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Son of a Dog

A Novel

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Like dogs desperately tearing up the ground they tore at each other's bodies, and often, helplessly baffled, in a final attempt to attain happiness they nuzzled and tongued each other's face. Sheer weariness stilled them at last and brought them gratitude to each other.

Franz Kafka, *The Castle*

There is nobody the dog hates more than the wolf; he reminds him of his betrayal of having sold himself to human beings.

Kurt Tucholsky, *Treatise on the Dog*

PROLOGUE

Today, I was saved by the smell of lavender, of thyme, of mint and sage. For two hours, I strayed around the Botanical Gardens. No idea what I was looking for. I barked at picnicking families with children, chased after brightly coloured birds and collapsed in the grass, exhausted. For a moment, I thought, why not dive into cacti to drown out the pain in my chest with the itching of my roughed-up skin. As always, I tucked my tail between my legs. I preferred to rub my fur on the bark of cedar trees and plunged my paws into the bushes of herbs. For a moment, I thought it was the curls on the back of your head I was getting lost in and the tips of your beard I was gnawing on, and the length of your thick eyebrows that I kissed my muzzle along, first against the grain, then with it. Surreptitiously, I took bites of the lavender, of the thyme, the mint and sage, so that I could place you under my pillow at home. Tonight, when I toss the animal wildly into the sheets, I'll put on *Keine Zukunft* by Bonaparte on Spotify. And may my mind decay like a wild garden, inshallah.

CRABS

I've plucked thirteen, fourteen, fifteen lice from my pubes. *Pthirus pubis* in Latin: 1.5 to 2 mm long, light grey, wingless, I read online. And that they sometimes take up residence in your underarms or in beards. I don't have any in my armpits, none in my beard either. But in my chest hair and even on my back: nits everywhere. One pubic louse lays up to twenty-five eggs a day, I read online. And that their development cycle from egg to adult louse lasts some three weeks.

I count back the days, three weeks ago I met Ravi. We'd sent a few messages on Grindr. 26 years old, 1.78 m tall, weight 61 kg. Single. Top. Looking for hook-ups. HIV status negative, on PrEP. Can't host. Into rough awakening, wild sex, animal instincts, bloodbath. That's what his profile said. Doesn't necessarily mean anything. But he did bite into my thigh like a pubic louse, I can still see the prick marks and the bruising. He didn't talk much, didn't write too much either. He sent me a picture, topless, his jeans down around his knees. He was wearing white briefs and white socks. I thought that was sweet. His beard almost twelve centimetres long, and his gaze aimed at my chest like a diopter. His walnut-brown hair hopelessly tousled, the marks of the battle grazed onto his face. A little blood stuck to his fingers, spit and lube, vegan, water based. He left after twenty-three minutes. We haven't written since.

Should I write to him now? I could write: Good morning! I just wanted to let you know that I have crabs, maybe you should check your panties. Or: What's up handsome, come back and be my parasite. Or: Hello Ravi. I was just wondering, could it be that you forgot your crabs here?

I have to admit, I'm a little curious to know who I got them from. Not that it'll change my situation much.

I take another look at my diary. A few days after Ravi, I was at Matteo's place. 34 years old. 1.81 m tall, weight 83 kg. Vers. Looking for friends, casual dates. Can host. fit/hung/clean/fair/safe, said his profile. I liked that. At 9:54 p.m. he sent me a fire emoji. U cute, I wrote back, and sent him a photo: me lying in bed on my back in a black thong, spreading my cheeks gently in the middle with my hand, like a carrot cake. Hot, Matteo wrote, and shared his album straight away. In one photo, he's wearing a silver chain, a tattoo on his right bicep. Some kind of bird. Chest and stomach covered in hair, I like that. Rings in his left and right ears, unfortunately also silver, not really my colour. In another picture, Matteo is kneeling naked in front of the camera. In the background, you can see a few shelves on the wall, coat hangers, a red coffee cup. I think there was a black ashtray as well. I'd love to eat your ass, I wrote Matteo. That was at 11:50 p.m. One minute later, he answers, please do. I love rimming. Then he shares his location. The blue arrow is a few streets past Leopoldplatz, in a courtyard.

I think I'm too tired to fuck tonight, wrote Matteo. But we can do other stuff.

Half an hour later I rang his doorbell, fourth floor, on the left. A flat share, but there was nobody home except for Matteo. We did other stuff. You can get crabs from other stuff too.

Twenty-four hours. That's how long a pubic louse can survive without a host, I read online. And that they need to feed on blood every two hours. That's quite a lot for such a little critter, if you ask me, and I walk into the pharmacy at 10:03 in the morning.

Hello, I need something for crabs.

For what? the chemist pulls his eyes wide open, looks kind of grossed out.

For crabs, you tosser, I would have liked to say. For Pthirus pubis, I say instead, and pay 14.95 euro for 50 ml of lice spray. That really stings. For that much, I could have eaten almost ten lahmacuns (no salad) at Örnek in Wedding. Or palak paneer with a butter naan at Tandoori

Palace in Neukölln, would have even had enough for a tip. Instead, I got myself crabs for the princely sum of 14.95 and I don't even know if it was worth it.

On the way home, I count backwards, two weeks ago I met Chris. He was going on about how he would do this to me and that to me. In the end, he do'd sweet nothing to me. Just wanted to cuddle. Which is okay, cuddling is nice.

No problem, I said. I like cuddles, I said. Then he combed my chest hair with his fingernails. That was nice. Chris wanted to be the little spoon. Guys who brag and puff up their chests always want to be the little spoon. I wrapped myself around Chris from behind, my stomach against his back, my left leg over his left leg, hands twisted tight against his chest like ivy. That's nice, said Chris. He kept his eyes closed, I combed the hair on the back of his head with my fingernails. He liked that. That went on for ten minutes, then I looked at my watch and said, now you really have to go. Really? asked Chris. Really, I replied, I got some stuff to do, but let's meet up again soon. He gave me a kiss goodbye at the door to my building. Ten minutes later, at 7:03 p.m., he wrote, thanks for having me over, followed by a red heart. Catch up soon, I replied, then a red tulip. I won't see Chris again.

It's 11 a.m. I'm sitting in the bathtub rubbing the louse solution on my neck, my upper arms, then on my chest, my belly, my back, and then my thighs. It has to stay on for ten minutes, until they suffocate. Not a nice death, I think. Repeat the procedure after nine days, it says on the package insert.

In nine days, I will see Hassan again, that son of a dog. Last time, we counted each other's moles, that's a year ago. In Turkish, mole is ben. The same word also means I, or self, that always seemed mysterious to me. In Turkish, I called myself by the moles on the cute face of

another man, twelve, thirteen, fourteen. I touched myself on Hassan's cheeks. I said, ben buradayım ve ben oradayım, I am here and I am there.

I've been counting moles since I was a kid, I told Hassan. Nene doesn't like it. Stop counting, says my grandmother, it makes more spots, a face like that isn't nice to look at, oğlum.

Nene couldn't be more wrong, Hassan's face is beautiful to look at. It looks like a watermelon exploded in front of his face and the seeds have been scattered across his cheeks, his neck, his earlobes. Twenty-nine watermelon seeds I counted on his face.

Now it's my turn, said Hassan, and threw me onto my stomach. He pulled my T-shirt up and tapped with his index finger on every spot on my back. I am here and I am there, said Hassan, laughing, and I twitched under his weight.

Don't stop, I thought. Keep counting, count me all the way through, till I don't know anymore where my ben stops and your ben starts.

You've got fifteen moles on your back, said Hassan.

I've got even more on my legs.

Well, I'll have to count them too, said Hassan, and pulled my trousers down.

If Nene is right, and ben multiply by counting them, then there's a beautiful magic to it. I began counting everything I love to make them multiply. I counted pistachios and grapes on vines and the beans in Nene's stew, and the hairs above Dede's narrow lips. I counted how often Nene stroked her fingernails over my head and how often Dede lowered his head to the mat in prayer, how often he said: be patient, my son, for truly, God is with the patient.

In the summer holidays in Adana, I counted cups of şalgam and bici bici and the moon, beneath which I roamed the streets with the local boys. I counted the grains of sand from Mersin,

which stuck to their backs. I counted everything in the hope that my wishes would be granted. And I was patient, for truly, God is with the patient.

In nine days, I will see Hassan again. I will get down on my knees to count his moles, I will lower my brow and my nose. That smell, he always smells of orange peel and sea salt. I will wish I was a pubic louse, making a nest in his pubic hair, in the hair under his arms, in his beard, that dense bush of leaves. I will bite Hassan on his thigh and spread nits, to make him remember me. He will count back the days, the bites, the excrement, the bloodstains in his underwear. He'll wash them at 60 degrees. He'll wash his bedding at 60 degrees as well. He'll go and get lice spray from the pharmacy. He'll say, a bottle of lice spray, you tosser. He'll pay the equivalent of 14.95 euro and be annoyed. He'll rub the stuff under his arms, on his chest and back. He will wait ten minutes until I suffocate. Not a nice death, I think. In nine days, he will repeat the procedure. And then he'll forget me, just like he forgets me every time, after he has first devoured me and then spat me out and chewed me up again when he gets bored and needs someone who needs him. And he knows that I need him. He has no equal.

It's 2:35 p.m. I jump out of the bathtub and onto the rug rolled out in the living room. I say Allahu akbar and lift my palms to my head, gently touch my earlobes with my thumbs, move my hands over my navel, the right on top of the left. My feet slightly spread. I say, qul huwa Allahu ahad, He is God, alone. Allah-us-samad, the absolute. I say, lam yalid wa-lam yulad, never did he beget, never was he begotten. Wa-lam yakun lahu kufuwan ahad, and he has no equal. I bend my torso forward, my hands resting on my thighs. I sit up, I bend down, I kneel, I drop my brow and nose. That smell.

It's 2:40 p.m. and unusually quiet. I always cry when it's quiet. The neighbour upstairs isn't doing her full-body workout, the ceiling isn't shuddering, only my breathing is. There's no drunk bellowing outside, no driver honking, the streets are empty and unusually quiet. I always cry when it's quiet. I call Pari, she doesn't answer. I call Salim, he doesn't answer. There's something wrong with me, I whisper into the knots in the rug, rocking back and forth. I'm not doing well, I'm not doing well. I close my eyes. Take a deep breath, I say. In, and out. And again, breathe in, breathe out. I open my eyes and begin to count moles to find my way back to myself. Six, seven, eight ben on my left arm, and fourteen, fifteen, sixteen ben on my right arm. I pull my pants down and keep counting, I count and count until the ceiling starts to shudder again. The neighbour above me is now doing her full-body workout, a drunk is bellowing outside, a driver honks. The noise enters into my legs and lifts me up. I go to my desk, I switch on my laptop. I confirm that I'm eighteen or above and scroll through the videos. I count until otuzbir, I count in Turkish until I reach thirty-one. Otuzbir çekmek, pulling a thirty-one means masturbating. For a long time, I thought it referred to the frequency with which the hand is moved up and down. At some point, a Turkish classmate at a house party – where else – claimed it was a kind of code. She told me that the letter elif in the Ottoman alphabet represents the numerical value of 1, and the letter lam represented thirty. That thirty-one is the abbreviation for el, hand, in Turkish. No idea if she's right, but I like the number. Thirty-one times I move my hand, until all my moles wobble and I find myself again.

I watch *Hot Guy with Huge Balls Fucks Twink Bareback. His Balls Slap his Ass*, the clip goes for 5:32 min. I open *Daddy fucks teen twink* in a second tab, 1:00 min. I open *my straight friend lets me suck him* in a third tab, 10:39 min. He keeps his eyes closed, the straight friend, he sits on the bed and doesn't make a sound, at the end, he twitches for a second. Then he pulls up his

pants and says, I gotta go. Hassan said that too. He didn't make a sound, at the end, he twitched. Then he pulled up his pants and said, gitmem lazım, I gotta go.

It's 4:30 p.m. and I've got to go. It takes twenty-seven minutes to get there, the U8 to Hermannplatz and the rest by foot. I ring the bell and enter the room, I sit down on the chair by the window. She sits three metres away from me and says nothing. She never says anything. She waits until I start. I glance out the window briefly, it's windy and cold out. Inside, it's warm, it smells of vanilla candles and a hint of fear.

This morning, I woke up with crabs, I say.

Oh dear, she says.

Then I fall silent again. I'm not going to meet anyone for a while, I say. I've deleted the app, I've got lots to do anyway.

She's wearing her hair out today, a white string of pearls around her neck, black trousers, black shoes.

That sounds like a good decision, she says. When we saw each other a week ago, you were saying how much time you spend on the app looking for sexual partners, and how frustrated you were with the whole thing. Your body has given you a sign, it's letting you take a break.

Yeah, I say. Thank God I got crabs.

I look out the window again, outside, a dog is barking, inside, Hassan, in my head, that son of a dog.

I had crabs once before, six months ago. It took me a long time to realise, I couldn't see my chest hair for all the nits.

Oh dear, she says.

Then I fall silent again.

For some reason, the shampoo didn't really help, I say. There were so many of them, every few days I would find new nits. Then I shaved my whole body, everywhere, to get rid of the little critters. I felt like a shorn dog, I want to tell her how I felt like lying down in the corner like a mangy mut and whimpering, but I say nothing.

I look out the window again, the wind is whistling outside, inside, she asks, what are you feeling right now?

No idea, I'm a bit sad, maybe also angry.

And where does that feeling sit in your body?

Here, in my lungs.

How strong is the feeling, from one to ten?

Nine, I say, without, hesitating.

In nine days, I will see Hassan again, that I don't say.

She grabs a red pen from her bag and moves toward me on her chair. We don't have much time left, she says. I would like to try something out to finish up. Follow the pen with your eyes, keep your head straight.

She moves the red pen in front of my nose like it's on a rollercoaster, slowly, she draws circles in the air. While you're watching the pen, concentrate on the feeling you have in your body.

I follow the pen with my eyes, from top right in a leftward curve down and back up again. I count the curves, seven, eight, nine.

In nine days, I will see Hassan again. He'll be wearing jeans, a white T-shirt. His hair curly, slightly shorter on the sides. Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen moles I will count on his back. Then I'll lie on my stomach, and Hassan will count mine.

Hey, he'll say. Your grandmother is right. They really do multiply when you count them. He'll laugh. So will I.

Keep counting, I will say. Please don't stop counting. Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, I will count along. And I will be patient, for truly, God is with the patient.

DEDE ISSUES

Last night I dreamt about Dede. He rose up out of his grave, he dusted off the damp soil from his suit jacket and combed pale, scaly worms and larvae from his grey hairs. I stood in a cloud of tütsü, of frankincense, delicate and pungent. I was still holding my hands in prayer.

What are you staring at me for, eşek sıpası? Dede asked. Kiss my hand. He held it out to me, I pressed my lips to the back of his hand, a little sand got caught in my mouth. I raised Dede's fingers to my forehead. Hoşgeldin, Dede, I said, and brought him a glass of water. He must have been thirsty after so many years under the ground. So much rain had dripped onto my hair in that time.

I have a gift for you, he said.

A gift? What for, what is it?

Dede said nothing. He stared me in the face for a long time, and I stared back. Bushy eyebrows, deep creases in his skin. His mouth a narrow, fine line. Strong cheekbones and black, badem-shaped eyes. He looked like he had never left his barber shop. He always wore tailored suits, shirt and tie. A comb in his left hand, a pair of scissors in the right. Dede was a barber. He cut the worries out of the beards of old men, and my fear as well, which grew out of the hair on my head like weeping willows.

Dede, my hair has grown all the way to Adana.

Dede nods, he began waving his hands in the dry summer air like a fan, wafting a soft breeze into my face. He sat down under a pomegranate tree and sang *El Bent El Shalabeya*. It was Nene's favourite song, she is beautiful as well, her eyes are almond shaped, 'uyunha lawziyyah, and he loved her. He sang, I love you with all my heart, bahibbik min 'albi. He sang, ya 'albi enti 'aynayya, you are my sight.

And since Nene's Baba came from Beirut, he sang, min qalbi salamun li beirut, he kissed the sea and the houses, wa qubalun lil-bahr wa-l-buyut.

I had missed his voice.

Dede, I've missed your voice.

I wish I could sing along and understand the lines.

Dede, I wish I could sing along and understand the lines.

Yabni, I know, he said. He stood up straight, picked a pomegranate from the branch and started peeling it. With all your whining three thousand kilometres away, I don't get a moment's peace under the earth.

I didn't expect that. Enşölligensi, I replied, speaking German as Turkish, and turned red like the juicy fruit he was tossing into his mouth.

That's why I'm here, he said, to give you something, so that you can finally sleep.

Dede put his hand in his pocket and pulled out his scissors. He had wanted to be buried with them at the time. I thought I was going to receive this sacred object so that I could cut my hair, just as he had done earlier, so that I didn't have to feel afraid anymore.

Astaghfirullah, there was no need to rise from the dead just for the scissors.

Dede grinned at me, he shook his head and stuck his tongue out. No sooner had I reached out for the scissors than he cut his tongue off, he placed it in the palm of my hand and lay back down in the hole he had jumped out of.

I woke up crying, the taste of blood in my mouth.

Tongue is dil in Turkish, it's the same word for language. I only really realised that later on. At school, everyone was amazed when Frau Meier translated the word Muttersprache as mother tongue, as langue maternelle, as lingua materna. How poetic, said Max. Picturesque, said Lea. Kind of flowery, said Tim. We say mother tongue in Turkish too, I yelled through the stuffy classroom, fuming. Nobody found the Turkish phrase poetic, picturesque, flowery. Max could say siktir lan when he wanted someone to piss off. Lea always called Cemile börek or lahmacun or döner when she wanted to annoy her. And on the football field, Tim would yell hadi oğlum, hadi, when he wanted the ball.

But ana dili, mother tongue, nobody could say that.

Lea could say, nous allons à la piscine demain. Tim could say, excuse me, how can I get to the post office? Max could say, una cerveza, por favor, but he couldn't order an Ayran in Turkish at Ali Usta. In the summer, Lea met a French person for the first time, an exchange student from Paris, but she never called her baguette, fromage, or crêpes. She knew the film *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* by heart, from the first second to the last. She even learned the piano so that she could play the soundtrack by Yann Tiersen. But she didn't know Yüksel Özkasap, the Nightingale of Cologne. She didn't know the song *Almanya'ya Mecbur Ettin* by heart. She couldn't say yoksulluk beni beni, she didn't understand fakirlik beni beni. Tim could quote Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, fair is foul, and foul is fair. But he's never read Aras Ören, even though Ali Usta has his verses from the takeaway joint on Naunystasse written on the wall. The smell of thyme has ruffled many a moustache here.

Baba always says, bir lisan, bir insan. İki lisan, iki insan. One language, one person. Two languages, two people. Which means the more languages you speak, the bigger your world is, the more you are.

But not all people are created equal, even if that's what they always say. And not everyone grows old with language in the same way.

In Turkish, I feel like a twelve-year-old child, I never get any older in Turkish. I can say, dersini ihmal etme, because Baba used to say that when he wanted me to knuckle down at school. I can say, ellerinden öperim, when I talk on the phone with Nene and send hand kisses down the line. I can say, ayağına çorap giy, üşütürsün, because Anne said that when I did my judo exercises barefoot on the kitchen floor and she wanted me to put socks on so that I wouldn't catch a cold, Kesa-gatame, Ō-goshi.

One tongue does a somersault. Two tongues jump rope.

In French, I can say, ne pourrait-on pas considérer que l'imagination et un altruisme exacerbé sont véritablement des antidotes à la solitude ? In French, I'm an arrogant professor of philosophy on the TV channel Arte, puffing on a pipe. In English, I'm a left-wing protestor on campus at Berkeley, I sit next to other students of literature, politics, and sociology in the cafeteria and say, 9/11 was a turning point that not only reshaped global security paradigms but also fuelled Islamophobia, intensifying discrimination against Muslims on a global scale.

In Turkish, I'm twelve years old and can't understand the newsreader, whose voice reverberates all the way into my bedroom and makes the covers quiver. He says çin, he says uygurlar, he says baskı. Five minutes later, Baba opens the door, a TV crew in sweaty T-shirts and dark sunglasses behind his left and right shoulders, the camera aimed at my fearful, boyish face. Oğlum, he says. You have to learn Chinese. You need to speak the language of the powerful, how are you going to change the world otherwise?

The next day, Baba enrolled me in a language class at the adult education centre. Now I could count the numbers on the remote control in Mandarin when he told me to change the channel while he cracked open sunflower seeds with his front teeth. I counted:

一 (yī)

二 (èr)

三 (sān)

四 (sì)

五 (wǔ)

六 (liù)

七 (qī)

八 (bā)

九 (jiǔ)

When it was late and my head was spinning from all the world it was taking in and I wanted to hide from the pictures under my blanket, I said, 我累了 (wǒ lèi le), I'm tired, Baba.

The next day, Baba was still sitting on the couch, as if he hadn't moved a millimetre, his terliks in front of his feet, çay sitting on the table, his eyes on the idiot box. Oğlum, he said, you have to learn Hebrew.

Baba, I haven't freed the Uyghurs in China yet, I don't have time to solve the Middle East conflict.

Ssssst, hissed Baba and drew his eyebrows close together, making it look like there was a wolf's tail lurking above his eyes. He grabbed my arm and dragged me to a bookshop down the street, I still had my pyjamas on and almost peed my pants out of shame. I can still see it all so clearly:

There are pensioners buying greeting cards.

People who read the spines of books but don't buy anything.

People looking out for a birthday present.

Screaming children.

Screaming parents.

And others who are giggling because they have found indecent pictures of naked men and women. Over among the calendars.

And dogs, you always run into dogs, no matter where you go.

Baba plucked a Hebrew textbook from the foreign languages shelf and slapped it demonstratively on the counter. For my son, he said proudly. He's going to go into politics. At which the cashier gave me a nod of respect.

So young and already so conscientious, she said. How old are you?

十二 (shí èr), I replied.

A year later, we went to Vienna on a family holiday. Anne wanted to visit Sisi's castle in Schönbrunn, and Baba was excited about the cannonballs from the time of the second Ottoman siege that could still be found lodged in some of the walls of the city.

We made it all the way to Vienna back then, oğlum, said Baba, as if he had been part of the cavalry and had set up tents on the edge of the city with his own two hands.

I thought we were Arabs, I said. But Baba said nothing. He does that whenever he doesn't feel like arguing and won't permit any backchat. Otherwise, he talked and talked like a waterfall – and Anne and I nodded with great interest in the place where, almost 350 years ago, the Turks had relieved themselves.

The excursion took us all the way into the second district, we strolled down the main boulevard running through the Prater, it was a Saturday. All around us, families with children, with dogs, with horses. The sun was shining, the grass glowing green, and Baba saw orthodox Jews for the first time.

There, he said, as if he'd spotted a timid animal in the bushes. Jews! he said, pointing his fingers at two men in black kippahs.

Trees! I said, and pointed at two poplars.

Go over and say hello, Baba demanded.

No, why?

What are you learning Hebrew for otherwise?

So that I can harass total strangers in public parks?

Promoting intercultural understanding, oğlum, ever heard of that? Why do I send you to that school, what do they even teach you there!?

I'm not going over there, Baba, that's super embarrassing.

Fine, I'll do it myself. How do you say, have a lovely, holy weekend in Hebrew? Today is their sabbath, our Cuma is their Saturday, right?

Baba straightened his trousers, lifted his head, and strutted over to the two men.

Shalom, he said. Tachat yafeh!

The two men looked at Baba with a dumbfounded expression. When they didn't answer him, he walked back crestfallen and huffing into his moustache. Racists!

Maybe they only speak Yiddish, said Anne, trying to lift his spirits. It's not like all Muslims can speak Arabic, right?

You don't have to defend them, they understood me perfectly, Baba said.

I nodded, Baba is right. They understood him perfectly well.

A few alleys further, I bit into my schnitzel with a sense of satisfaction. Anne watched me out of the corner of her eye and began to grow suspicious.

Be honest, what did Baba say to those men.

Have a lovely weekend, of course!

What's the matter, oğlum, cat got your language! Spit it out!

All right, all right, he said nice butt.

Anne choked on her fries and coughed so uncontrollably that I started to worry she might choke to death right here in this Viennese beisl and our family holiday would end in disaster.

Vienna has already taken the lives of enough Turks, Baba would say. I thought Anne is an Arab? I would ask, and Baba would say nothing again.

Back in Almanyia, the next time she was reading coffee grounds to her friends, Anne told them all about it. They had a good laugh, and now they make fun of Baba every time they see him. They call him Mr Rabbi and wish him tachat yafeh! I'm an Arab, Baba answers. I'm a Muslim and an Arab, elhamdulillah.

Baba is an Arab, but he only speaks Turkish. Anne is an Arab and she only speaks Turkish as well. Baba's parents are Arabs, just like Anne's parents, and they both speak Arabic and Turkish.

I'm twelve years old, and I remember.

Dede is speaking to Baba in Arabic. He says, uq'ud! Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un. Sit down! Truly, we belong to Allah and to him we shall return.

And Baba nods and sits down, without saying a word.

Nene is talking to Baba in Arabic. She says, jib li talate kilo bamya min as-suq. Get me three kilos of okra from the market.

And Baba nods and heads off, without saying a word.

Because my Arabic is not so good, I stick the letters ق and ع and غ and ي on the end of the Turkish words, so that it sounds like I'm part of this story.

Nene asks in Arabic, lesh ma biddak takul bamya, yabni, why are you not eating?

That I understood, and I sit down and eat bamya.