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*The Inventories*

Mustafa lies alone on the ruined mattress, among cicada shells and moth wings, on a sheet disintegrated by winter humidity. He stares up at blooms of mold on the ceiling. It is spring at the resort, but the air is still damp in its derelict houses and hotels. A sumac has pressed its way up through the middle of the kitchen, and though Mustafa thinks he has been watching for it to happen, it has somehow sprung through the roof without his seeing. Where was he at that moment? Dozing, perhaps. Confusing the dogs of his dream with the feral dogs that roam the streets.

This will be a story about what has already happened. You, too, will be waiting for something more, and there may be a surprise or two along the way, like a rat emerging from a cupboard or a glimpse you get of something as you peer through the chainlink fence dividing the accessible portion of the beach from the forbidden part. But the math that takes place in the form of the inventories is largely aftermath.

In the time before, a woman would have taken the mattress to a balcony or courtyard to dry when the sun came out, coaxing it through the seasons when the tourists were gone. On the wall is a poster of the actress Brigitte Bardot, signed in a loopy hand. It is evening. Mustafa has not kept track of the days, which somehow have become weeks.

The lists of household items he has compiled for the government create the only order within the ruined house he has made his own for the past few days. Lists that were due weeks ago, when he should have been ushered out by the guards one last time, along with the others enlisted by the Turkish authorities. They would have walked down the broken boulevard parallel to the sea, past the showroom full of plaster-dusted 1974 Peugeots and the bakery, toward Famagusta's Old Town, the quarter where he lives.

But in his dream, the tree keeps growing, its branches like keys on an enormous green instrument he would play if only someone would teach him how. He goes from door to door in the abandoned

resort looking for someone to teach him. Everyone has gone—except for the soldiers who have made their barracks in a villa near the water.

When he awakens again, a beady-eyed rat is gnawing at his notebook and has reduced the lower corner to shreds. Mustafa throws a shoe at the rat, which moves a few feet off, scampers up onto the countertop, and studies him from behind a metal dishpan.

Wearing a plaid Oxford shirt, Mustafa had set out one Saturday morning in March to work on the inventory and had not returned at dinner time with the chicken he'd promised Havva he would pick up on his way home. He had worn the same shirt for five or six days before discarding it in the garden of an apartment building and beginning to ransack the bureaus of the dispossessed for a change of clothes.

At first Havva, his wife, might have thought he was merely being unreliable, as he had been pretty much since his mother's death. When he didn't come home with the chicken, she might have opened the refrigerator to look for some hummus, or she would have gone up to the corner cafe for *labmajun*. She and Mustafa gave each other space. More and more as time went on. Only by the second or third day of his absence would she, on returning from her work at the university, have begun to think that something had happened to him. But since it seemed no one was out looking for him, she must not have reported him missing. So late in the semester, the principal of the school where he taught would be more angry than concerned.

Mustafa hears the engine of the military jeep a long way off. He has learned to listen for its throaty rumble, which has become part of the circadian rhythm of Varosha. In terms of sound, there is the barking of the feral dogs, who fight over scraps the soldiers throw out, and then the start of the engine when the soldiers make their rounds before sunset. He knows they pass the car-sales showroom and the bakery and the store from which, in the early days after the invasion, the wind carried off all of the inflatable beach toys—flamingos and cartoon characters and brightly-colored beach balls.

He has kept the inventory for the Turks, who chose him, among others, for the task. Handwritten, it amounts to several thick notebooks he did not submit when the operation was supposedly over. Mustafa supposes that everyone he knows or cares about thinks he

went AWOL, especially knowing his attitudes toward the Turks. His colleagues and friends would not assume that he had taken his job so very seriously. Mustafa would have returned to his students, his classes in Turkish and Cypriot history, to thirty-five-minute increments of the storied past, if there were some way to divest himself of all he has taken stock of in the present:

Item#	Description
312	toy guns with caps (one broken, one functional)
313	wool blanket
314	set of Austrian crystal dessert bowls, still in box
315	3 bottles of Drano (special offer?)
316	2 pairs Cretan slippers
317	1 pair Turkish slippers

He was supposed to record anything of value, but in any room he inhabits for even just a few minutes, everything has value. The vanities and the children's sandals, the cooking pots and lemon juicers and linens. He has become laden with the meaningfulness of things. His heart, he thinks, will burst. And he will never have the opportunity to give it all back. If there were a way to lose the birdcages with their piles of feathers and bones, and the wrench sets and the family photographs, he would have leapt into the street and exposed his presence to the night guard. Even now, he considers doing so. Parked in a lot near the old bakery is a big truck, a Greek-Cypriot moving van with M E T A P H O R O printed on the side. He imagines filling it with the items on his lists, or maybe just the lists themselves, and lumbering out across the barricade, his last moments lived in expectation of a spray of bullets.

Mustafa knows he's gone overboard with the level of detail. For sure, now, they'll know if he drinks one of the bottles of Drano or uses one to poison the dogs. Maybe he writes it all down to save himself from such impulses.

One day, as Mustafa sits at a dining table sorting through a box of war medals and broken jewelry, it occurs to him that Havva was the sort of person who would have seen his disappearance coming even if he hadn't. Considering this possibility, he glances up to see the rat crouched on the kitchen counter, watching him. It returns quickly to the business of compacting the shreds of paper it has scavenged. Mustafa, tired of trying to scare it off, says aloud, "She

probably thinks I left her with only the shirt on my back.” He hates this thought.

- The plaid one? the rat says.

- Yes.

- Wrong, the rat says. You had the notebook as well. Not to mention pants.

- I wasn't leaving her.

- The rat busies itself, casually, with the nest it is building and does not look at him when it says: But maybe you were.

Mustafa has not thought about when he will go back. Pre-occupied with the past, he hasn't been looking to the future at all. But something in the powdery, sweet air now makes him think of the supple, smooth skin of Havva's shoulders and arms—arms that seemed perfectly suited to whatever task they undertook. He imagines her wearing the emerald-green t-shirt, her green eyes lively but imperturbable as she studies what might seem like his avoidance of her.

On the very day of the Turkish invasion, Mustafa's mother was dying. He'd been caring for her with her ravaged lungs for months. Had been hoisting her up to use the commode and wiping her, then lifting her again in an embrace, on the count of three, to put her back into her chair. He had marveled that excretion was the last of the human needs to be dealt with, and that it did not stop out of any sort of grace or concession to the dying. So consumed was he in that thought and in his labors that he had barely looked up when the neighbors had come over saying the Turks had reached Varosha.

In the days before, the Turks had taken Kyrenia, the idyllic harbor in the north, along with many of the villages of the north. Mustafa, a Turkish Cypriot, had lived happily alongside his Greek-Cypriot neighbors all his life. To him, the Turks were as foreign and unwelcome as they were to the Greek Cypriots.

Mustafa's mother, too, had lived with an open heart. She had turned bitter oranges into spoon sweets and gathered wild greens for her table and the tables of local tavernas in winter. There was a joy in her that was Mustafa's primary source of awe, worn thin as he was by his work at the high school. The history he taught, full of conflict between East and West, Christian and Muslim, weighed on him, as did his students' hormone-driven distractedness.

He understood now that a single grief, full-blown, was really all a body and a heart were capable of. It was like a house destroyed by a small central explosion that would not then be shaken by any aftershock, even if that shock were somehow of greater magnitude.

Each morning after his mother's death, as he sat at the table drinking his coffee, Havva touched the back of his neck and asked how he was feeling. He always said he was fine. It was what he thought she wanted to hear. But each day, a little more distance opened between them until they were moving in spheres almost completely separate. He had married Havva because she would not replace his mother in his affections but would occupy a different space altogether in his universe. Havva was sensuous, serious, not much of a cook. A marine biologist, she taught at the university. She was someone who always knew there was a dark underside to the blue-sky world. Mustafa, on the other hand, even with fair warning, had been broadsided by his mother's passing. Perhaps he was ashamed for Havva to see how it devastated him. How ill-equipped he was for even the losses that were inevitable. Not to mention the ones that weren't.

The labor of documentation has begun to drift away from dispossessed objects into days and weeks Mustafa feels he must record. He is living on preserved bitter oranges (like the ones his mother used to make), pickled beans, olives, and Nutella. It pains him to consume the stores of what someone else laid up for a future that was abruptly cancelled. So he makes a ritual of opening the jars and releasing the hopes under their lids. He eats in remembrance of those who fled. He gathers wild greens and picks oranges and lemons from the trees in the gardens. Also capers, which know how to grow only in the wild. He cures them first in a little jar with salt. For protein, he eats the eggs of a chicken from Famagusta that he has coaxed to lay near the chainlink and concertina fence. One afternoon while scavenging, he finds a rusty petrol can in the garage of a block of flats. He empties its contents into the tank of the M E T A P H O R O truck.

Sometimes, though already it seems too late to merely wander back, he imagines returning home. He knows what Havva would say. "I think you've been depressed, Mustafa." "It's called grief, Havva," he would tell her. "You don't have to agree with me," she'd say.

- What if she's right? the rat says.

- What do you know? Mustafa says, looking over at the rat,

which seems to have gotten at more of his paper somehow and is mixing it with human hair to make a nest at the corner of the countertop, in plain view.

- I'm just saying. What if you're a depressed derelict obsessing over memorabilia?

- Think of me as a poet. This is my elegy. And you're reducing it to a rat's nest.

- Get over it.

- OK then, an anthropologist.

In a cultural history, you would read things like, "A resident of Famagusta owned five small sacks of *lana de cambelon* and 60 sacks of goat hair," followed by the observation, "The names of the two fiber types and the distinction between them. . . imply that neither ordinary sheep's wool nor ordinary goat hair entered into Cypriot camel weave." But Mustafa knows that the Turkish authorities have no interest in anthropology. The type of inventory they have requisitioned is just something one does when in power—a demonstration of authority. Or it would be for purposes of taxation (though there was no one left to tax in Varosha), or just to revel in the spoils of war.

Mustafa fills his head with lists as he lingers, vagrant, in the ruins—mostly unofficial lists these days. He has imagined people's arguments at dinner and their interrupted loves. Their infidelities. Their business successes and their homework, completed reluctantly in the leafy courtyards. Their prayers and their dancing. He has lost time to living so many lives. The lives he imagines are those of Greek Cypriots, who were Christians, not Muslims like him.

One afternoon, he writes down what he remembers of the charges brought against the Knights Templar by the Bishop of Famagusta in 1310—charges also perhaps imagined:

- XI That these brothers sometimes trampled upon that cross
- XII That they sometimes urinated on or made others urinate on that cross and several times did this on Good Friday
- XIII That some of them on that day or on another of Holy Week were accustomed to meet together for the aforesaid trampling and urinating
- XIV That they adored a certain cat which appeared to them at their meeting.

Mustafa doubts that the knights were guilty of these things—as charged by men of their own faith. He, a man of a different faith, cares little for the cross but urinates in the garden and does not adore the cats he lives among. They are filthy and when once or twice in his loneliness he petted one, he found he had contracted worms.

He wanders the rooms of the abandoned hotels, taking the keys from where they hang behind the desk, and sometimes, seduced by the intimate lives of others, he masturbates by moonlight. All day, he is making inventories. Today, he takes stock of the reasons he has not left the quarter.

1. He would have to give an account for his prolonged absence.
2. Havva would by now have become accustomed to not having to remind him of things—everyday things like the grocery list or a visit to the barber.
3. He is a profiteer living on what his Greek-Cypriot neighbors, forcefully relocated to Paralimni or Larnaca, have left behind.
4. He has no idea whether or not it is Good Friday, or if any day can be good without foreboding.

One list morphs into another, brutally detailed histories and collective traumas mingled with causes for personal guilt, all of it straining toward whatever it is that he has missed. A reason not to kill himself. Because nothing will surprise him now. Mustafa even makes an inventory of the things that would not. He discusses the possibilities with the rat, who surprises him by turning up at a different moment each day. Same beady-eyed industry.

- The rat, gnawing on a pair of years-dirty panties or a sack of fava flour, says, Suppose the British pulled out of the EU?

- What if your mother-in-law embezzled money from the coffers of the Lala Mustafa Pasha mosque?

- Unearthing some white asparagus bulbs, the rat suggests, The sea water will rise so high it will lap at the oven in the abandoned bakery.

- Yes, Mustafa says. Yes, yes, yes. It probably will.

- You will soon be required to cook your neighbor's femur in a stew to prove your loyalty.

Well, the rat doesn't say that. Mustafa dreams that one and can't eat even a boiled egg for days. He feels as if he's swallowed a

stone.

- What if you did swallow a stone? says the rat.

What doesn't surprise us makes us duller and more passive, and what doesn't kill us merely leaves us waiting to die. This is what Mustafa has come to believe.

But then the belly dancer appears one night around dusk on the flat roof of a building just outside the dead zone—undulating but not womanly, more taut than supple, his shape flat against the sky. The music is the same music you'd expect. The dancing isn't a parody, but rather is lovely in its hermaphroditic way at almost-night just beyond the concertina.

Mustafa takes pleasure in the belly dancer's appearance, and it is this pleasure that surprises him. His ability to feel it. Still. Then the music disappears abruptly with the boombox down an unseen staircase.

- The rat says, The Georgians are using the moon as a garbage dump.

- Mustafa says, And nobody even knows we're here.

Mustafa records a leaky sunrise over the eastern Mediterranean and the mud-rain that the wind carrying dust from the Sahara brings. It spatters the broken panes of windows and dirt-washes the abandoned cars. There is so much drama if you only sit still long enough to see it—lizards devouring flies, ants carrying twigs to build their fungal gardens, weeds breaking stone. He has stopped getting the news except in fragments from the radio of the military jeep—and it's always declarations of political intractability. But as long as the soldiers keep their patrol, he can assume the rat is telling him all he needs to know.

Nights on the rooftop, the belly dancer works his bowel and his ribcage like a snake that has swallowed a rat. The rat is himself. His own stomach and intestine. It's all done with exquisite control. He shifts the cage of his ribs like a courtesan carrying the bird of her own freedom to and fro on a balcony in a harem. His arms swarm the graying sky—countermotion to the white and gray dust. He quivers and jangles, and Mustafa watches him each evening, imagining that if he were to send a postcard to the world, it would be this dance.

Mustafa moves every three or four days so as not to create much evidence of himself. The rat follows him. No matter. Mustafa

buries his own shit, which resembles the pellets of a wild or constipated dog. He is ruminating on the sound the locusts make. He has been watching them grate their legs together and is taking refuge in this one evening while opening a can of white beans when he hears the sound of the military jeep's radio passing outside the apartment where he is holed up. *Yesterday the Turkish army, in brash defiance of liberal European Union . . .* Nothing new. While he isn't paying attention, the rat scurries over and knocks the can of beans out of his hand. It clatters on stone. Now the radio lingers and is interrupted by the two soldiers on duty talking to one another.

Will anything surprise you now?

What if one of the soldiers steps into the courtyard with the broad beam of a military-issue flashlight and empties a round of ammo from his semi-automatic? Then he shrugs, says to his comrade, "Nothing, I guess." Mustafa, having buried himself in the massive geranium that has taken over the eastern end of the garden, recognizes, in this brief sequence of events and in the soldier's appraisal of it, the history of the world. When the soldiers leave, he sees the white-feathered body lying beside the chain-link fence where it took the spray. His chicken.

What Mustafa loads into the truck that night: forty bales of misery and failed diplomacy, a burden of disappointed hopes, the camel-hair shirt of his regret, a fine-toothed comb for picking nits, a wool blanket, a few rounds of wistful sighs and protests, a catalog of dreams, the explosives of his stored-up anger—enough to blow the local government buildings sky high—and a dozen apologies to Havva for all that is wrong with his decision. Also a pair of the woolen slippers from Crete. He's not sure whether what he's doing is insurrection, martyrdom, protest, surrender, or just plain suicide.

He thinks, tonight, that he recognizes the dancer. It's a kid from his class in Ottoman history. The boy always seemed to disbelieve Mustafa, though Mustafa didn't understand how that was possible when it was history he was teaching. Things had happened. You couldn't argue with that. Mustafa was teaching about the decline of the Ottoman Empire, but that boy said the empire didn't decline. He argued change didn't necessarily mean decline. And there he was on the roof, himself a kind of argument against what felt like the end of the world. Maybe he would say it wasn't.

Mustafa has always had a hard time weighing personal trouble against the larger troubles—shared troubles. He can't tell

the difference, say, between his grief over his mother's death and all of the losses of all of the refugees from Varosha. Or between knowledge of his own mortality and what feels like the impending death of civilization. Or at least a civilization. And maybe even, eventually, the world. He knows the instinct for survival of the species runs in his veins, though somehow he feels that the inventories could easily dissolve into species silence. There is a peacefulness about ruin—the death of expectation—that makes him want to lie down quietly and surrender on behalf of humanity. Is he half mad? Sometimes, he wants only to let the cicadas and the overgrowth of misdeeds cover him and all of us together.

But there on the rooftop is the boy—the one who used to argue about the Ottoman Empire and who now seems to have taken all the contortions living in this world demands and turned them to fluidity and movement against the night sky. Mustafa climbs into the truck.

You think this can't end well. Or if it does, it will not be realistic. Yet what you probably wish for, as Mustafa puts the truck in gear and rolls it first backward then forward, down the avenue, is a triumph of the heart, a repurposing of testosterone and ego, a crossing over into a zone that is free of the absurd waste that conflict and aggression have circumscribed. And why shouldn't you have what you wish for?

Mustafa's gaining speed in the M E T A P H O R O and is headed straight for the northern gate. You imagine men and women somewhere at the table of peaceful negotiation, about to make a breakthrough. All four tires as flat as humility, he's rolling on metal like rail stock across the broken concrete streets. Can you think some soldier was distracted and forgot to close the gate? Or that the game's so old there's no one standing guard? How much is riding on these threads of hope!

Mustafa bursts through the concrete barricade, tearing off the chain-link gate too before the truck gives up in a puff of exhaust and comes to a halt about ten meters outside the border. It is silent, except for the hiss of the radiator. Mustafa is curiously aware of the absence of gunfire. He is, in fact, not dead. Can the Turkish military be gone? He descends from the cab and looks down the road to the newest hotel at the open end of the beach—the first place outside the chain link and concertina. No doormen or SUVs or taxis. No vendor in the little market on the other side of the road leading back

toward the Old Town.

It seems that something has swept the rest of the city, and there is nobody left. Mustafa walks to the water's edge and dips a wary hand into the bright sea lapping at his feet. He spots a few empty trash bags floating in the shallow bay, dark blobs in a blue-green expanse. Have the Turks finally drilled their way to war with the Greeks in the Exclusive Economic Zone Cyprus claims? Has everyone been evacuated on account of a chemical spill?

It occurs to Mustafa, as the waves lap at the empty beach, that, while he has been mourning his mother's passing and then taking in all the sadness of the absent refugees, something more has erased the life that once was. Even the gulls are quiet along the road to Famagusta. Each day makes it clear that he was merely naïve the day before. He has fallen behind in his griefs.

And why is he still carrying the dead chicken? He wanders cautiously along the road toward the Old Town, where his own house is. Has there been a wildfire? He smelled smoke for a couple of days a while back, and there is a small patch of scorched pines near the stadium, but nothing to explain the vacancy of the city. He wonders if he might be breathing noxious fumes, invisible gases from some accident.

Eerily now, the air is filling with dust, coming up from Africa and causing a brown haze to settle over everything. This is not unusual, except in its intensity.

A man loves his mother who has a heart as big as the wind. She means the world to him. He loses her. Then he loses the world. There must be a difference between a civic, communal grief and an apocalyptic one, but something inside him that should calibrate these things and tell him how to respond is broken. Maybe he has been trying to fix it.

Turning to look back just once before walking in the direction of home, he sees a figure out on the beach closer to the chain-link barrier and an empty guard tower. One lonely figure that stands between him and the idea of apocalypse. The figure is bent, examining something in the sand. It is late afternoon, and the air has grown dim and hazy with the dust up from Africa. You can't feel it on your skin yet, but you can see it. He stops, cautious, and watches her straighten up and throw off a shirt or a jacket. It is a woman.

Mustafa experiences a shock of recognition at the splash of emerald green revealed against the dull sky.

He hurries over, past the observation tower, his heels sinking deep into the sand. He skirts two mounded areas staked off with string. He is very near when the woman stops what she is doing and looks up to see him. Perfectly still, she watches him approach. He knows it is her, though she has changed—the hair she brushes from her face now visibly silvering, the lines around her mouth deeper. He doesn't think about how he might have changed—the full beard, the tourist-shirt. "Havva!" he shouts, his voice full of wonder and trepidation.

She looks at him for a long moment before gesturing to the dead chicken he still carries in his right hand.

How long, he wonders, has he been gone? She looks like a woman of fifty, though she was considerably younger when he left home. Was Varosha some kind of time warp? And then, smiling slightly at how mad he must look, he says, "I guess you've made something else for dinner."

She laughs in a single, weary, closed-mouth syllable.

"Havva," he says, "I know I've got a lot to explain, and I'm not sure I can explain it, but what happened here? Where is everybody?"

Her hands resting on her hips, she surveys the landscape. "I guess we should go in reverse, since I don't remember exactly where we were when you left." She picks up a mallet and begins tap-tapping at a wooden stake she has poked into the sand. "People were just returning to their houses," tap, tap "to repair the damage after the wildfires swept the northern quarter of the city—worst fires in two hundred years," tap, tap, tap. "Then the cruise ship came into harbor bringing with it the pandemic. As you can see, the dust storms—" But she stops and studies him. "Where have you been, Mustafa?"

She picks up another stake and begins tapping at it in rhythms that sound, against the blank beachscape, like Morse code. For trouble. He watches her face for any sign of resentment toward him and does not find it, though he knows she must feel it.

"Varosha," he says.

"I guess you knew about the dust then?" she says. "But maybe not that it's picking up toxic airborne pollutants and bringing them here from North Africa, causing lots of asthma. But the virus, which also affects the lungs—that seems to have originated in China."

"Is everyone dead?"

“Under lockdown until further notice.”

“But you’re out,” he says. He puts the chicken down in the sand. It is good for nothing now anyway. Or maybe it could be boiled. How long has he been carrying it? It feels, suddenly, like years.

“I gave myself permission,” she says.

He raises an eyebrow.

“And paid the military police,” she adds. She seems to be reflecting on that decision.

“To let you do what?”

“The sea turtles have returned,” she says, suddenly animated. “The lights have been out a long while now, and they’ve come back to nest.”

“I was in there, Havva. You may not believe me, but I was working on the inventory. I just couldn’t stop tallying the losses. I didn’t want to go on as if it hadn’t happened. I felt, in there, like the last man on earth.”

Havva reties her hair since the wind has picked up and is batting it at her cheek. She says, “The rest of us were still out here though.”

Ah. There it was.

A couple of gulls pick at a broken eggshell nearby. “And by the way I have never not believed you. Should I have come after you? It’s just that I thought—I knew you weren’t dead. But I knew I could never give you enough space.”

He weighs the virtue in telling her what he tells her next. “An hour ago, I drove out through the barricade in plain sight, expecting to be shot. But after I got through, I found.... Where is the military?”

“They were moved over to Famagusta to enforce the lockdown. No one’s allowed to leave the house except to get supplies. And yes, people are dying. Some people have died.”

They are both quiet for a while as Havva ties a string around the stakes to protect the mound of eggs. “They started to hatch last night,” she says. “The moon guides them back to the water.”

“What did you do with the lists? The inventory?” she asks.

He gasps, and then begins to laugh and keeps laughing until he collapses on his knees in the sand. Havva can’t help laughing with him when she says, “Mustafa? You forgot them, Mustafa?”

He is crying now. “Oh my God! They’re still in there. Sheaves

of them!”

Havva moves toward him and he puts his arms around her knees and makes her fall into the sand—away from the turtle’s nest. He crawls over to her head and she touches his hair and his wet cheek where the beard takes over his face. He kisses her and it seems miraculous that he is still alive enough to love the grit on her lips and the salt air he can taste there too. He wishes he had his pen and his notebook to write down the good things that still surprise him. Number One: Havva. Number Two: Havva’s arms. Number Three: Havva’s arms digging and tapping their codes.

She releases him. Rising to her feet again, she says, “One or two small things, Mustafa. That’s all we can do. We’ll help them follow the moonlight. And then we’ll go home. We can talk about all of this later. Look at the sky! It’s crazy!” The sand arrives in a dust they can feel on their skin.

Mustafa stands up and touches her with a tenderness he has not felt in years. “You must have needed things while I was gone. I’m sorry, Havva. I lost track of time. I made you go it alone.”

She says nothing. And he truly has no idea how much time has slipped away. He can’t bear to ask.

Now, at dusk, they watch what at first looked like trash bags floating in the bay begin to make their way ashore. Some adult turtles, the late arrivals, Havva explains, are just now coming in to nest while the eggs laid a couple of months ago, in late March or early April, have begun to hatch. The dust settles on Mustafa and Havva’s shirts and the backs of their necks and in their hair. They start walking home, but Mustafa turns and looks back, worried. “Will they be OK?” he asks, feeling the gritty mass of his beard with both hands. “The little ones?”

“Sand they can manage. There are other things that will get most of them before they mature. Many of them tomorrow morning, even. Gulls. Snapper. Crabs. Raccoons. But look at this one, coming ashore.” She points. They watch the marvelous reptile move in her scaly armor, her eyelids heavy, like endurance, like the centuries lumbering on, carrying their great weight ashore, arriving at the land of opportunity.

“I think you’ve been depressed, Mustafa.”

“It’s called grief, Havva,” he says, his hand dropping to his side.

“You don’t have to agree with me. It’s just what I see.”

“You sound like a high school student reading Kafka. They always came to my class right after World Literature. Couldn’t believe how depressed that guy was. By the way, do you also think the Ottoman Empire never really—”

“Shhh,” she says, putting a finger to his sandy lips. “Enough,” she says. “Let’s go home.”

In the middle of the sandy beach at their backs is a lifeguard stand you’d barely notice until a quick movement there caught your eye: a bald, pink tail disappearing up inside the ladder. The rat reappears on the seat of the stand and darts to the edge, where it lingers.

- You don’t believe this ending, do you? it says, taunting.

- You: Why shouldn’t I?

- The rat, its eyes shining: Their moment of happiness is undeserved. Seriously. They’re laughing? Things will only get worse. One of them will die probably.

- You: I can still be surprised. And what about the belly dancer?

- The rat: What about him?

- You: It’s evening. I’m waiting for Mustafa to show her.