

Betrayals of the past

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The old woman insisted on going home, Birol tells me. We were all afraid, but she wanted to go home. Her sons were in the mountains fighting, and she came to the village alone. And of course the Greeks came to her and wanted to buy her land. That's what they would do then: try to buy our land. It was summer 1974, they say. Just two weeks before the Operation. She sold some of her land and put the money under her pillow. And the Greeks came in the night and killed her and took the money. They chopped up her body and threw it off the cliff at Five Mile beach. When her family came to look for her, they told them, 'Go look at Five Mile beach.' And only two weeks later the Operation happened and our army landed at that beach. Allah took his revenge.

You got this on tape? her brother Hüseyin asks me.

Yes, I got it on tape.

It's an important story.

The sister Birol insists: *you must tell the Americans, you must make them listen. They must recognize us.*

Her brother Hüseyin tells her: *she came from Turkey, her husband's Turkish. Don't talk to her about the Americans.*

No, she says. *The Americans must listen. I did beautiful embroidery, I would've been a teacher in the villages, teaching the girls embroidery. I was only eighteen. Eleven years! The best years of my life, in a tent. That's why I can't keep house now. And they took my embroidery, and they used it for their daughters' dowries. And now they come here, and I have to make coffee for them.*

You make them coffee?

Yes, I make them coffee. But I don't speak Greek, so we can't talk, just a few words. And the Greek of this house comes, and she brings her grandson. Birol jumps up now, running about the room. The cira, the Greek woman, she points to things, 'This was ours, this wasn't ours. This was ours, this wasn't ours.' And what about me? I wake up in the night and recite prayers until dawn. I turn on the television, and if there's something against Turkey, or against northern Cyprus, I pray. My husband thinks I'm crazy, but I pray until dawn.

How long have you done this?

Since the border opened. Since they started coming here.

Hüseyin is insistent that I must document their suffering, and he's disappointed to learn that I speak to the Greeks, as well. *Well, what do they tell you?* everyone asks me. They're thirsty for news that's not constrained by the demands of hospitality. Hüseyin's daughter tells me, *I*

know he's too much. He's a bit fanatical. But he feels betrayed, you see. He won't admit it now, but he speaks Greek like a Greek. All his friends were Greek. They used to go drinking and carousing and chasing women together. They danced for days at his wedding, and then those same friends took up guns and said to him, 'We're going to kill every one of you, right down to your cats and dogs.' He feels betrayed.

Hüseyin's own stories are often punctuated by the rat-a-tat-tat of machine-gun fire, and shrapnel from Greek guns is still lodged in his skull and legs. A generation of men, a decade of fighting. He asks me to imagine their life in the mountains, the lost years of youth. His wife, Fatma, asks me to imagine January 1964: a frigid winter, the Turkish women and children of Lapithos clustered in a handful of houses. *We had no food after a while, no milk for the children.* All night, there was gunfire in the mountains. And then their flight from the village, and a decade passed in tents. *They said they would kill us all. They said, 'We'll kill you all, right down to your cats and dogs.'*

Who said that?

Fatma rises and points out the window. *They lived there, and there,* she says.

In some Greek depictions of the island's division, barbed wire drips blood, like a swordcut across the island's belly.

One of my first experiences with Greek Cypriot refugees from Lapithos was a ceremony to mark the fall of the village to the Turkish army on August 6, 1974. By that same date in 2003, the checkpoints had already been open several months, but most of those in attendance at the ceremony had refused to visit the village. The Bishop of Kyrenia, a gaunt, grave man, raised his arms and blessed those in attendance, telling them that struggle is the only route to return, that they should not be fooled by longing and nostalgia.

Those who return to Lapithos say, *The village seems dead.* It seems a ghost of itself. They've chopped down the trees, and it seems naked. The houses seem smaller, and the paths that once joined neighbours and relatives are amputated by fences. There used to be commerce, festivals, bustle in the streets. Life and noise. Why have they not cared for things?

Greek Cypriot legends tell of villages whose saints were strong, who protected them from the Turks who would have come to settle there. Others were not so lucky. *In the period of Turkish rule, the leaders and pashas used to come to Aglantzia to entertain themselves.* Wild and drunk, the story goes, they would roam the village, annoying the inhabitants. One day, the villagers could stand it no more and killed four of them, and the whole village fled in the night. *The Turks reached the village and prowled the streets like rabid wolves.* They found only one man, still asleep in bed, who through a ruse tricked the Turks and led them away from where his co-villagers were hiding. The Turks killed him to slake their blood-thirst, and the story remarks that *Agathoklis died like a true Greek, in the service of his village.**

The village as world and ethnos. Patriotism for the *patrida*, the fatherland, the land. A nationalism that is truly natal.

Eleni eulogizes the pure Greek nature of Lapithos. It was famed in legend, the Greek Kingdom of Lambousa. She points to a photo of the gymnasium perched on a cliff-top, and its neo-classical façade. *It looks just like the Parthenon, doesn't it?* she says. A past in a perfect tense, gleaming around the edges.

The Turks were marauders, she says. They seized the land. *Do you know what they did? In the time of the Turks, the pasha in Nicosia used to demand every girl who was to get married. There was a girl of Lapithos who was to marry, and he sent his men to fetch her. But everyone knew that they were coming, and as they descended the mountain through the pass, the men of the village attacked them, chopped up their bodies, and threw them in a well. Ever after that, the water of that well is bitter.*

And then the Turkish family from Vassilia, the neighbouring village. Parents and five children who had gone to visit relatives some miles away. It was the end of 1963, and they were stopped on the road. They were killed by being thrown into a well.

Parcelled bodies, unretrievable lives. Wells beyond the village, beyond the community of the human.

All the old Turkish Cypriots of the village tell me the same story. In the old times we were rich, they say. In our grandfathers' times there were no Greeks here, that is until one who was expelled from his village near Morphou came here and began to make shoes. Then others came. We had all the land, but our men were fond of the Greek women. They had children with them and began to parcel up the land among them. Before long, almost nothing was left to us.

Greek Cypriots from Lapithos agree with me that the village seems to have some special significance among refugees. It's the light, some tell me. It's the contrast of sea and mountain. It was a commercial centre. It was civilized, they say.

Turkish Cypriots from the village laugh. *I think the reason it's so symbolic for the Greeks is sheer pride, an old mason tells me. They had worked so hard to cleanse it of the Turks, and now they can't stand to see it in Turkish hands.*

The old mason, Osman, learned to read Greek as a child and still gets the Greek newspapers. Because Hüseyin introduced us, Osman is cautious; everyone knows that Hüseyin is fanatical. Osman is interested to learn that I speak to the Greeks, and he asks me what they say. *What do they want?* he wants to know, the question that all the Turks in Lapithos ask. It has become a refrain that repeats and circulates through the community like blood through the heart. *What will become of us?* he asks. *It's not about us, it's about our children and grandchildren.* His wife is a relative of one of the first two Turks from the village to be killed, but she holds no grudges. There are good ones and bad ones, she admits. But her aunt, who is visiting, chuckles. *It's a shame the bad ones were in power,* she remarks.

I ask what she means, and she tells me the story of her house, and of the house where she now lives. When the Turks fled the village in January 1964, their houses were looted and destroyed. Several years later, when they

returned for a visit, her old neighbour, a Greek Cypriot, told her that it was the deputy mayor who had destroyed her house, blasting out the walls. She went and told him that he needed to rebuild her house, saying that she wanted to return. He refused. And after the Turkish invasion, when they returned to the village, she went straight to the deputy mayor's house and claimed it as her own.

The grocer from whom I buy milk every day tells me that he spent his teenage years in a camp in Boğaz, on the other side of the mountains, and that he missed his village the entire time. He missed the fig tree under which he used to play, and the view of the sea from his bedroom window. *We couldn't forget, and they can't forget. We don't want them to forget.*

But he also tells me that after 1967, the Greeks painted the fronts of the houses in the main street running through the Turkish quarter. The houses were almost four years ruined, four years empty. They painted only the façades, he says, in a tidying effort to show to the world that the Turks could return. Yet behind the paint there was nothing; in Turkish they say, *Not even a needle was left*. Everything had been taken, down to the doors, window-frames, and roof tiles.

Plunder as politics, and intimacy inverted. Paint on a looted body, decrepit and whorish.

I meet Vassilis and Maroulla at a church near the border, just before the referendum to decide the fate of the island. By the time I first met them, the border had been open almost a year, and there was suddenly a plan on the table to reunite the island, a plan that Greek Cypriots would overwhelmingly reject in a referendum in April 2004.

A few weeks before the referendum, Vassilis and Maroulla drove to Nicosia from Paphos, in the far southwest of the island. They drove from the Turkish village where they had hastily settled almost thirty years earlier, a few months after they became refugees. There they built just a couple of rooms, a few pens for chickens and goats, never investing much, always planning to return. The house is surrounded by olive trees that Vassilis planted when they built the house, and, he says, *We watered them with the water that we drank*. The trees have matured in the period of their exile, but still, he insists, *You don't feel like it's your land. You feel like you're in a foreign place. It's not where you have your roots*. Vassilis and Maroulla are waiting expectantly for the day when they can gather their clothes, close the house, and turn their backs on this village where they've taken refuge for so long. I ask him one day what will become of the olive trees; he replies that it doesn't matter.

In their natal village, Maroulla and Vassilis came from large, land-owning families, and the marriage of two children of such respectable families was considered a good one. Now, their struggle to maintain dignity is a daily affair, endured by the minute. Vassilis had no need of schooling, but he reads widely and is one of the few refugees I encountered who knew early on that he would vote for the reunification plan, in fact tried to persuade others. He was wealthy, the heir to stone houses perched on the mountainside and fields that stretch to the sea. He doesn't want it all, just some part, just to go back.

Put yourself in our place and imagine what it would be to go back to your home after thirty years, Maroulla leans across the seat to tell me as we wind through the mountains. *The home that you left without even a handkerchief.*

We drive through the village, and along the way they point out homes of brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles. Finally we arrive at the home that Vassilis says was Maroulla's birthplace; Maroulla remains silent. It turns out that she's never dared to enter the house, because an immigrant family from Turkey lives there, and they speak no Greek, unlike many of the Turkish Cypriots. I offer to go with her and translate, and she seizes the opportunity. We leave Vassilis in the car as we approach the door.

A Turkish woman of indefinable age answers it. Maroulla immediately takes her by the arms and kisses her on both cheeks, and the woman understands what the visit is about. She tells me later that she's had many such visits, and I learn that they were the children and grandchildren of Maroulla's sister, who had inherited the house. The Turkish woman insists that she raised seven children in the house herself, and that they had been given the house as a 'martyr's family,' a *şehit ailesi*, meaning that she lost a son during the Turkish invasion of the island in 1974.

On that day, as we walk through the house, I engage the Turkish woman in conversation in order to leave Maroulla to herself. She wanders to the balcony, which overlooks the village and the church of Ayia Paraskevi, and which has a clear view of the coastline. *It's a nice view,* remarks the Turkish woman, but she seems unimpressed. Instead, she explains to me about all the improvements they had made to the house, about how the house had been looted by the Turkish army, and there had been almost nothing left of it. We make our way to the adjoining room, and Maroulla comments that it was not a separate room before. She points to an area under an open window; that was where she slept, she says.

As we leave, I request permission to take a photograph, and the Turkish woman asks me if I want them together. So the two women stand uncomfortably side by side, facing the camera. On our way down the steps, I tell Maroulla that I will photograph her alone in front of the house. She tells me to be sure to get the balconies in the photo. After I put down the camera, she tells me, *When I die, I want this photograph on my grave.*

In the car, she tells Vassilis that it was a mistake, that she should have had me photograph her while she stood on the balcony. Instead, we have a photograph of her dressed in black on the stone steps of the house, and another of the two women together in the doorway. One woman fled the house, and the other received it as a trophy. And now, in the photograph, they stand uncomfortably side by side.

Betrayals of the past immortalized for the future.

Anna is convinced that the Turkish Cypriot who now owns her house is hiding their belongings in a room. Like many refugees, she refuses to visit the village on principle, saying that she will not be a tourist in her own country. Also like many refugees, she despises the latest UN plan to reunite the island, though she is more vehement and more open than most in telling me that no

plan would ever pass that did not return everything to the way it was in 1960. *Either all the refugees will return and take back their property, she says, or we'll accept division and live in our memories and dreams.* Division would preferably include a wall to separate them from the Turks.

Her sister, though, has visited the village and has gone to their house, which was an impressive one on a hilltop above the church of Agia Anastasia. Her father had gone to Alexandria in his youth, made a fortune, and furnished the house with the sorts of paintings and imported furniture not then found in most of rural Cyprus. The Paphiot Turk who now 'owns' the house does not live there himself but rents it as a vacation home to wealthy foreigners. When her sister went, she found only the renters there, and they left her to tour the house, where she discovered that one room was locked. This is now the source of Anna's fantasies. She imagines that the paintings and antiques are stored in this room, and she wants to know if I can go and ask, perhaps take a photograph.

When I next see Vassilis and Maroulla, I ask them about Anna's house. It is now late spring, a year after our first trip together, and I am very conscious of the contrast between the lushness of their natal town watered by springs and the Paphos village where they now live, with its dun-coloured rock dotted with olive trees. I've seen them there many times, in the silence and the heat, as they swat at flies and fret over the future.

Once again, we meet at the church near the border, though now I have come from Lapithos, where I stay much of the time. They know that I am interviewing Turks from the village, and the intent of this trip is different. We have business together. The Annan Plan has failed, but Vassilis is still determined to return. He'll return even if it means renting a room, or a house. He'll spend his small savings to return to the land that was his birthright.

And so our first stop is his old friend Mehmet, who lives down the road from the house that the couple had built after they married. Mehmet speaks a thick Cypriot Greek which I have trouble following, and they have a pleasant conversation as we are served lemonade by a blonde Moldovan maid whose role in the house is dubious. The real subject of their conversation is the lower floor of the house, which is currently empty. Could Vassilis come sometimes to stay there? Maroulla is taciturn, her face pinched. She doesn't like Vassilis's obsession, and they often bicker in low voices about it.

Why not? Mehmet shrugs, and I am momentarily hopeful. I've tried to think of ways that Vassilis might return to the village, the most recent of my schemes being an attempt to cut a deal with a Turkish Cypriot developer who advertised plans to build on what appears to be Vassilis's land. A clean title for a finished house, perhaps?

But in any case this is better, a renewal of old ties. It is with some swelling of hope that we leave Mehmet and his Moldovan and follow the winding road to Agia Paraskevi, where Maroulla wishes to visit Vassilis's childhood home. They were relatives, after all, and they grew up together in these houses. Five magnificent stone houses side by side had belonged to Vassilis's family, although one in the middle was sold in the 1950s to the British consul.

This is something that the British ‘owner’ of Vassilis’s house doesn’t understand, I discover. This was all foreign land, he insists. British land. I explain to him slowly: *There was a family here, a large, wealthy family. Only the house next door belonged to Brits.* But I know by now the various deceptions and self-deceptions. There are the titles in Turkish that the foreigners can’t read. There is the fountain at the bottom of his drive, installed by the British administration in 1950, like fountains throughout the island. He takes the English writing as a sign that the house was not Greek. And he insists.

Vassilis has not come with us; he doesn’t like this sentimentality. Instead, he’s wandered to the house next door, where a Turkish Cypriot family from Kouklia, in the south, is making halloumi cheese. Kouklia is in the Paphos area near where Vassilis now lives, and I have seen him in the past try to establish ties with the Turks from the area now living in Lapithos.

We join him, and I comment to the mother that her neighbours refuse to believe that their house was Greek prior to 1974. *They don’t want to believe,* she remarks. She brings us coffee, and her husband with handlebar moustaches stomps about in high boots. Vassilis talks about ingredients for halloumi, trying to trade secrets with him. The husband is taciturn, grumbling, and his wife turns her back to them and says to me in Turkish, *What do they want? Why do they always talk about coming back? We don’t want to go back. I don’t want to go back, even though I miss the sound of the sea from my window, and the odour of seaweed. We’re far away from the sea here.* Her house in Kouklia was new, she says, even though the other houses in the village were old. *They suffered,* she says, *but we suffered more. They never had two men leave home one evening and never come back.*

We drive down through the village, and Vassilis points out Anna’s house before we descend to the sea for a doleful lunch in a *kentron*, a restaurant, that used to belong to Maroulla’s cousin. It’s now owned by a land speculator who has the sharp look of someone eyeing prey. I wrack my brain for places to take them, people to introduce them to. This is supposed to be my role, after all: intermediary, conduit of information. Vassilis has insisted that he wants to meet the Turkish Cypriots that I know in the village, but I have a hard time thinking of ones who would be eager to meet him, who wouldn’t wonder why I would put them through the imposition.

I finally think of Pembe and Hamit, whom I’ve interviewed once. Hamit is a small, wiry, good-natured man, and Pembe is his sweet-faced bride from another village. Before bringing Maroulla and Vassilis to the house, I first make my way through the garden to the porch and ask Pembe’s permission, telling her that Vassilis believes he knows Hamit. And indeed, the two men embrace warmly, although the two women are more reserved, ambivalent. Vassilis is very happy, and he tells me that Hamit was a hard worker, that he used to work twenty-four hours a day. I recognize this as the supreme compliment that Vassilis intends it to be.

When we sit down to lemonade, Vassilis begins again the theme of his scheme to return. Hamit and Pembe nod but offer no advice. And there’s of course the ever-present question of why Hamit and Pembe are not in their

own house. *No, this isn't our house*, Pembe turns to me and says in Turkish, her voice tinged with defiance. *We know it's not our house. But what do they want? Everyone can't just pick up and move again. Do you see this garden? Do you know how many hours went into this garden?*

Betrayal is not so easily undone.

Birol does not sleep. Eleni's husband smokes incessantly. High blood pressure, cancer, eccentric obsessions. Everyone takes pills; illness seems an integral part of life. A friend's sixteen-year-old daughter takes medication for hypertension, a sad inheritance. Betrayals are traced in the body. And it's the women who say it to me most: *It's because of our suffering*, they tell me in Turkish. *We'll die far from our homes*, they tell me in Greek.

Legend tells of a place in Pano Lefkara whose name in ancient Greek means 'disgusted by blood.' *It is called that because when the Ottoman armies came to Cyprus, there was a battle against the Lusignans in which so much blood was spilled that the ground was saturated and could drink no more. The earth was revolted, sick with blood.**

I have coffee in Nicosia with a friend who paints as catharsis and who takes a rainbow of pills to relieve her various illnesses. A new grave has been discovered in Alsancak/Karava, the village so close to Lapithos that they are like a small urban sprawl. A woman was digging in her *avlu*, her inner courtyard or garden, when she discovered bones, human bones.

Oh, but I had a friend, Özden says. *She moved into Agios Georgios after the war.* Agios Georgios is a village on the sea a short drive from Lapithos. The first two Turks of Lapithos killed by Greek special forces were murdered there. It is the home of Five Mile beach, the site of the first Turkish military landing, and the place where, in Birol's story, the old woman's body was thrown. The largest monument on the island was built over that site, a giant modernist hand stretching from the sea to seize the land.

They planted vegetables in their garden, she says, and they were always boasting about the size of the vegetables. Then one day she called me and told me to come over. It was incredible: there had been a heavy rain, and it had washed up the skeletons buried in the garden.

Water bitter with murder, soil satiated with blood. A land imbued with betrayal.

In the recent film *Çamur*, or *Mud*, Derviş Zaim, a Turkish Cypriot director who has made something of a name for himself in Turkey, uses mud as a metaphor for the buried past. The mud of the title refers to the edge of a salt lake, minerals in which are thought to have healing powers. But buried at the edge of that lake are Greek Cypriots who were killed by a young Turkish Cypriot during the 1974 invasion. The film's claustrophobic atmosphere becomes increasingly oppressive as, almost thirty years later, the man is more and more haunted by this past, until the final scene in which he commits a reckless act that he knows beforehand will lead to his own death. Like

struggling in quicksand, the more the protagonist flails, the more he is dragged under.

I hear rumours of a mass grave on the coast of Lapithos. *Oh, yes*, a young man tells me. *It's right past those hotels*. We stand in his kitchen doorway, which looks out toward the sea. The house officially belongs to an acquaintance of mine, Aris, an architect in Nicosia. The young man, Bulut, was only seven when they returned to the village, but his child's mind was imprinted with the images of bodies littering the orchards. They had returned early, before the Turkish army swept through in a clean-up operation that dumped the corpses near the sea. *When I was a teenager I would go to fish in that cove*, he says. *If it had rained, bones would wash up and float on the water*.

The Committee of Missing Persons had made an abortive attempt a year earlier to find Lapithos's mass grave. *Everyone knew they were digging in the wrong place*, Bulut insists. *Everyone knew*.

When I try to find someone to take me to the grave, everyone demurs.

Betrayal seeps into the present, remains washed up by a flood.

Aris has opened a lawsuit against the British couple who have built a villa behind Bulut's house, in what used to be Aris's orchard. Bulut's wife is upset: *We were very nice to them, and then they did this. We like the English woman, she's very nice. We always say hello and wave to each other across the fence. When the Greek man asked for her address, I didn't know he'd do this*.

Only a few things were left in Aris's house when Bulut's family arrived there. Bulut's father found photographs, which he gave to Aris years earlier, when Aris came across in one of the foreign-funded bicomunal activities that seemed then to bring more hope, at a time when the border was still closed. An old clock remains, now perched high in the sitting room corner, above the entertainment set. *They wanted the clock*, Bulut's wife tells me. *They said, 'It's our clock.'* Her smile is wry. *'No,' I said, 'it's the house's clock.'*

Finding a house to rent in Lapithos had been quite difficult, since it seemed the only empty houses were the new villas that now spring up in every field. I relied on a friend who had taught in the village for many years, and she led me to one of her students, a classmate of Bulut. My landlord Cemal is my age, from Paphos, and he spent the first years of his life in flight. His parents speak Greek at home, and they vehemently hate Greeks. (*You know most of his lineage is Greek*, someone whispers to me. *They've still got relatives over there, married to Greeks*.) Cemal still has nightmares, as do many people I know.

Cemal trades in Greek Cypriot property, renovating the old village houses and selling them to foreigners. I have an ambivalent attitude towards his project, since it at once saves the character of the village and violates it. The apartment that I rent from him is part of a large stone house that had belonged to a Greek Cypriot miller and where Cemal's wife has cultivated a large, lush garden. This was what I had wanted to avoid, living in plundered property.

I hear first from Cemal about the man who came to Cemal's office, claiming to be an architect. Cemal's 'office' is emblematic of the problematic character of his profession: he rents from the government a small chapel, in which he has placed icons that give the chapel an 'authentic' character. It's no more than a small room, with a desk, a computer, and a table at which guests can sit. *Three of them came*, he says. *Two men and a woman. I invited them to have coffee, and the woman said, 'We don't drink coffee in our churches.' But it's not a church! It was just a place where people would go to make wishes. And I said to her, 'In Europe, they turn churches into museums, and cafes.' And then the man who claimed to be an architect started saying how I was ruining all the village houses. I don't believe he's an architect, because he didn't understand anything about renovations. We started arguing, and I told them to get out, or I was going to call the police.*

Cemal's mother has been pestered by 'the Greeks of her house,' who come and tell her that they're going to take it back and force them to leave. Cemal has more nightmares. He tells me he has a pistol, and that he's prepared to use it.

When I meet Aris and his wife Maria and their friend Nikos, they tell me about an encounter that had put a damper on their visits to the village. *We saw a Turkish flag over the chapel, and we went in*, Nikos says. The rest of the story is as Cemal had related it, though they tell me he became enraged. *He picked up a large stone and threatened us with it! He chased us away.*

There is no statute of limitations on the traces of trauma, especially when one constantly irritates the wounds. Even though it's difficult, I admit to them that Cemal is my landlord, that I'm living in a Greek Cypriot house. *The Greeks who own his mother's house have been pestering her*, I try to explain.

Aris was one of the first to promote ecotourism and the restoration of village houses. They lament the hundreds of villas that now clutter the village, and the loss of their orchards. I laugh and try to joke with them. *The ironic thing*, I say, *is that on that issue you and Cemal would agree.*

They laugh, as well, and Maria jokes that perhaps Aris and Cemal should go into business together. But it doesn't mitigate my own betrayal.

The cafeteria of Woolworths is crowded with shoppers, and the windows from its sixth floor overlook Nicosia's busiest intersection. This background of motion and the visceral present gives a surreal quality to Anna's spiral into the bitter past. She pins me at a table by the window for five hours, as she retraces for me every cruel step of their flight. She is intense, venomous. She talks at length about the bombardment, when the Turkish planes swooped over the village, hitting the mountainsides and dislodging boulders that rolled through the narrow lanes. *They bombarded us with ships*, she cries, *they bombarded us with planes, and they bombarded us with our own mountain!*

The very stones of the mountain were forced to turn against them.

She tells me of her aunt, who stayed on in the village for several months after the invasion. The hundred or so Greeks who stayed were gathered into the Agios Theodoros quarter, were not allowed to stay in their own houses. But one day, she tells me, her aunt wanted to go see her house, and she walked

up the hill from the lower quarter where they stayed. It was not long after the invasion, and already a family from Paphos was living in the house. A woman answered the door and in response to the aunt's request to come in, replied, *It's our house now*. From the doorway, her aunt saw the photograph of her dead brother still on the wall, and she asked if she might at least take the photo. A number of women were sitting drinking coffee, and as she climbed on a stool to reach the photo, one of the women pulled the stool from under her.

That's how they are. But, she also tells me, the Turks from Lapithos gave the keys to their houses to their Greek neighbours when they left. The ones who destroyed their houses were not their neighbours, she insists. They came from elsewhere.

As the hours wear on, I feel increasingly guilty that I have not told her that my husband is Turkish. She already distrusts me as an American, and I know that I should find some way to tell her this piece of information that she will find crucial. I try to convince myself later that there was no chance, that she talked on and on. But I know that the real problem is the inevitable betrayal of being between.

Nidai Usta thinks you're a spy, Cemal laughs. *I tried to explain to him what you do, but he doesn't understand about research*.

The *muhtar*, or village headman, was one of my first contacts in the town, someone introduced to me by an artist friend. Nidai is the *muhtar* of Cemal's quarter, as well as a carpenter and a former member of TMT, the Turkish guerrilla organization. He is a crafty, cautious man, and I've spoken to him on several occasions, for hours at a time. His uncle was İbrahim Nidai, one of the first two Turks of Lapithos to be killed. At our last meeting, I made the mistake of trusting him and showing him maps that Vassilis had given to me, maps that he had drawn before the opening of the border. The maps are an anthropological treasure and an incredible mnemonic feat: long before the border opened, Vassilis had sketched, in twenty-six pages, every road, every house, and every workshop in the village, labelling each with its owner's name.

What will you do with these maps? Nidai asks me.

I'm not sure yet, I reply. *I'm using them to understand the village now*.

You'd better be careful, he warns me. *People will think you're a spy*.

And so my trust in him is also betrayal.

Nidai tells me the story of a young Greek man who visited the village after the opening of the border. The young man claimed that his grandmother was buried under an orange tree in what used to be their garden, and he wanted the help of Nidai, as *muhtar*, in exhuming the bones. *I had to ask him, 'Was she killed?'* *Because if she was, I wouldn't want to get involved.* *'No,' he said to me. 'It was during the invasion, but she died of natural causes.'* *They didn't have time to bury her properly, so they buried her under the orange tree.* *'What you're asking is complicated,' I said to him. 'I'll have to ask the mayor, probably the*

Minister of the Interior. It's going to be a lot of trouble for me. So I'll do it on one condition.'

And then Nidai explains to me about a man whose name Turkish Cypriots had repeatedly whispered when discussing murders in the village. *He's probably got hundreds of murders on his hands*, Nidai tells me. He was a police sergeant, and everyone knows that he was the one who followed İbrahim Nidai and Şevket Kadir on the day that they disappeared, and that he stopped their car outside Agios Georgios. Most people say that he killed them by throwing them into a furnace.

So I said to the boy, 'You go to so-and-so, and you ask him what he did with my uncle's body. Then I'll help you.'

And according to Nidai, the boy went, and he found the sergeant, and he asked him about the bodies. *And you know what he told me? That they buried them at Five Mile beach, right under the monument. That's what he told me. You see what he was saying? He was saying, 'Go take down the monument if you want their bodies.' That's the way things are.*

I ask Nidai if he still helped the boy exhume his grandmother from the base of the orange tree. He just laughs.

While renovating a Greek house near the main square of the village, builders have knocked down a wall and found a large arms cache. Many people have told me that the man whom Nidai blames for his uncle's murder had a stockpile of weapons in his basement. And the women talk about guns aimed at their children, mostly by young men who were neighbours. *They would sit in the café, Fikriye Teyze tells me, and they would take aim at the children from there. I had a neighbour—we worked in the fields and shelled beans together. Her son took out a rifle and used to aim at my boy from their house.*

I mention this one day to Vassilis, and he laughs sheepishly. *They got scared because we'd go to the mountains and shoot off rifles*, he shrugs. And he makes a motion of firing into the air. But there is embarrassment in his voice.

Later, Anna tells me that Vassilis is a true patriot, that he had been a hero of EOKA, the Greek guerrilla organization that fought against the British and for union of the island with Greece. I've known that there's something in his past that he does not want to disclose, but now I confront him about this. *Absolutely not*, Maroulla answers for him. *He was never in EOKA. He was arrested by the British once, that's all.*

But I understand that some parts of the past will always remain murky in the present.

The Greek Cypriot mayor of Lapithos, the mayor 'in exile,' comes to his office for a few hours once a week. Without a municipality, his position is official but only honorary, and his small office in Nicosia is in a house that they inherited from the union of former EOKA fighters, which took over a larger building down the road. Despite my urging, he has refused to have contact with the Turkish Cypriot mayor of the village, the one actually in the village, the one who does the hard work. Even though the 'exiled' mayor is a

leftist and works in a union that has bicomunal roots, he rejected my suggestion a year earlier that perhaps it was time to bring the Greek and Turkish people of Lapithos together and force them to talk politics. *That's not how things get decided*, he replied.

He was only a boy when the Turks left the village, but he remembers a neighbour, Tamer, with whom he used to play. Tamer's family stayed longer, he says, because the father hadn't wanted to leave.

I want to check this story and, through a circuitous route, find myself returning to Hüseyin. It turns out that Tamer is a nephew of sorts, but they know nothing about whether or not the family had stayed on in the village. *His grandmother was Greek*, Hüseyin remarks, implying that if it was true, it was probably because their loyalties were tainted.

But it also reminds him of his own problems when he tried to join TMT. *They didn't want me at first*, he complains. *I had too many Greek friends*. Instead, it turns out that they recruited his sister Birol, who was only fourteen at the time. That was 1960, the year of the Republic's birth.

Old Christodoulos's coffee-shop is now a grocery, run by a Turk from Paphos. It was one of the few mixed coffee-shops, since it bordered the Turkish quarter. *The EOKA men didn't like it*, he chuckles. And he tells me the story of the old Turk with a limp, who spoke Greek like a Greek and would come to the coffee-shop every evening. Some of the men warned him not to come, but his limp prevented him from walking further, so he continued his visits, even though the EOKA men began to accuse him of being a spy. Then one day his body was found.

Much later I learned the story from the old Turk's niece: *I heard it in the night, the sound of a motorcycle going back and forth, back and forth. They wanted it to look like an accident, you know. But if you saw his body, you'd know it was no accident*.

Old Christodoulos now lives in dilapidated refugee housing in Lakatamia, as do several of his children and grandchildren. He has not visited the village and has no plans to do so. *I can't afford a passport*, he explains. *And besides, why visit if we're not going back? Even if we went back, what would we do? We're too old now, we can't work the land*.

It seems that time itself slips into betrayal.

I have heard from others that there may have been one old Turk who never left Lapithos in 1964 or who later returned, and who kept a kebab stand near the shore. The grocer who remembered playing under a fig tree has his shop on the coast road, and I ask him about this rumour. He claims to know nothing about the man with the kebab stand. He knows of only one old woman who returned to the village, but she died just before the invasion.

His wife interjects to ask, *Did she die? Or was she killed?*

She died naturally, he says. *My father found the body*.

Vassilis comes to see me, and I offer him coffee in my rented house, which he comments must be a good place for writing. He is trying hard, struggling

to understand. After the coffee, we will go to talk to the mayor about whether or not they would permit Vassilis to stay in the village sometimes, if they would perhaps let him rent a room. He is putting his hope in Mehmet.

But only a few days before this visit I had returned to speak to Mehmet and had found him alone in the house, the Moldovan gone to town. He insisted on sitting too close to me, and I left early. But in our brief conversation, I asked him what he intended to do about Vassilis. He laughed; he had no intention of renting him a room. *This all used to be ours*, he remarked, letting his arm sweep across the orange groves across the road. And I asked if he meant that it belonged to his family, which was the wealthiest in the village. *Oh, yes, but the whole village belonged to the Turks*. And he told me the story of their Ottoman forefathers who were fond of Greek women, but then leaned forward to warn in the low voice of someone who knows, *Anyway, the ciras, the Greek women, they're not clean, you know*.

Mehmet told me that day that he had been one of the core group of TMT fighters who had organized in the area in the early 1960s, meeting in the house of the schoolmaster, a man now known throughout the island for his writings and his principled anti-Turkey stance. At the time, the schoolmaster was a military commander trained by Turkey.

Vassilis has finished his coffee, and I must decide. If I keep silent, I will betray him; if I tell him, I will betray Mehmet.

Don't trust Mehmet, I tell him. *He was in TMT all along*.

Vassilis says nothing, just bows his head.

I want to say to him, *You claim he was your friend. How could you not know?*

The words form on my lips, but the moment passes. And I sense that the secret to all our betrayals must be found somewhere in this question that I cannot bring myself to ask.

Note

* Two of the legends quoted here are taken from several volumes of folklore collected in the 1960s by the students of the Pancyprian Gymnasium, *Το Παγκύπριον Γυμνάσιον και η Λαογραφία* (The Pancyprian Gymnasium and Folklore), ed. Chrysanthos S Kyprianou, Nicosia, 1968.