once I knew what the old nun was reading just now, I stood in front of the kitchen mirror, in which I saw the old nun's light, grinned like the Grin Cat from *Alice in Wonderland*, and turned the light off. The Grin Cat disappeared as in *Alice in Wonderland*. Then I turned the light on again, grinned again like the Grin Cat and imagined the old nun. Both her hands were holding the book in front of her face, she had her long white nightgown with the long sleeves on, but in this nightgown she had no body. A long nightgown with a head and two hands is reading *Alice in Wonderland*, and I was grinning at the nightgown as the Grin Cat in the mirror. At some point the old nun turned the light off. I immediately stopped grinning, she had closed the book. Sometimes, when the old nun's light was just going out, Mr. Volker would be coming up the stairs. The light went on in the stairwell, the wooden stairs creaked, his door closed upstairs, downstairs I opened the door, and the stairwell smelled like his perfume.

That was my personal city map. Oh, there was something else. Once I was heading toward the train station. A thin German man was walking folded over in the middle, bent down to the ground, along the street. Next to him was his Yugoslavian friend, a tall man, who was bending down to his friend. As I walked by, I said: "You must have acupuncture for your back. I know a doctor who was cured by acupuncture." Then I kept going. A few minutes later the two of them suddenly got off a bus with which they had followed me because the bent-over man couldn't run fast enough. They invited me to have a drink with them. At the hot dog stand behind the bus stop I drank a can of beer with them both. Then the frame maker on the corner, who had made many frames for my self-portraits. He had lost his left thumb in an accident, and the doctors had sewed it back on. Whenever we were bent over a picture looking for a suitable frame, this sewed-on thumb trembled and looked like a child's thumb in a rubber glove. One day his girlfriend called me. Again I stood, telephone in hand, in front of the mirror. "Excuse me please, Mr. Rüdiger is dead, can you come get your picture? He didn't get around to framing your picture." The girlfriend, Renate, gave me the picture.

"What did he die of?"

“He took pills.”

“Why?”

“He was sick, mouth cancer. And he was a very fine, proud gentleman, you know. He couldn’t bear it. He was a Jew. We wanted to get married soon, he wanted to make all the arrangements for me.”

“Mother, the Jewish frame maker is also dead. He had also framed the picture in which you are thirteen years old.”

“Don’t cry, my daughter. Don’t cry. People die, that’s what they do.” On the telephone my mother cried in Istanbul and I cried in front of the mirror.

All the dead live in this mirror. The butcher woman, her son George, her daughter-in-law. The old butcher woman weighed out 300 grams of hamburger, the young butcher woman gave me recipes in the mirror for making roast beef. She talks to her husband, who hacks meat down in the basement, through a microphone. “George, can you bring up some calf kidney? The actress is here.” Or the parrot that had spoken such unintelligible German to me. The Jewish frame maker, who wanted to marry Renate soon. He puts little nails into his mouth, and with his index finger and trembling thumb, he takes one nail out. My mother. My father. Everyone lives in this kitchen mirror.

And now, now I think, the old nun in the courtyard has also died. The dead in the mirror make room when someone newly deceased arrives. Sometimes a bee flies through the window and flies around in the mirror among the dead. The dead see it, they see the steam from the percolating espresso machine on the stove. Or a bird flies through the open window and flies around in the mirror. I shower in the bathtub, see myself naked among the dead in the mirror. In the courtyard, the letter carrier rings a doorbell. Does he have heart disease, like many Turkish letter carriers? It’s raining on the balcony and over the dead in the mirror. Sometimes hundreds of small mosquitoes come and spin like crazy around the light bulb that hangs in front of the mirror.

I waited a while longer in the dark, my back against the radiator, but the old nun’s light didn’t come on again in the kitchen mirror. In the end I turned the kitchen light on after all. In the mirror I saw myself, the kitchen, the bathtub, and the balcony that looked out on the courtyard. The courtyard looked exactly as it had many years ago, when I had first seen it. Only the tree in front of the nuns’ building had now grown very large. If that tree there hadn’t kept growing, I might believe that the nuns’ building wasn’t a real house but a large photograph hanging there in the sky. And this photograph was then reflected in the mirror that hung over the table where the telephone stood. I always stood in front of the mirror whenever I used the telephone. The mirror showed me whether I loved the person I happened to be talking to or not. When I didn’t love someone, I began to see the dust on the kitchen shelves or on the picture frames in the mirror, or I saw that a picture was hanging crooked on the wall. I’ll have to straighten it later. In the mirror I saw myself once again, heard my voice, saw the kitchen, and the kitchen extended itself to the nuns’ house in the courtyard. The urban studies specialist in Paris had once written about the residential aesthetic of the Orient. The people there extended their houses into alleyways. That’s how a window would suddenly find itself in front of the neighbors’ window. The houses got all mixed up together, and so something resembling labyrinths

came into being. The neighbors woke up nose to nose. With three mirrors I too had extended this apartment as far as the house in the courtyard. One mirror in the kitchen. From the kitchen, you could walk, left and right, into two other rooms. In the room on the right, there was a large mirror in the corner, and in the room on the left, hanging over a painter's cabinet, there was likewise a very large mirror suspended from the high ceiling. The three mirrors gathered all the windows and floors and the garden of the nuns' house together from three different perspectives. When I stood with my back to the courtyard, I saw all the nuns' windows and their garden in the three mirrors. We all lived in three mirrors nose-to-nose together. When I woke up, I did not look into the courtyard from the balcony, but looked in the mirror instead. I made coffee or wrote or cleaned and could see the courtyard and my neighbors, again and again, in my rooms. Sometimes little accidents also happened because of the mirrors. The nuns rented a few rooms on the second floor to a printing-house. I saw three printers standing there at their machines, and in the mornings and in the afternoons, whenever they took a break, they would stand at the three windows directly across from my apartment, and drink coffee. One morning I was walking naked from the bed to the kitchen, and one of the printers standing at the window with a coffee cup in hand saw me. I threw myself onto the floor, and almost in synchrony, he also threw himself onto the floor with me. I crawled to the corner, where he couldn't see me any more, and looked into a mirror to see what he was doing now. He stood up, with his back to the window, and went on drinking his coffee. Besides the three rooms onto the courtyard, in which the three mirrors stood, the spacious old-style apartment had three other rooms. But these other rooms overlooked a large street. The curtains there were always closed. Across from the building there was a Knights Hospitallers Clinic. From there, young men dressed in white nurses' smocks would drive into the city with sirens on. My boyfriend's piano stood in one room. He was always working in Vienna or Munich and seldom lived in the apartment. When he was there, he would play the piano, and I would listen to him while I stood in front of the mirror and kept watching the nuns or the printers in the courtyard. It seemed to me as if I had placed my salon at their disposal for the purpose of hearing piano music. I called my mother. "Mother, Karl is playing the piano now for the entire courtyard and for you."

"Karl, please play *A Maiden's Prayer*. Karl, please play *Oh, Love is a Sweet Light*. Karl, please play *A Stranger I Came, and a Stranger I Depart*."

Karl played everything, and at the end he always played a Berlin folk song for me that Kurt Weill had set to music.

Here I sit eatin' meatballs,  
 when suddenly, a knock.  
 I look around, amazed, and wond'rin':  
 suddenly, the door, it opens.  
 What's up, think I, I think: what's up?  
 Now the door's open, but it was just shut!  
 Out I go and take a peek  
 and who's standing there?  
 It's me!

I loved the mirror that hung over the kitchen table. You could make the room talk. Only there did I hear my voice. My mother, from Istanbul, on the telephone, the espresso machine would percolate and steam, the chicken was roasting in the oven with the light on. The moths flew out of the cream of wheat or rice when I opened the cupboard. The bees came here and crawled over the fruit, and in the mirror the printers were moving, or the family from Africa that the nuns let live on the ground floor. “Mother, now the black woman is baking bread.” On the telephone, like a sportscaster at a soccer match, I told my mother in Istanbul what was going on in the courtyard. My mother asked: “Does she have a lot of children?” “Yes, four. Listen to their voices. They’re in puberty now. Now the daughter is rolling up her mother’s sleeve so it won’t get into the dough.” Every day the African woman made bread at the windowsill, white dough between her black fingers. A dusting of flour flew out into the air from the dough through the window screen, and there was a dusting of flour in the mirror. The four black children played ball in the mirror. While she was making bread, the woman often lifted her head and looked over at my balcony. She didn’t see me, but in the mirror I saw her eyes looking for me. I caressed her face.

“Mother, now I’m caressing the woman’s face.”

The nuns didn’t stand in the window very often. The voile curtains were always closed. But in the mirror I often saw the old nun’s hand. She probably no longer ate with the other five nuns but in her room instead, in bed. Because every noon and evening, in the mirror, I would see how a hand would shake the crumbs out of a dishtowel in front of the window. That’s why, directly under her window, there were a few birds on the ground pecking at bread crumbs. One spring evening, for the first time, I saw her face in the mirror. She had leaned her head on the dusty old voile curtain and looked as though she were smelling it. I said: “Virgin maid, why does fear hang from your eyebrows when you stand at the window?” I had a fur coat, which I now held up directly in front of her in the mirror. In it she looked like Greta Garbo, dressed in a fur coat, leaning her head against the window in a luxury hotel and thinking of her impossible love. Then I went over to the balcony. Now she saw me too. New wrinkles appeared on her forehead and around her mouth, as if—like the bum on Christmas Eve on the deserted Kings Boulevard—she were trying to find unfamiliar muscles to express her joy. Then she drew my attention to the birds pecking at her bread crumbs on the ground below, as if I were her child, and she showed me how nicely the birds ate together. We both watched until the birds flew away. Then she leaned her forehead against the window frame. I walked from the balcony back to the mirror, leaned my forehead against her forehead in the mirror, and quoted from Heinrich Heine:

Lone I wander on the shore  
Where the white waves break and leap,  
And I hear a voice so sweet,  
Voice so sweet upon the deep...

And the old nun said:

Ah, my heart cannot be still,  
And the night is far too long--

Lovely nymphs, oh come to me,  
Dance and sing a magic song!

In the mirror the face of the old nun had now disappeared. With my forehead still against the mirror, I said:

It drives you fair, now here, now there--  
You know not even why;  
A tender word rings in the air--  
You look around with wondering eye.

On some Sundays I saw a young nun in the mirror from behind. She was washing the minister's car in the courtyard. I called my mother. "Mother, she's washing the minister's car just now, and I'm roasting a chicken." In the mirror I tickled the young nun's back so that she suddenly began to laugh in the courtyard below. "Mother, I'm tickling her just now." My mother said: "And just now the sun is shining in my left eye." In the receiver I heard the voices of children playing on the steep little street in Istanbul. The ships' horns commingled with the children's voices, and a street vendor yelled, "Watermelons!"

"Mother, shall I sing you a German song?"

"Yes, sing, sing."

Ahoy! we're sailing off to Burma this morning  
Whisky by the gallon at our elbow all day  
As we smoke our fat cigars—Henry Clay  
And I'm through with bloody girls ('scuse me yawning).  
So at last we're really under way.  
For other brands of cigar mean nothing to us  
And we've only just enough smoke to take her to Burma  
And as for God, we think He's not worth the fuss  
And of religion you won't hear a murmur.  
So now it's goodbye!

My mother laughed and said, singing, good bye!

I was happy in the mirror because, in this way, I was in several places at the same time. My mother and six nuns and a minister, we all lived together. The reverend minister lived directly across from the kitchen mirror. Like the old nun, he too stood at the window one spring evening and breathed as though he were astonished to still be alive. While I was on the phone with my mother, I took my hair and made him a mustache in the mirror. Then I took my cigarette out of my mouth and put it into his mouth in the mirror. As in a photograph, a small minister stood there standing still, smoking a large, real cigarette, and in the mirror I gave him a kiss. The minister in the mirror had disappeared. But in the mirror, my lipstick mouth remained.

When my mother died and I heard about it on the telephone while I was looking into the mirror, I saw this impression of my lips in the mirror. A moth flew over and

landed on it. After my mother and father had died, I discovered in this mirror that my mother had been an orphan child. I knew that she hadn't had a mother, but when I got very sad, because of her death, and didn't want to live any more but kept living anyway, I sometimes spoke to myself in her voice. And this voice was the voice of a stepmother. Because she hadn't had a real mother, only a stepmother, she had learned how to be a mother from this stepmother. And now this restless stepmother-voice was there, mixed with the sadness of an orphan child.

"Eat something, I tell you, do you understand, eat!" "Enough, do you understand, I've had enough of you, you'd better eat something now!" "Sit down at the desk, sit down, I tell you!" That was what her childhood had been like. I had to come to a foreign country to discover her childhood as an orphan in a mirror. Whenever I took pity on myself, I spoke to myself with the voice of my father's mother.

"Come, eat, my rose, I'll give you my life, my kidney, my eyesight. Eat, my child. I'll take all your sins onto my own back, eat something, my child."

So as not to let my mother talk to me with a stepmother-voice any more, I called up one of her friends in Istanbul. I told her: "I am in so much pain because of her death. Please help me. I want her to show herself to me in a dream and tell me what she thinks of me."

The old woman said: "There is a dead woman here who is holy. One Friday I'll have a few women drink café au lait for her soul and ask her to have your mother show herself to you." On that Friday night I dreamed of my mother. I was standing in an aisle on a train, and next to this train, another train was traveling in the opposite direction. My mother was standing on that train, with many newspapers in her arms. When the two trains passed very close to each other, my mother said to me: "If you only knew how much I love you." I didn't hear her voice, but through the window of the train I read these words on her lips. Since I had that dream, I talk to myself in the mirror without sound, moving only my lips.

"If you only knew how much I love you. Eat something. Otherwise you'll get sick!"

While I was concerning myself with dreams, trying to normalize my mother's voice, I had neglected the courtyard in the mirror a bit. When I spoke to myself in my mother's sweet voice again, I noticed that the face of the African woman who had always made bread at the window no longer appeared in the mirror. One morning, in the mirror, I saw the nun who always washed the minister's car, the one whose back I had tickled in the mirror. She was heading toward the street. I ran down the stairs barefoot and, in front of the house, asked her: "You know, I had gotten used to the four children. Where has this family gone?"

"They went back to Africa. The husband was a doctor."

The nun had skin like unloved leather. I couldn't caress this leather. In order to please her, I said: "Now he can help the poor people there."

In the afternoon the nun rang my doorbell and gave me religious brochures to read. I knew I wouldn't read them, so I gave her five marks.

Karl told me on the phone: "You gave her money, now she'll come back again like the Jehovah's Witnesses."

Once I had opened the door for the Jehovah's Witnesses and given them a mark. When they came back again, I said:

“I no German.”

“Indian?”

“Nope.”

“Turkish?”

“Hm, hm.”

They pulled a small Jehovah’s Witnesses Bible in Turkish out of their bag. When they came back again, I told them: “The one that always opened the door for you was my twin sister. She has returned to Turkey for good. I don’t even believe in my Allah myself. How could I believe in your God?” The Jehovah’s Witnesses had come up the stairs laughing. After this they went down the stairs looking as if they had taken their false teeth out.

But the nun didn’t come back. She had climbed out of the mirror just once and rung my doorbell. Then she had climbed back into the photograph of the courtyard.

In summer I also heard how many plates the nuns took out of the cupboard. I counted six and put my plate on the table, too, and said: “Seven.” But they didn’t eat much. The sounds of the forks and knives moving on the plates didn’t last long. I took longer to eat. The youngest nun drank a glass of red wine. In the mirror I raised a glass in toast with her. And heard her refreshing laugh through the window. I was always happy whenever she laughed, and then I always wanted to go out and give my love to other people. Then I walked around the corner into a little supermarket.

There a woman with very little hair was sitting at the cash register. When she entered the prices, I looked at her half-bald head. She often told me that her shoulders hurt from entering the prices. “Ruth, shall I massage your shoulder for you? How is your shoulder today?” Today she didn’t look me in the eyes. Her eyes looked like the eyes of a chicken I had seen on television. From the time they were born until the time they died, these chickens lived together with other chickens in very cramped cages. When they were carted off to the slaughterhouse, they pecked at each other’s heads. Some chickens were already lying dead on the bottom of the cage. And that’s where I had seen this chicken. It had such tired eyes, as tired as those of a wise grandmother who wants to prevent a war but whose words no longer had any value. That is how the cashier’s eyes looked in the little supermarket now.

“Ruth, is something troubling you?”

“My brother is dying in the hospital, cancer.”

“Mother, the cashier’s brother is dying in the hospital.”

“Yes, my daughter, people die, that’s what they do.”

“His name is Werner.”

Then Werner also went to live with all the other dead in the mirror.

The owner of the beautiful old building in which I lived also died one day. He wanted to fix everything himself. He was always visible in all three mirrors because he would stand on a ladder on the left, on the right, in front of all the walls, and had keys to all the apartments. Sometimes I would wake up, and Mr. Kürten would be standing on the lid of the toilet seat in the bathroom. Often, whatever he was holding in his hand would break. Whenever he fixed something on the walls in my rooms, I’d hold the ladder for him.

“Mr. Kürten, I’m afraid you’re going to fall down.”

“No matter, I’m a druggist.”

He had a handyman, a very thin man.

“Willy, why don’t you eat?”

“My stomach is bad from all the painting I’ve done, and Kürten pays me with medicine. It doesn’t help, I’ve already painted too many walls.”

He painted the balcony that looked onto the courtyard in yellow, and said: “I’m painting it yellow, that gives it a sunny look. Soon I’ll be going to Turkey.” Willy had a Turkish girlfriend. He said: “In Izmir I know a dentist. He’s going to fix all my teeth for 350 marks.”

When Willy came back with new teeth, Mr. Kürten had already died. His son worked just like his father and fell off the ladder even more frequently. Willy told me: “The son is paying me with a radio, he’s given me his old radio. All day long I can listen to music while I work.”

It was a beautiful day. Willy was listening to music, the landlord was falling off the ladder, the young nun was laughing behind the curtains, the old nun was shaking the bread crumbs out of the dishtowel through the window, the birds were pecking at the bread, a cat was running around in the courtyard, and a new tenant was moving into the ground floor apartment on the courtyard, which had just one big room. The new tenant was an elderly gentleman with thick sacks of tears under his eyes. At night I saw him running back and forth in the three mirrors under the weak light of an electric bulb. His shadows were strolling back and forth, back and forth, in all three mirrors. When I went to sleep, I still saw the light and shadows in the mirror from my bed. Maybe he’s cold over there. After a few days, I asked him: “Would you like a mattress and a few blankets?” He listened to me but kept running back and forth, and said: “I haven’t sunk that low yet.”

Ashamed, I made lamb and beans and invited him to dinner. His name was Hartmut. Even at my place, Hartmut ran back and forth between the rooms. And suddenly he rolled up his pant legs and showed me the injuries on his knees and legs. He said: “I had an awning company, but my employees left me in the lurch while we were putting up awnings in Wiesbaden. I fell down from the second story. My legs are smokers’ legs.” He was descended from an aristocratic family and, as he ran back and forth, he recited quotations from Baudelaire’s *Le Balcon* for me:

Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,  
O toi, tous mes plaisirs! ô toi, tous mes devoirs!

Then he ate standing up and said: “Hm, hm, well seasoned.”

Then he recited some more:

Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses,  
La douceur du foyer et le charme des soirs.

When he said the last sentence, he was standing in front of the mirror and looking at me in the mirror. The old man, whom I had seen and observed through the mirror for days, was suddenly standing next to me and inviting me in the mirror to dance. We danced the tango through all the rooms, and I saw us appear briefly in all three mirrors. Then he sat down at the piano and began to play Chopin. While he was doing that, he asked me:

“What roles have you played?” “Cleaning women.” “What? Cleaning women? You must play Carmen.” And he immediately switched from Chopin to Carmen.

Later, when he had gone, I looked out from my bed in the dark into the mirror over to his apartment. Tonight he turned off the light.

The next day, from the courtyard, he whistled up to the balcony and threw me up a stuffed animal. A monkey. This monkey whistled whenever the light went on or off. Every night when I turned off the light, it whistled *whi-iihWEW*... I whistled back, *whi-iihWEW* ... One evening Hartmut brought me rotten mushrooms and cauliflower. “Take them, you can use them. The landlord is evicting me, I have to move out.”

He had wrapped the rotten mushrooms and the cauliflower in a newspaper. The newspaper had gotten wet, and brown juice was dripping onto his shoes. At that moment I had a cup of coffee in my hand. Hartmut’s speech was very agitated. His spit was spraying into the coffee cup. It seemed to me as if Hartmut were swimming in this black sea and a vortex were pulling him down. He left, I put the newspaper down on the wet table and called the landlord in front of the mirror. His mother said: “I have to hold the receiver up to his ear. He broke both of his arms.”

“Mr. Kürten, why does Hartmut have to move out?”

“He hasn’t paid any rent so far. And one night he also pissed into the nuns’ flower pots and yelled, ‘Les fleurs du mal—flowers of evil’.”

“That’s just a line from Baudelaire. Hartmut loves Baudelaire.”

While the landlord was talking, my hand, in which I was holding the receiver, smelled like rotten mushrooms.

Hartmut had to leave. He rented a large moving truck, which then stood in the courtyard for eight days. He hung up his suit in the courtyard. The suit hung there for eight days too and moved in the wind. From my bed, I still saw his light in the mirror, but he was no longer running back and forth. One night I went down quietly and looked into his window. The large room was filled to the ceiling with old newspapers. Hartmut was sitting between piles of newspapers. Sometimes he pulled a newspaper out of the pile and read it for a long time, then he pulled out another one and read that. After eight days he moved out with all the newspapers. When he left, he stood in the courtyard under my balcony and called:

Les soirs illuminés par l’ardeur du charbon,  
Et les soirs au balcon, voilés de vapeurs roses.  
Que ton sein m’était doux! que ton coeur m’était bon  
[...]

Je croyais respirer le parfum de ton sang.  
Que les soleils sont beaux dans les chaudes soirées!

When he moved, he forgot to turn off the light behind him on his way out. I was sleeping, woke up, saw his light in the mirror, and said:

Comme tu me plairais, ô nuit! sans ces étoiles  
Dont la lumière parle un langage connu!  
Car je cherche le vide, et le noir, et le nu!

One day I went to visit Hartmut in his new apartment. I got on a bus, and the bus driver explained to me where I had to change buses, but I ran in the wrong direction. The light was green, but the bus driver got off the bus, grabbed my arm, laughed, and said: “Girl, are you in love? You’re supposed to go to the left.”

In front of the next bus stop, there was a Chinese restaurant. The bus came, the driver got off and went into the Chinese restaurant. When he came back, I asked: “Did you eat Chinese?” “Yes, ching, chong, gong. I wanted to pee, the little guy didn’t want to let me in. I told him that peeing is permitted all over Germany. Then he let me in. But it was really nice, very clean, beautiful mirrors, it worked out.”

At the address there was no Hartmut to be found. Someone told me that Hartmut had lived here before. I returned home. The monkey whistled *whi-iihWEW...*, and I whistled back *whi-iihWEW...*

Now that I couldn’t call my dead mother any more, I called Jon, an old poet in Istanbul.

“Jon, Hartmut is not to be found. The address that he had given me was his old address.”

Jon said: “Then the man has no apartment at all. He was probably ashamed, that’s why he gave you his old address.”

Then he made poetry for me: “You carry the sun in your belly.” And he gave me a recipe: “You grill the eggplants in the oven, remove the skin, mix the eggplants in milk. Then you sauté hamburger, tomatoes, pepper, and salt together in the pan...”

One day, when Jon is also dead, he can exchange recipes in the mirror with the old butcher woman, and my mother will make sure that there’s not too much salt. Jon told me he was once in Romania with friends. A Romanian chicken flew through the window of the car, laid an egg, and flew off again. At the Hungarian border the customs agent asked: “Do you have anything to declare, weapons, munitions, tobacco, alcohol...?” Jon was a socialist. He showed the customs agent the egg and said, in English: “I have only this egg, but this is a Romanian egg.”

I went downstairs to the two men who repaired the televisions.

“Have you guys heard from Hartmut? He had given me his address, but it was his old address.”

“He had really come down in life. He’s gone, but the mice are here now. Today little mice came to us. They probably moved in here when Hartmut did.”

“How can I find him?”

“We don’t know. He was a very interesting man, but he didn’t have a television set, so we don’t know anything about him.”

I went upstairs. In the mirror I saw the light still burning in Hartmut’s abandoned room. Because the landlord had broken his arms, he wasn’t coming by. I slept, woke up, saw the light in the mirror, opened the balcony door and called out into the courtyard: “Hartmut, where are you?”

Then, in bed, I looked at a book of photographs about the Marx Brothers and fell asleep with the light on. Suddenly something ran very quickly across my chest and my legs. I saw a little mouse, which was now sitting next to my bed, on the open Marx Brothers book, next to the picture of Harpo Marx. One of Hartmut’s mice. I grabbed

hold of it with a towel and took it over to Hartmut's apartment. The door was standing open, and the room was empty. There wasn't even a sheet of newspaper lying around. I released the mouse into the empty space, and it ran around there, back and forth, like Hartmut.

The next evening I walked out onto the street. Across from our building there were a few bars. I asked one of the bar owners if he had known Hartmut. Just then he was washing a beer glass. "No." I went into the next place, where a woman was sitting at the bar with two friends. "Where is the owner?" She looked at me and screamed: "Whaaattt!" I ran outside immediately, my heart between my hands, and outside in the night I swore to myself that, from now on, I would never speak with another German again. And in the apartment I swore to myself a second time, in the mirror: "I swear, from now on, I will not speak with another German again."

I called up Jon, the poet in Istanbul. "Jon, I have sworn never to speak with another German again." Jon said: "Darling, you're going to go out now and run into ten different Germans in ten different places. If one of them treats you badly, then you won't speak with any of them any more." Then he went on to give me a recipe.

The next morning I went into different department stores, spoke with sales clerks and bus drivers...and found no one who hurt me.

When I came home, I smelled two different colognes for men on the stairs. I heard Mr. Volker laughing on the stairs. This evening he wasn't going up the stairs alone. Sometimes Mr. Volker would come after the old nun had turned off the light in her room. Maybe she was still alive and the book *Alice in Wonderland* had the warmth of her fingers on its pages at this very moment, or maybe a few of her eyelashes were lying between the pages.

When I unlocked the door to my apartment, the telephone was ringing. Jon. He asked me: "Did you find anyone who treated you badly?"

"Not a one."

Jon made poetry:

Yes, that's the way it is, Your Honor, I said  
I don't want to burden you  
Otherwise I'd have a lot more to say  
much worse than all this  
I know I'm guilty and accept my punishment  
I've neither robbed nor murdered anyone  
No, I've done something much worse  
You know something, Your Honor?  
All I did was love people

"Now tell me a German word."

"Yearning: a yen to yearn. Jon, no other language has such a powerful word. Yen to yearn. Yearning. 'You know, Jon, my grandmother had told me in Istanbul, don't look into the mirror at night, otherwise you'll travel to a strange land. ... Now I live only in the mirror. I'm talking to you in the mirror'."

Jon said: “Say hello to the beautiful woman you see in the mirror for me. What’s happening with the light in the old nun’s place?”

“It’s not on.”

The longer you look,  
the more stars you see at night.  
If you try to count them,  
they’ll slip through your fingers.  
Some you can hear and some you can’t.  
The longer you listen,  
the more there will be:  
voices that come to you, with sound  
or on barely audible feet.

While Jon was reading me his poems on the telephone, the old nun’s light went on in the mirror. “Jon, wait, wait, the light went on.”

I put the receiver down next to the telephone and went over to the balcony. The old nun’s light was really on. I saw a few shadows.

Shortly after that, the two men who repair televisions downstairs came out of the nuns’ building. They were carrying a television set, looked up at me on the balcony and nodded their heads at the same time.

I ran down the stairs. With the television still in their arms, the two men said: “She’s dead. The nuns gave us the *Alice in Wonderland* book. Do you want it?”

In the book I found a bird feather. The old nun had probably used it as a book mark. The feather was on page 103. There I read:

“‘Will you walk a little faster?’ said a whiting to a snail,  
‘There’s a porpoise close behind us, and he’s treading on my tail.  
See how eagerly the lobsters and the turtles all advance!  
They are waiting on the shingle—will you come and join the dance?

Will you, wo’n’t you, will you, wo’n’t you, will you join the dance? ...”

The last sentences on this page of the German translation were: “There is another shore, you know, upon the other side. And the farther away from here we are, the closer lies Peru.”

I returned to my apartment. Through the receiver I heard Jon’s voice and the voices of children in Istanbul.

“Jon, the old nun is dead. She read *Alice in Wonderland* as far as page 103. There was a bird feather on that page.”

Jon said:

On Sevda Tepesi, the hill named for love,  
under the table across from me,  
I saw two chickens  
washing themselves with dirt,  
in the hollow they’d scratched out.  
For people, I thought, death is

perhaps nothing more than a way  
to wash themselves with dirt.

Everything speaks in a language of its own.  
And even when darkness falls,  
At night, color persists ...

Then Jon said: “My days in this world are also numbered. Come soon, come tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. I want to see you.”

“Yes, Jon.”

That night the nuns were singing behind the wall, and I was holding *Alice in Wonderland* in my hands. I dreamed of the old nun. My mother, my father, and my grandmother were flying off from a hill into a red sky. And the old nun was standing there in her nightgown and looking at the sky. I thought, she’s freezing, and I put my fur coat around her. Before she flew off, she took the *Alice in Wonderland* book and, reading, in a fur coat, she flew off after my parents and my grandmother. The book fell out of her hands and flew off into the sky. I screamed: “Alice, Alice, Alice...” When I woke up, I saw a young cat next to my bed. It had come in through the door to the balcony and was looking at me with a furrowed brow. I furrowed my brow too, and the cat said something to me. I said to her:

The old cat of our neighbor’s  
Would come to visit there;  
We received her with bows and curtsies  
And compliments to spare.

“How *are* you?” we’d ask very kindly  
As usual, time and again.  
We’ve uttered the same polite murmurs  
To many old cats since then.

After the cat had heard Heinrich Heine’s poem, she went for a walk in the room. She came back again, saw herself in the large mirror in the corner and began to concern herself with the cat in the mirror. Behind her, in the mirror, I saw a shadow in Hartmut’s window. I went over to the balcony immediately and saw, in the ground floor apartment where Hartmut had lived, a new tenant. He was sitting in profile, behind beautiful shutters, at a table, and looked like a scissor-cut silhouette. His profile looked like that of the young Goethe, he had tied his hair back. I went down to the television repair shop.

“Who’s living there now?”

“A new tenant, a modern photographer. He produces his photographs on the computer. He brought a cat with him.”

When I called Jon in Istanbul, I saw the new tenant, like Goethe’s shadow, in the mirrors, from three different perspectives.

“Jon, there’s a new tenant in the courtyard. He’s a photographer and he has a cat. He looks just like the young Goethe. I think he’s a non-smoker.”

Jon said: "I'm just now smoking a cigarette."

In the mirror I saw a few birds. There, where the old nun had always shaken out her dishtowel before, they were looking for bread crumbs. And then they flew off again, up into the sky.

Jon asked: "When are you coming?"

"Tomorrow."

A sky, thoroughly soaked  
Caught in the nets  
Sky-blue now all  
Anglers

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