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# Our Grand Despair

By Baris Bicakci

I can't get it out of my mind.  
Those voices.  
That noise.  
What do we do now?  
Everyone will go back to their lives.  
Even me.  
I need to go back to Berlin.  
It's just too bad.  
Let's get some fresh air.  
You'll be fine.  
Come on.  
Nihal can't stay alone.  
Not in that apartment.  
She'll see Mom and Dad...  
everywhere she looks.  
We have no one in Ankara.  
Only you two.  
OUR GRAND DESPAIR  
What time is it?  
Midnight.  
Just don't be good to me.  
Don't be good to me.  
Nihal... Look at you.  
Come in.  
Where did you get so drunk?  
- At Sevil's.  
We drank a bit. Nihal, too.  
She cried and threw up.  
Did she talk about her parents  
or the accident?  
No.  
Bora was there too.  
- Who?  
We'd better go, it's late.  
Good night.  
- Good night.  
Take it off.  
Don't be good to me.  
Don't be good to me.  
I'm off.  
Do we have any aspirin?  
Sure, I'll give her some.  
What are we gonna do?  
She's going to be trouble.

See you.

Nihal, can you answer the phone?

She'll come.

She won't.

Dinner's ready!

I'm not hungry!

Let's eat.

Thanks.

Cetin!

Look at us.

Since high school, we've dreamt of  
living together, chilling out...

It hasn't even been three months.

Like summer vacation during school.

Now we're like daddies.

Should we talk to Fikret?

Tell him something?

What if something happens to her?

What would we say?

I saw bugs, man.

Something happened.

I think someone died in the building.

We're going out!

Where are you going?

For a walk and to eat something.

Can I come, too?

I really love cats.

Sometimes I wish

I were like them.

Carefree creatures.

They observe everything

and feel everything,

but pretend not to care.

They just watch from a corner.

Did you know there's

a street called Catlover?

Really?

In Ulus.

Just an ordinary street,

but its name is lovely.

Yes, it's really nice.

How's school by the way?

Can you concentrate?

I just get so bored sometimes,

I could explode.  
Try to hold on.  
I will.  
I can't stand the idea  
of school lasting longer.  
I want to live in Istanbul.  
Don't you like Ankara?  
Not really.  
While at school in Istanbul  
or working overseas in construction,  
I really missed Ankara.  
Ender's letters described  
everything here so beautifully.  
Enough?  
Yes.  
Or you could peel one more clove.  
We caught bigger ones  
with harpoons in Libya.  
Really?  
- He even has pictures. Right?  
A big harpooned fish,  
him looking proud.  
Show them to Nihal.  
They get scary  
if you run into a whole school.  
Have you read all these books?  
Not all.  
But some more than once.  
For example...  
I keep coming back to this book.  
You can tell  
by the fruit stains on its pages.  
This one's orange for instance.  
Right.  
Ender insists the dishwasher  
makes the glasses smell like eggs.  
It doesn't smell. Check.  
You're squinting.  
- What?  
Your eyes became squinted.  
It doesn't smell, does it?  
Honestly, you two  
are so funny.  
See how Nihal is on your team?

Of course!  
She also has good taste!  
Feta goes well with jam,  
especially strawberry.  
What a joke!  
I knew a guy who put apricot  
jam on grilled meatballs.  
What do you gourmets say about that?  
Let's not exaggerate!  
We're fine.  
Right, Nihal?  
- Feta and jam forever!  
Shall we go to the movies?  
Want to walk eyes closed?  
We used to do that  
when we were kids. I liked it a lot.  
When you close your eyes and walk like this,  
you feel a sweet dizziness after a while.  
Come on.  
No cheating.  
Close your eyes.  
Ender? Ender?  
I'm here. Come on.  
Ender!  
Come and listen to this song.  
Did you speak with Nihal?  
About the accident I mean.  
Talk to her.  
Tell her about  
what you and your brother went through.  
She shouldn't feel alone.  
Or think we don't understand her.  
OK, I will.  
My brother told me.  
You were in the car, too.  
How old were you?  
Eight.  
My brother was 18.  
What's up?  
- Not much, you? - Nothing.  
Listen,  
is Nihal home?  
- Yes, why?  
Is she with you?

- No, she's in her room.  
In her room, good... Listen,  
we shouldn't pee standing.  
How should we pee?  
Into the toilet!  
Don't make me yell here,  
you deaf asshole.  
Our bathroom toilet.

- Yes?  
Yes! When we pee standing, it splashes.  
It'd be embarrassing  
if she saw pee stains.  
You're right.  
We're real pigs!  
Exactly!  
Listen...  
We sit and pee from now on.  
And the protocol for washing underwear?  
As you've become such a gentleman!  
Shut the fuck up!  
We'll talk about this later.  
Ender and I studied  
together in high school.  
I mean he used to help me.  
He was better at school.  
He even passed me the answers  
during exams.  
Without him, I might not have graduated.  
My brother always says  
I'm secretly stupid.  
Don't say that.  
It makes me sad.  
You put bergamot in it.  
Yes, I did.  
So what?  
My God!  
What a woman Sevgi was!  
Why are you blaming Sevgi?  
She dumped you but you're  
still under her spell.  
The wounded lover  
still imitating her. Constantly!  
Shut your fat mouth!  
No more bergamot for you?

Now it's chamomile for your nerves!  
And making yogurt at home? Why?  
Because Sevgi used to!  
Why are you still celebrating Labor Day?  
Protesting prisons and stuff?  
Wanna hear more?  
You wanna hear more?  
- Yes.  
Unlike you  
and all those bourgeois urban asses,  
I don't ask the butcher "Do you have meat?"  
or the fruit vendor "Do you have apples?"  
Get it?  
I don't become a clown singing songs  
in English in front of women.  
I don't get a tattoo in the middle of the  
night because my girlfriend wants me to.  
Whatever.  
Call me when you want more tea, asshole.  
How are you?  
- Fine.  
How did you meet Cetin?  
Like all good friends, we met fighting.  
You two used to fight?  
There were rumors about Cetin at school.  
Almost everyone knew  
his parents died in a car crash.  
And that he lived with his brother.  
For some reason we were scared of him.  
While working on the school newspaper,  
Cetin, Fikret and I,  
we got closer.  
My brother Fikret?  
- Yes, of course.  
You weren't even born yet.  
We used to go to Cetin's.  
His brother Murat was at work all day.  
Sometimes he went  
on long business trips.  
Cetin and I had fun inventing  
recipes and cooking together.  
We'd eat, and if we felt like it,  
we'd call Fikret to say  
"we left some for you."

Seems you didn't like my brother.

On the contrary.

We really liked him.

Recently we kind of grew apart,  
but we really like him.

Cetin and I, our friendship  
was different.

It was like a romance.

We had crushes on girls,  
but we didn't have girlfriends.

After high school Cetin and  
his brother moved to Istanbul.

We were lost, like fish out of water.

We missed each other like crazy.

We spoke on the phone every day.

After Cetin went to Istanbul,

I searched for him

in every man and woman I met.

In women, too?

Yes, in women, too.

Even in green plums.

One day I went to Istanbul  
when Murat was away on business.

Cetin had a girlfriend, Serap.

His first one.

As we were

getting ready for bed,  
apparently he said to her...

"Let's have Ender sleep on the floor  
here with us or he'll be upset."

With them in the same room?

He really said that? Really?

Yes. The poor girl came and told  
me in anger and astonishment.

My good old "Lennie".

God knows why he thought  
something so silly.

He thought I'd be upset.

Typical.

Lennie?

Who's Lennie?

#### **OF MICE AND MEN:**

Let's go for a walk.



Good evening.  
I'm back!  
Could you take over?  
I really like it.  
Beautiful.  
But Lennie is a bit strange.  
I mean  
him caressing  
the hair of Curley's wife...  
Are you confused about that  
or me comparing Cetin to Lennie?  
You're right.  
It's a bit complicated,  
the caressing of the hair.  
I mean, neither this, nor that...  
Yes.  
I'll make meatballs for my brother.  
Cool.  
Eggplant salad?  
Great idea.  
Let's get parsley as well.  
Hey, boss!  
One kilo of minced veal, please.  
Twice grounded.  
OK.  
Will Murat find the house?  
We should've picked him up.  
He was born and raised in Ankara.  
He'll find it.  
He knows the school,  
he'll find the house.  
For what's left of Ankara. Now  
there's a road through the schoolyard.  
No worries, he'll make it.  
Have you told Nihal  
the story of the cat in the fridge?  
What cat?  
One day Cetin sneaked into  
the janitor's apartment  
and put a cat in his fridge.  
The janitor's poor  
wife was so frightened.  
And the cat almost froze!  
Why? What for?

I ate the rice pudding and  
put the cat in its place.  
Was it a white cat?  
Mete is living in Izmir.  
- Really?  
His daughter just started high school.  
- Really?  
What about Sadun? - Sadun is in Istanbul.  
We see each other often.  
He also has a daughter.  
- No way.  
I'm going to bed.  
If I don't see you tomorrow,  
have a nice trip. - Thanks, dear.  
Good night.  
- Good night.  
Your apartment is nice, guys.  
A fine life you have here in Ankara.  
That girl...  
Everything she went through...  
She seems better,  
but you never know.  
We can never be sure.  
It's not easy.  
Keep an eye on her.  
Do you talk with Fikret?  
Listen, I suggest...  
Update him on her.  
Don't take the sole responsibility.  
I'm going to bed.  
And...  
Behave yourselves.  
You're still as water  
Like feelings  
There's love in your eyes  
Like deep deep sleep  
Why that regard?  
Tell me are you in love with me?  
Get up.  
Sit there.  
Today you talk and I listen.  
Nihal speaks today.  
I remember something from school.  
I was in 8th grade.

A bookstand  
was set up in the schoolyard.  
In morning class,  
we visited it with our teacher.  
Our assignment was to write a  
paper on a book of our choice.  
Then  
one of the booksellers handed me a book.  
A university student,  
with long hair in a ponytail.  
Not the type everybody would fall for.  
But up close, his eyes  
were very beautiful.  
Leaning forward, he told me  
about the book I was buying.  
He had beautiful hands.  
The way he held the books...  
How his fingers flipped  
through the pages...  
I went to the bookstand  
during every break.  
Of course to see him.  
So that he could show me a new book.  
But at the last break...  
The bookstand was gone.  
Only bare ping pong tables remained.  
And empty chairs.  
Some bookmarks on the ground,  
discarded papers...  
I felt abandoned.  
As if he had left me.  
I went back to the classroom  
and wept secretly.  
Of course I forgot it afterwards.  
All those feelings and thoughts.  
But I think I grew up that day.  
Suddenly I was forced to grow up.  
That day.  
A turtle!  
Don't look!  
August 27.  
Don't forget to visit.  
- Don't worry. Get some rest.  
Take care of Fikret.

He needs some affection.  
Bye bye.  
- Bye.  
Call us when you get there.  
- I will.  
Let me be your dog, Captain.  
Let me be your dog, Captain.  
Let me live by your leg.  
Let me live by your leg.  
Copilot, copilot!  
Captain scolds, I stay silent.  
Captain scolds, I stay silent.  
Wherever he goes, I follow.  
Wherever he goes, I follow.  
Copilot, copilot!  
The roads are dusty, we're on the run.  
The roads are dusty, we're on the run.  
Non-stop to the sea.  
Non-stop to the sea...  
Hold the wheel!  
You look pale. Anything wrong?  
Really?  
Must be the trip.  
- You're pale as a ghost.  
You too.  
Let's get some rest.  
Thanks.  
What do you think Nihal is doing?  
What do you think about Nihal?  
I'm in love with her.  
Me, too.  
Me, too!  
Inevitable.  
Hey, boss!  
Got some raki?  
Then the way  
she walked at the picnic.  
Swaying past us...  
Really, what was that?  
A feast for the eyes.  
The way she said "A turtle!"  
Her voice still rings in my ears.  
Notice her feet?  
They're pretty,

not pinkish when wet.  
Her feet, her hands...  
How about her profile when she speaks?  
Her nose quivers like a little squirrel.  
And her chin when she laughs.  
I could eat it!  
Why the towel? What about breakfast?  
Breakfast first!  
- Let's go.  
My friend...  
We always imagined falling in love  
with the same girl in high school.  
You can't say I didn't try hard  
to fall for that Burin of yours!  
In honor of the  
fulfillment of our fantasy...  
Onward to the sea!  
Cetin...  
Do you miss her?  
Thinking of her?  
Would you go away with her alone?  
Man, this is weird.  
Poor Fikret trusts us  
to take care of her.  
Right?  
We should act our age.  
You know, this is no good.  
What will we do when Nihal returns?  
This stays between us.  
We won't tell Nihal anything.  
Right.  
We won't tell her.  
The secret of a great chef  
is to not add water.  
Right, professor?  
Boy, you must wait until the beans moan.  
"Enough you bastards!", they say  
while giving their last juices.  
What if we told her?  
I think that would  
just confuse her even more.  
She's young.  
She's already shaken up  
by everything she went through.

She can't know how she feels.  
She might think she loves us.  
Or she might get more confused.  
Almost done.  
You two ate them all?  
Sure, what did you think?  
Ender, you know I missed you a lot.  
I missed you all the time.  
We missed you too.  
We did too.  
I mean, we got used to you.  
We kind of became family.  
She told me the same.  
What did you say?  
"Us, too.  
You're like a sister",  
that kind of thing.  
Good for us, Cetin. Good for us...  
So there was this competition,  
a dance contest.  
The company director  
got on stage and explained...  
Couples had to dance with an  
apple between their foreheads.  
One of the couples got it all wrong.  
They both bit into the apple and  
danced like that, drooling all over.  
How could they with the apple?  
Come.  
Your forehead.  
Hold on.  
Like that.  
Bathroom?  
Go ahead. I'll use the other one.  
Do you need to work this afternoon?  
No.  
Shall we meet? I finish at 3.  
I think a person can  
only understand oneself.  
And only from time to time.  
What?  
Why are men like this?  
Always trying to make rules,  
defining and analyzing things.

And if you can't understand something,  
instead of figuring it out  
you call it mysterious.  
Mysterious?  
Yes, mysterious.  
You find women mysterious.  
But there's no mystery.  
We're like you.  
We aren't butterflies. We aren't books.  
We're not butterflies.  
Did she have something to say?  
Why did she want to meet?  
Nothing special.  
For some reason we talked  
about men and women.  
She's so confident lately.  
She doesn't treat us  
like big brothers anymore.  
Can you write a poem for me?  
Something about the pain and  
uncertainty I've gone through.  
A poem?  
A poem.  
A poem about the pain and  
uncertainty you've gone through?  
Nihal.  
I'd love to,  
but I can't write poetry.  
Reading inspires some to write,  
but it's the opposite for me.  
Let me explain.  
I think divine things,  
such as writing should  
ultimately inspire us to live  
without doing these things.  
Literature should inspire this  
and so should prayer. Understand?  
Writers, especially poets, have  
a problematic relationship with beauty.  
They either want to succumb  
to it or reign over it.  
They can't be in harmony with beauty.  
Don't you think that's silly?  
Mankind does such

silly things sometimes.  
Reality can't be transformed  
into art anytime we wish.  
It's not same tangible object that some  
alchemist can transform into art or poetry.  
It's the most beautiful  
thing I've ever read.  
What did you mean by  
"What the seasons cannot repeat?"  
Don't do this to me, Nihal.  
Don't do this.  
I'm craving kokorec. Should we go out?  
I'm not in the mood.  
Fuck your mood. Let's go.  
Time out. We're going for kokorec.  
No, thanks.  
Everything alright?  
Fine.  
Can I bring over friends this Saturday?  
We should get Fikret's approval first.  
Come on!  
Friends from school?  
For dinner?  
Just a visit during the day.  
You'll meet them.  
OK.  
Here we are.  
Welcome!  
Welcome.  
Is it cold?  
- Yes.  
Winter is here.  
This is Bora.  
Cetin and Ender.  
- Ender and Cetin.  
Pleased to meet you.  
- Me, too.  
Well,  
enjoy yourselves. We gotta go, right?  
Nihal, tea will be  
ready soon. Around 2:40.  
Sprinkle coconut shavings on the cake.  
As for liqueurs I have  
cognac in my room. OK?



Great.

Bye.

Bye.

- See you.

This is a poem in a language  
I only learned recently.  
I know it better than my own,  
for the love of my teacher.

Who am I,  
smeared in the desert,  
sun beating my forehead,  
who am I?

Three days to go before me  
and savage words  
hover about my head

Who am I,  
when you say my name,  
picking fruits from your voice?  
To the red sunset where meaning sinks  
a chaotic caravan inside me  
Who am I to carry dreams to you?

Sky low,  
sweater tight,  
short of experience, tell me, who am I?  
Did you sleep with Nihal?  
You want to get punched?  
Don't question me like that.

Why not?  
When I was at work or in Istanbul.  
So did you?  
Stop it.

I'm not like you, making  
out with girls at weddings.  
You know I don't like this kind of talk.  
But why?

You slept with Sevgi.  
It's OK to do it...  
But not to talk about it.  
Sensitive gentleman, my ass!  
Cetin, the question is not  
if I slept with her,  
but if I loved her.

Imbecile!

Love Nihal?

You love her?  
Bullshit.  
You only love yourself, as usual.  
Funds are available  
for debts and real estate,  
but not for education and health!  
Capitalist mentality!  
Policies for the people  
will enable everyone to benefit  
from free and good education.  
Speak up! Claim it!  
Education is a right!  
Speak up! Claim it!  
Education is a right!  
We won't allow them to mess  
with our future anymore.  
Schools shouldn't be run  
by merchant-like boards.  
Let's not produce conformist  
citizens for monopolies.  
Don't let schools become assembly lines.  
Universities back to the students!  
Universities back to the students!  
Can I have a beer?  
What's up?  
Nihal is pregnant.  
We had lunch today.  
She's worried, afraid.  
She doesn't want to tell Fikret.  
Nor you.  
She needs help to get an abortion.  
She needs a doctor.  
And money, a loan.  
What did you say?  
I said we'll help if she wants the baby.  
But she's set on an abortion.  
I got her an appointment  
for next Tuesday.  
Where have you been?  
What's up?  
Grad studies or whatever the fuck she  
does, send her to Germany with Fikret!  
Tell me what happened.  
That Bora guy came too.

Driving home he asked: "Can you drop us  
at my place?" And Nihal didn't object!  
It was too much, dropping  
them off together.  
How much more must we bear?  
We open our hearts,  
our home to her highness.  
And look what she does!  
Have you eaten?  
Did you turn the stove off?  
I did.  
Shall we make zucchini with rice?  
They're rotting in the fridge.  
OK.  
With red pepper paste  
and dried mint on top.  
Garlic would go well.  
And local yogurt.  
Could it have been different?  
I guess not.  
Useless to ask, but I can't help it.  
Could it have turned out differently?  
I don't know, guys.  
I was scared for Cetin.  
If I had been alone...  
I was 18.  
Cetin was only in third grade.  
Imagine, university and  
the bank at the same time.  
But I thought of him.  
I was afraid something...  
would happen to him.  
I was so worried that Cetin  
would slip through my fingers.  
Then he ran away in sixth grade.  
We laugh now,  
but then...  
I felt I had failed.  
It was really bad.  
Actually, you know what my mistake was?  
Thinking I could handle  
such a heavy burden.  
Losing our parents,  
still being a kid...

**I thought:**

I can handle it.

I'm on my feet, I have a job.

Cetin must go to school.

I expected a disaster, but...

nothing happened.

Things happen with time.

Without noticing it go by.

Cetin

became the Cetin he is now.

And I, this Murat...

Weighed down with

heavy responsibilities.

Something in me still

doesn't feel right.

Are you OK?

It's nothing.

If you want to talk...

I'm sorry.

Mrs. Nurten wants to know

if there's a problem.

It's nothing, I'm sorry.

Has she eaten anything?

No.

She can't resist this.

Ice cream?

Welcome.

How are you?

You lost weight.

Didn't they feed you?

The stress of graduation.

She spent the last month in her room,

her head buried in books.

Come on, let's go.

I'll take your bag.

Fix your collar.

Have it ironed better.

Tuck in your belly.

I'm stressed out.

Is the lady on her way?

Yeah shortly.

Here she is. Come.

Very pretty. Ready?

Smile please.

And...

Cetin's right. We shouldn't change real estate agents, but she's not trustworthy.

I say furnished, she asks to put the furniture in storage.

That much furniture in storage?

If it's furnished, she says only students or foreigners will rent it.

It doesn't matter.

I'm OK with students.

We've been there too, can't forget those days.

We've already locked the private stuff into one room.

If she doesn't call next week, you guys will have to deal with it.

Are you laughing at me?

Do I talk too much?

Watch out for the mirror.

"To the two best guys in the world."

- What?

"To the two best guys in the world."

Why do you think Nihal wrote that?

Cause we're good, aren't we?

Of course we're good.

Are we writing her back?

We are.

But what?

I have something in mind.

But let's not use those machines to post it.

Let's use real stamps.

- My good buddy!

You're a great man.

There's a series with flowers and birds. Let's use those.

OK.

Go on, play, play.