

*Maybe that's just how people are in that part of the world,* Gül says to herself. Nadiye and Ozan come from the Black Sea region, and Gül sometimes has trouble understanding them at first.

'I got to know Turkey when I was in the army,' Fuat says. 'Kurds, Circassians, Alevis, Georgians, the ones from the mountains, blond chaps from the Aegean, fancy Istanbulites, men from the Black Sea coast with big noses, all the people of our country. And you're getting to know them here in Germany. This is your military service,' he says, laughing.

Neither of them suspects that this period of service will last well over fifteen years.

Nadiye's son isn't one yet, but already she's heavily pregnant again. Gül wonders what will become of these children.

Gül has been in Germany for almost two months when she realises her period is late. She spends the first few days fretting and hoping, but one morning Fuat comes home and finds her crying in the kitchen.

'What's happened?'

'I think I'm pregnant again.'

Fuat just looks at her. Gül can't say whether it's the hope of a son she sees in his eyes, or happiness, or even disappointment.

'I came here to work,' she says. 'What are we supposed to do with another child? Am I supposed to leave it with strangers, like we did the girls? Will this one have to grow up without a mother, without a father?'

'Are you sure?' Fuat asks.

'No,' Gül says, knowing full well that her period's been late before and her husband has almost always been careful, no matter how drunk he's been.

'We'll talk to a doctor, then.'

Nadiye has to see the doctor too, because it's only a matter of days before the baby is due. The doctor explains to her and her husband, by drawing on a piece of paper, that the baby hasn't

turned around and they're going to have to perform a caesarean. Nadiye will need to spend a few days in hospital.

The doctor who examines Gül doesn't use drawings to help her understand. Gül is shy around this grey-haired old man, who seems a little dodderly and is constantly groping in his shirt pocket for his glasses, which are propped on his head. She doesn't understand a word he's saying.

When they're out of the surgery, she asks Fuat: 'Yes or no?'

'You heard what he said.'

'And how was I supposed to understand what he meant?'

'He said *baby*, didn't he? Surely you've heard that word before? What's not to understand?'

Gül holds back the tears until she gets home, and then a little longer, until Fuat has left for work.

'What am I going to do with this little one?' Nadiye says. 'I can't exactly take him into hospital with me. Would they give Ozan time off, do you think? But what's the poor man supposed to do with a child all day? Oh Gül, life's so much harder when you haven't got your people around you, looking out for you.'

'I can look after Ergün,' Gül says. She can tell from Nadiye's eyes that she hadn't reckoned on her offering to help, or even wondered if she might. Nadiye's look of surprise makes Gül want to give her a hug. Hers is a pure heart.

'You're mad,' Nadiye says. 'You don't want to be lumbering yourself with a kid at the moment.'

Gül hasn't told her about her pregnancy. Has Nadiye sensed something's not right?

'Don't be silly!' Gül says. 'Just give Ergün to me, you know I've got two children of my own and you can't go leaving a baby with your husband; he's here to work. He wouldn't like it and you know it.'

'What's all this in aid of? What are we supposed to do with an infant?' Fuat scolds. 'You know I need my sleep. As if it weren't enough that I work nights and you're always making noise, now

you want to bring a child into the house, is that it? You and your ideas. It beggars belief.'

While her husband sleeps, Gül sits quietly on her stool in the kitchen or plays with Rafa. She can't do anything about the fact that her husband wakes up when a plane flies past overhead. She even tries to light her cigarettes quietly.

'We won't disturb you,' she says now. 'You won't even hear him; we'll be in the kitchen the whole time and you won't hear a peep.'

*He's your friend's son, she could say. Why are you acting like it's nothing to do with you? It's our duty to take care of this child.* She could say that, but then he'd get even more wound up.

'Not a peep, you say? He's a baby! You don't know when he'll scream and when he won't, are you having a laugh? *Not a peep.*'

He sticks a cigarette between his lips and sucks the smoke in angrily.

*Where do I get these ideas? Gül thinks. I wait in the kitchen all day long for my husband to get up, there's no space at all here, my own children are far away, I'm pregnant again, and I get it into my head to look after someone else's child. But what else was I to do?*

Gül is lucky. As it turns out, Ergün is quiet during the day. Every morning, once Fuat's gone to bed and she's finished washing the dishes, she carries the little boy in her arms to visit his mother. The hospital is about ten minutes away, and Gül is still scared of getting lost when she goes out on her own, but she only needs take two turns before she reaches Nadiye.

Ergün is quiet during the day thank God, but at night, at night while Fuat's at work the child cries. He stirs, and at first, only makes enough noise to wake Gül. But as soon as Ergün sees her face, the face of a stranger and not his mother, he starts wailing and almost nothing calms him down.

Which is probably why Gül starts to cry soon after him.

'See,' she tells the baby. 'That's life for you, we can't change it. My children and I have been separated, too, and I'm not happy about it either.'

She cuddles the little boy, hugs him to her chest, and they cry together through part of the night until Ergün falls asleep, exhausted.

‘That’s life for you,’ Gül says. ‘Soon I’ll have another child and there’ll be many more things I never would have wished for.’

The first time Gül drank alcohol, it was liqueur that she drank in her mother-in-law’s kitchen, liqueur that the many guests who visited during Eid had turned down, and which tasted better with every sip. Eventually, she grew queasy and threw up. The following morning, she threw up again and thought it was the after-effects of the alcohol, until her friend Suzan explained that she was probably pregnant.

With her second daughter, Ceren, she had only felt sick in the mornings two or three times, and now in the mornings with Ergün, before Fuat gets home, she doesn’t feel great – her eyes are swollen, she hasn’t slept enough, her mind is on her daughters – but she doesn’t feel bad.

After four nights she takes Ergün back to his mother, and at home, in the toilet in the stairwell, she discovers a big dark-red stain in her white knickers.

‘I came here to work,’ Gül says. ‘That was the reason. Not to spend all my time sitting here in the kitchen, so far away from my children. We wanted to earn money.’

‘You didn’t want any money,’ says Fuat. ‘You always refuse when you’re offered it.’

He’s replaced the stools in the kitchen with chairs now, and he even managed to get hold of an old armchair that just fits next to the door, where he’s sipping whisky and Coke.

‘I didn’t do it for money,’ Gül says, ‘I did it to please God. It’s not right to earn your bread from other people’s need. We’re in a foreign country, we have to stick together.’

‘Money’s money,’ Fuat says. ‘You’ll never be rich until you understand that.’

‘Well, I can’t exactly go to Nadiye now and say I do want it after all,’ Gül says.

‘We’ll never get enough saved if you keep working for everyone for free.’

‘I want a proper job,’ Gül says.

Fuat twists the glass in his hand and takes another sip.

‘Look,’ he says, ‘everything in this country has to be done just right. You need a permit for everything. They let you come here because you’re my wife. And they have a rule that you have to have been here for six months before they’ll give you a work permit. Without a work permit, you can only work off the books, and that’s not easy. I’ll see what I can do, alright?’

Fuat knows his wife is a hard worker. Back in Turkey, she asked him to buy her a sewing machine so she could contribute to the family’s income. He was sceptical at the time, but the investment soon paid off.

He already has an idea of what Gül could do. It may seem like the rules in Germany are different to Turkey, but Fuat knows you’ve still got to be smart if you want to make it. People who follow the rules don’t get far. Wherever you are, you have to keep an eye out for opportunities and people who can level your path.

Two days later, Gül finds herself at the conveyor belt of a chicken factory, plucking chickens for eight hours a day. She has a fifteen-minute break for lunch, and she’s allowed one visit to the toilet on each side of the break.

The first night, Gül dreams of those naked and half-naked chickens, pink flesh as far as the eye can see. Flesh, flesh and more flesh; the smell of blood, and the faces of the men whose job it is to pull the heads off the slaughtered birds. Half-formed eggs removed from the meat, feathers floating on the air. In her dream, the seas fill up with naked, dead chickens and threaten to flood the land.

The second night, her dream is much worse.

Ceren has got into trouble and Gül has to rescue her, get her out of somewhere, free her. She has to be there for her daughter; she has to reach out her hand and help, but Ceren keeps slipping away and every attempt is in vain. Gül kicks and struggles and tries, she toils and travails, but Ceren slips away from her in a maelstrom of fear and angst; Gül simply can't get a grip on her.

It's four thirty in the morning when Gül wakes up, more than an hour to go before Fuat comes home from work. She gets up, the images pale but the feeling of the dream painted in such stark colours that her hands tremble as she sits down at the kitchen table with pen and paper. She writes a letter to her mother-in-law: *Is something the matter with Ceren? Is my daughter healthy? Has something happened to her? Write back, please write quickly. Don't leave me wondering.*

She makes breakfast for herself and Fuat, but the dream has her trapped beneath a bell jar of anxiety. No matter where she goes, no matter how she moves around the kitchen, something is cutting her off from the world. Something is behind her, above her, inside her, and even when she doesn't think about it, she can feel that it's there.

She sticks a stamp on the letter, one of the many Fuat bought for her, along with paper and envelopes. 'What are you planning to do,' he asked, 'write a letter a day? What do you want with twenty stamps at once?'

'Yes,' she told him. 'Every day or every other day, perhaps every third day, but I want to keep writing – it's the only way we can stay close to each other.'

Gül posts the letter on her way to work, and the bell jar around her grows a little thinner; a little air gets through to her anxiety and one or two clear thoughts form in her mind, but then she's back at the conveyor belt plucking chickens, with scraps of last night's images in her head and the weight of the dream still pressing down on her.

*People say light as a feather, she thinks as she rips out the down, light as a feather – they must have come up with that one long before they had chicken factories.*

Just before lunchtime, the man who showed Gül the ropes two days earlier comes rushing in. Herr Mehl is a skinny man with glasses, whose upper body always looks like he's leaning forward, and whose wrinkled neck reminds Gül of a turkey. Behind him are two women and one of the men who pulls the heads off the chickens.

'Quick, quick, quick, an inspection!' Herr Mehl says, dragging Gül away.

She works out what's going on.

In Istanbul, Gül had seen street hawkers running away from the police with big trays covered in simit. She'd felt sorry for the traders; they earned their money by the sweat of their brow, but if the police caught them, their sesame rings ended up trampled in the dirt.

Herr Mehl runs into the walk-in refrigerator with the four workers. Gül has to hide in a big box that she only fits into if she draws her knees up to her chin. She's curled up so tightly that she can't even see how many hands are covering her with plucked chickens.

*If anyone looks in the box they'll see me, with or without the chickens, Gül thinks as she waits there, feeling the weight of the meat. And: At least the simit sellers were outside in the fresh air. And: I did forget the dream for a moment, though.*

*Two hours, she could have said, two hours I spent in that box in the walk-in refrigerator. It was so cold that it froze the marrow in my bones, I had no feeling in my fingers or in my toes. Two hours I spent there with those cold, dead chickens on top of me. It's not like being in a house where you've run out of coal. It's not just the cold; there's the fear too. How was I to know what would happen if they found me? For all I knew, they might take me to the police station, put me on*