

Memoirs of a Dead Man

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- to the only *Décadent* I've come to know -

I.

We had just celebrated the 30th anniversary of our marriage with my wife Ethel, everything was going fine. To be sincere, especially on our seventh year, I was beginning to believe that we were growing apart, but Ethel's devotion and her unlimited love transformed many impossibilities into possible.

I'm a physics professor at some university, my pupils generally like me; sometimes I use the 'in' jokes which I hear from my son to 'warm up' the class. A forgetful –in such a way that my forgetfulness became my trademark- old professor like me making obscene jokes just hits the target every time – times change!

About two weeks ago, while I was sitting at my desk, investigating a hypothetical comment which somehow kept on eluding me for some time, I suddenly became aware of a pain coming from my chest. I had never before experienced a heart attack, but due to the fact that nearly all of my male relatives in the family died of heart failure, I wasn't caught unprepared. While unbuttoning my shirt with one of my hands, I applied a tough massage with the other. As I felt somehow better, I remember calling for Ethel who was downstairs at the time.

When I was myself again, I was still alone in my study and somehow the pain had left the same way it had come, without any trace. I even thought of having died but this was a momentary thought and perished right away.

My religious beliefs are not famous for their strength. The same thing went also in the family before me. During my marriage process with Ethel, who is, by the way, an Armenian, nobody opposed to or, to be honest, cared for the fact. Thank God for Ethel having more faith with respect to me that we managed our son Can to be circumcised timely. Every Sunday, Ethel wakes up early in the morning, puts her black dress on and goes to church. Sometimes, I tease her by saying "I married a nun!" to which I receive the reply: "The only reason for my going is to beg for your sinful soul to be saved!"

I realized that I had been thinking these thoughts leaned on the desk. What if I were actually dead and in a state of frustration from this emptiness from the absence of an afterlife? A smile appeared on my lips: What? Was I actually wishing for the presence of a god? Would it be better, considering the fact that if it was the case, that my designated place were the final circle of hell?!..

Then, I went downstairs, to find Ethel. She was in the kitchen, cooking dinner. I began with "Do you know?...". She didn't hear me at first, then, startled a little and said "Oh! It's you, you scared the hell out of me!"

"I was just going to say that, I had kind of a heart attack upstairs, I thought to myself, 'Behzat, my man, while you are going away, why don't you take your beloved wife with you, relieving your son?...'. And I was going to joke about... what was it... Oh, yes, you Ethel, you're so pretty that you give me heart failure!"

It wasn't obviously one of Ethel's better days, and she scowled. In that early hour of the day, I was scolded with sentences beginning with "If you're that much inclined to die..." In the end, my face became sour as well, I murmured "OK then, whatever way you like, I'm now going to school, I have some business in the library. In case anyone calls me, do tell them that I love you, marrying you was the best thing I have ever done." In contrast with the general mood, these words were of more value than usual, making Ethel softer and giving me a kiss on the lip so tiny and pretty that you could say friendly.

"Oh, please try not to leave any lipstick mark, my mistress just goes crazy when she spots them..."

II.

When I arrived at the university, everybody was out. Since I had no clue, I approached a student that looked familiar and asked about the occasion. “Haven’t you heard, sir, the tanks are parked outside the parliament?” First, I was surprised and then frustrated. I scolded by saying “But how does this relate to physics?” and to this, the boy first gave me a look that clearly meant “you dotard, how can you not understand?”, but then his gaze transformed into a “he’s the monument of a thousand years of experience, who am I to criticize?” and replied by saying “You’re absolutely right, sir, let me fetch my friends!”... Which meant that I had a lecture today, but I had come to school today for the thing in the library, and outside, people were most probably experiencing their first coupe! Yet, there still was the lecture... A lecture which had been erased from my mind!

“...if we are to integrate from here to infinity and make a transition for the generalized coordinates, and by the way I hope you have already guessed that we’re leaving out the 0 point else the integral grows and grows and explodes at the end, now after all these approximations and generalizations and getting farther away from the real life, we have ourselves another nice wave function and gives us the opportunity for a 15 minutes talk.”

Aaaaaaand they were still staring at me blankly.

“Now, pay attention boys and girls, I can see at the moment that we are about 15 people in the class. What is our actual count? About 60-70 people, meaning that a dominant portion of your friends is absent. In my time, which is about the era Rome was founded, people would actually think about events similar to today’s and generally these thoughts wouldn’t include a stupid electron that is so idealized that it is impossible to relate it in real life and its never-going-to-be-observed stupid wave function. Please, do not ever think that I’m degrading physics, take a look at this book, what does the title say? ‘Foundations of the Quantum Mechanics, by Behzat Kagir & Numan Denk’ – if I was in this for the money, at least I would go for a book that is consists of more erotic sections instead of this one, of course that’s my point of view, can’t speak for Numan...”

Nobody’s laughing, they’re not even sure whether they should laugh or not...

“What I’m trying to say is that you’re a bunch of idiots not thinking about physics, but only the course and the grades. That’s what you really are.”

Still staring at me with blank faces.

“If I didn’t know that I would be retiring at the end of the term, maybe I wouldn’t be so harsh, but wouldn’t want to keep it unsaid either. Today’s lecture is over, now go and continue your photosynthesis outside.”

After this, I waited... Not even one opposition, one objection. At least they avoided direct eye contact with me out of shame. Rotten class, rotten society, everything has rotten, well, since I am their mentor, my rotting is also on the table. Now, that is enough, get out, leave the class. Didn’t you have things to do at the library?

On the way to library, I thought about my youth, my wild days: I was deep into literature for a time, even if it didn’t contain *erotic sections*, still I had managed to write a novel, a dark novel,

about a lonely man... I had sent it to a publisher which returned it back, and pissed off at being rejected, I had put it away someplace. I guess it is still there, but I can't remember where that someplace was. The Grim Ripper is approaching. Today's incident of the heart was "Checked, couldn't find you at home" for me, the deliberate message. I'm already past expiry date, wouldn't be such a loss, would it? Besides, I was forgetful all along, but now I have a valid, logical, concrete reason for it, too. Funny that the only difference between the elder and the younger versions of a person is his stand relative to death, other than that, the forgetfulness is the same forgetfulness, now and then.

An assistant professor passed me by without a salute or anything - "The elder must give way to the youthful, Bah!" We are surrounded by dummies, dummies like vegetables thinking it suffices just to stroll in the garden when the tanks enter the parliament. Take two-three of them to the main square, make them read Kafka, Oğuz Atay by force and see then if they ever repeat it again, well, by then possibly nothing can be expected of them... O' irony, irony where art thou?!..

III.

By the time I returned home that evening, a weird weariness had come upon me. Slowly I lay down on the couch. If it weren't for the news on TV, I was even going to forget today's "attempted coupe". Nonetheless I fell asleep during the news.

Ethel's voice woke me up from my dream... I was in a garden, with trees bearing every kind of fruit, with people here and there. The famous almonds belonging of my childhood's Isparta, my hometown – it was surely a happy dream that I was taken away from.

- Behzat, dinner is almost ready, take a shower if you want, at least it will take away your weariness.

- You're right, Ethel. Today was devastating... It is old age. I'm looking forward to retirement, so that we can go to Isparta, I miss it there terribly. One longs for the homeland as death approaches... I guess it is the situation here.

She reached out slowly, touching my face, caressing my cheek. I once again realized how much I loved Ethel. We couldn't be accounted as young when we had married, in our 30s, I had long hair which had started thinning – that hair! I had been beaten up how many times for that hair! Now, look. I'd feel like resurrected if I can spot even one or two strands of hair on top of my head! On the other hand, Ethel was and always has been a beauty. Her hair -turning gray now- was blondest of blond those days... Her blue eyes would just melt me on the spot – which by the way still melt me... Behind her huge pink frames, her eyes would get enlarged even more, our hands would find each other... Looking back after 30 years, I realize that so little has changed, still we can't set our eyes on anything except each other. Now that Can has come of age, we will have him married in a couple of years, finally be on ourselves with Ethel, move to Isparta, I taking care of the orchard that my dad left me and living our remaining days in peace, away from all this chaos...

Sometimes, especially in times of trouble, I wonder if there really is not a tiny bit of "hope of deliverance", then I recall the diabetic coma Ethel was in two years ago. One afternoon, I was late for home, Can was also absent for some meeting with his friends, I had knocked on the door, knocked on it, no one to open, entered, guessed Ethel was probably by the neighbor as I walked past the living room in the dark and then I had seen her, lying unconscious there on the carpet, hospital immediately, I had asked the neighbor to take us to the hospital, my hands were shaking too much to drive the car, I had begun to stutter, everything was happening in a fast forward but I somehow had managed to leave a note for Can despite my shaky hands.

- If you had arrived 10 minutes later, it would already have been too late. That still doesn't mean that all is too well, but she is certainly much better than she was when she arrived. Now, there is nothing we can do except wait.

And that was the time I caught myself retreated to some corner, murmuring all the prayers I happen to have heard somewhere... that was the time I realized that when someone is faced with the fact of losing the beloved, he tries to hold on to anything even if it is simple delusion whether he has faith or not.

Afterwards Ethel was discharged from the hospital, became more shy and her visits to the church happened to be more frequent. Speaking of faith, my sudden enlightenment was already back to its “equilibrium position”. After such a disaster, I am scared to death of losing Ethel and of the day that the only possible means of finding her being the after life...

I rested my hand against Ethel’s, touched it with my lips, my eyes wet – a newly learned thing by the way: a person gets more childish as he gets older – I hugged my dearest wife.

- There there, what was on your mind, you old baby! C’mon, go and take a shower, were you in such a rush today, your shirt is smelling sweat, or did you take it among the dirty ones this morn?..

IV.

I had showered that day but neither that day’s shower, nor the attendants (“tellak¹”) of the Turkish Bath where I go regularly since my childhood were able to rid me of the smell. Besides, the bruises they caused were in no way getting better. The smell originating from me was not like that of sweat by the way... It was also unlike those people’s who smell whether they are clean or not – I was born in Isparta², everybody knows that it is impossible for one who has bathed in Isparta’s water and raised with rose essences! But on the other hand, the smell was increasing day by day. Thankfully, the semester break came and I was saved for the moment.

In addition to the smell, my skin had started to get paler. Can insisted that I get examined by a fellow doctor, but I paid no attention, my pills and I were getting on pretty well. Lately, I wasn’t interested in getting out of the house; we were sitting all day with Ethel, planning for the pension day. “Behzat,” she would say, “I know that you are looking forward to moving to Isparta, it is OK for me, but I’d like to go on a trip, maybe to Paris once more, we’d enjoy a week there...” We had gone to Paris for our honeymoon; I was obsessed with the French literature and Ethel was fascinated with the architecture, we had spent a wonderful time there. “Why not indeed? Definitely we can go there my love. Our son is already a grown up, he is longing for a sibling. We can surely have our second, no, we had already had the second... third maybe?... No, no, I mean we can surely have our fourth honeymoon again in Paris...” Ethel smiled, of course she smiles...

- Can is still single, I added suddenly, do you think he might be a ..., you know...

- Behzat! You are definitely losing it.

- If it is like you say, then where is my bride-to-be?

- He had mentioned to me the other day, she exists... What was her name, let me recall... It was something like Asli or Ayca...

- You get the girl’s phone number, her address and let us get them engaged without Can’s consent. If we leave all this to him, God knows when he will attain anything. I can’t understand this boy, you expect one to think if just for a moment “Well, I’m with these seniles, guess they want to

¹ Tellak : The attendant in the Turkish baths who ‘rinses’ the customer.

² Isparta : A city in Turkey famous for its roses and essences.

be on their own...” but where is such thoughtfulness? Ethel, if you ask me, this boy has got his “sensitivity” from me.

- You’re surely joking... You are the most sensible and caring person I’ve ever come to know.

- Are you being serious or sarcastic? I would have kissed you right at this moment but you know what the doctor said...

- So you have visited Can’s doctor friend?

- Of course I haven’t. What good can possibly come from someone who is Can’s friend? I meant the faculty doctor who checks my blood pressure... By the way, tell Can to bring the girl, I’m willing to let Can go without any dowry...

It took a week for Can to bring the girl, whose name is Asli by the way. In this one week, I couldn't resist Can's increasing requests anymore and went to see his doctor friend who happened to be Numan's son Soner! When Can saw me surprised he said "Don't you remember dad, I told you again and again that Soner is an attending physician, let's visit him but you refused over and over?" "My dear son, how could I possibly know that Soner was indeed this Soner? Soner, my boy, lately I'm experiencing something like a mixture of weariness and absent-mindedness... I know I'm a forgetful man all along, besides I'm ashamed to say it but I have been smelling for a while, it is so shameful that I can't meet people anymore..."

Doc Soner took my shirt off, listened to my heart, and then examined me some more. He used to visit us when he was a child, and he favoured me since. "Uncle Behzat, your heart seems to be tired; you need to rest a lot... Do not go to the school the next semester and retire as soon as you can. About the smelling problem, I can not find the exact reason but it may be your meals being too much for you. Stick with veggie diet for a time, if it does not disappear, then I will have another colleague to examine you..."

We thanked and departed from Soner's hospital. Now that I had done what Can had requested of me, it was his turn to return the favor: he was going to introduce us to Asli as soon as possible...

On the day of Asli's arrival, Ethel was twice in a hurry... It was as if she had changed her legs for wings. As she didn't want me strolling around, took me to the study where I found our dear neighbor Mr. Mehmet waiting by the chess pieces already set... So we started the game, by the middle of the second game, Ethel brought our coffees, how I love this gal! Mr. Mehmet offered me one of his cigars, and then we smoked together...

Afterwards, god knows how many hours later, I looked around to see that I had dozed off on the couch, alone in the study with neither Mr. Mehmet nor the chess set visible and somebody, most probably my dearest Ethel had covered me with a blanket. I went down to the kitchen, Ethel was there finalizing the preparations. "You dozed off," she said, "if it wasn't for Mr. Mehmet, you would have stayed in that uncomfortable way... Can has called just now, they're on the way..."

- Well, whatever... The sooner they come, the sooner I can eat something. I'm starving...
- I'm talking about marrying the boy, you just think about stuffing yourself! Oh Dear!..
- What can I do, I can eat a horse...
- Do not forget what the doctor said... You seem like getting better.

Then the door bell rang. Ethel with all her agility, shot forward to open it. Voices, voices, voices... I had just reached the living room when I heard Can asking for me and as he saw me coming, introduced the girl next to him "Asli, let me introduce you my dad, and dad, this is Asli". Asli bent and kissed my hand, doesn't matter, let her kiss the hand, I mumbled some thanks... let them marry each other, and then I take Ethel, we go to Isparta, must get going, going, going...

We sat down on the coaches, Ethel returned to the kitchen, calling Can to help her. Like I don't know Ethel! She can't sleep that night if she can't report "the first five minutes" impressions right at that moment... And the girl. She was staring at me, what was the name again? Right, Asli.

- So, Asli, tell me, how did you meet Can?
- Well, one day I was at Can's department, an extra proctor was needed for an exam of ours, so Can helped me that day,...
- Our meeting with Ethel was something similar!
- Were you a lecturer then?
- No, we were coping with our M.S., then there was this small fire in the laboratory, ... long story...

And so we were conversing like this...

Can and Ethel were still missing, and I had already forgotten what the hell I was talking about... My eyes kept on strolling towards the TV: They were broadcasting from the parliament house gardens I guess... At first, I tried hard to listen to what the girl was saying, but it was getting harder and harder...

- Yes, yes,... and you were saying.., Asli?...

And then, all of a sudden, a scream came from Asli... She was just able to shout "Can!" – nothing could be understood other than this among the screams. She was also trembling as if she were caught in the midst of an earthquake... I tried to calm her but this only increased her panic; by that time Can and Ethel had also come into the room, Asli ran to him seeking shelter. "He's dead Can! Dead!" she went on screaming. But I was still there, looking at her, trying to comprehend... Can shook Asli to her senses, he said "I had told you dad is a bit weird these days but this reaction of yours, it is complete non-sense. Let me take you back to your home..."

By the time Can took Asli and returned, we were talking with Ethel... "Ethel," I said, "Ethel, I think, on that day when I had a heart attack, you were in the kitchen then, remember? Well, I think I died that day, I know it sounds strange but when you think about it, this is the only explanation to everything that came afterwards: you know, the bruises, that smell..." With her eyes full of tears, she was desperately trying to find another explanation, a catch maybe... Can came over, sat between us. "Dad, we are seeing Soner the first thing in the morning, don't pay attention to Asli's jabbering. You know, once in a while she talks nonsense..."

These were what Can was repeating over and over but, somewhere inside me, I realized that the girl was right, that was what I had been suspecting all along myself. True, I had died somehow in a strange way; those who knew me weren't expecting it, or less possibly, they more-or-less weren't yet ready to accept my death so they couldn't realize the simplest facts. On the contrary, those who didn't know me, maybe, failed to see it at first, but eventually, they were coming to terms with the fact that their dear addressee was nothing but a corpse that had already begun to rot... After accepting all these facts myself, I was confronted with just one problem: where I should hide my corpse.

For this purpose, I tried hard but neither Ethel nor Can allowed me to hide it. They recovered my corpse from everywhere I deposited it and brought it back... "Dad wasn't used to be like this," Can goes on saying these days to his friends who ask about my condition, "lately he was very exhausted from the university..."

As for me, I finally realized that there was nowhere that I could safely hide my corpse and I came up with maybe the best solution I could come up with: I began to take it with me wherever I went ...

THE END

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