

Seen from the wall-to-wall window

of the living room. The window I looked through for nine years.

The other side, in Istanbul, means the other side of the Bosphorus.

It could be any time of night. What lingers in my mind is time's scenery, when all sounds were hushed, no one was about.

The scenery which is there all day, which you keep looking at and in time grow accustomed to not seeing, the landscape and the sea somewhat transforming, suddenly gains an altogether different dimension, depth, very late at night, or in the early hours, those desolate hours when you see your own loneliness overlapping with the loneliness of the world. The sea calmer. The world more quiet. Life more beautiful. A landscape that gives one a sense of beginning. There lies, it seems, a different land opposite. Like a life in which we don't take part. That strange, aching sadness of certain landscapes, something almost inherent in them, which says nothing more than it should, which you're already familiar with, though it insists on surprising you yet again, each time you look that way. Nature is always surprising. It always has the same power to renew us within. Older than us all, nature can triumph as the greatest surprise, though always dependent on the same resources. Perhaps that's nature's true miracle. Perhaps that's what art tries to be when observing nature.

In the soundless night, the peopleless landscape, the calm that offers an almost historical distance from the scenery opposite, it seems I'm not in the Istanbul of the present, but in the old days of magnificence told in the pages of books. I often

**MURATHAN
MUNGAN**

Lights on the other side

notice that I miss not the Istanbul I have known day by day, but the one which has been written about, the Istanbul that I once read about. What I desire is not so much the Istanbul right here and now as those pages about "Istanbul" where I once dreamt of taking my place. It seems I yearn for the literature wrought out of it. Istanbul which I dreamt of with an innocent thrill, while reading those pages as an adolescent, Istanbul which I felt had never changed, had always stayed the same, expecting me to take my place in it one day. The yearning for my fantasies reviving with the same thrill... How strange! Innocence, too, can be remembered. Not as a concept, not as some dry, objective information, but as a feeling that can be reproduced equally fresh years later. That thrill which you thought you had lost, which had died in you, suddenly is revived with the profound power of recollection. You say, "yes, I remember experiencing those feelings in exactly this way". It's as if time has not gone by, and I'm once more at a starting point that lies not behind but ahead of me, to be aimed at my horizon. All of a sudden, a completely different future spreads out before me. Is that possible after so many years?

It was possible-on some nights as I gazed at the lights opposite. It seemed everything was possible once more. On those nights, gripped by emotion, I felt compelled to take a boat the next day and make a round of all the ferry landings in Istanbul, of the ancient neighbourhoods, streets, shores, to look at the fountains, the mosques, the wooden houses with their bay windows, as if the Istanbul in the book pages had stayed where it was and I, like a man returning years later, would find it as it was. I was looking for the Istanbul in the books, not the one I was living in, I knew, but didn't mind. An illusion, of course, but one that empowers and revives.

Some nights, while you were asleep, I used to slip quietly out of bed into the living room, and watch the lights on the other side for a long, long time. Sometimes you would wake up too, and join me and we'd watch together.

Some mornings at sunrise, I used to go out on the balcony and let myself be taken by the stillness, when the sea did in fact stretch out like a sheet and there wasn't even a single fishing boat that passed through the Bosphorus, or when a lone rowing-boat

glided by with a gentle rustle as if tearing a fine line through a roll of silk, sending the finest of ripples to the shore.

On deep nights, as autumn turned to winter, ghost ships in starless darkness, those ships that sail through some poems of mine.

Sometimes a military transporter in the middle of the channel, a destroyer, flag-flying battleships, like a torchlight procession through the night.

In images that changed from season to season, the lights on the other side made me sense somewhere deep inside me, the time I was living in.

Longing for what was right under my nose, a living example, and the strange sadness of it, gave a jolt to so many of my foundation stones.

"The important thing is not the sea but the Bosphorus," some of our guests would say. "You can see the Bosphorus!"

To live on the Bosphorus and reflect on lives.

To live on the Bosphorus and reflect on times.

Watching the Bosphorus: both history and geography, both literature and love.

The most recent history dating back to the ancient voyage that began with the Golden Fleece.

The lights brightened up my nights for so many years.

A thousand torchlights...

Some mornings, the lights of the ferris wheel at the funfair in Üsküdar, the red light winking on top of Leander's Tower, the islands in a dreamy haze, the suspension bridge to the left of my balcony. Fethi Pasha Wood and the slopes of Beylerbeyi, in a blush with flowering Judas trees; Camlica Hill as remote as a black-and-white film; the lane that winds down lazily to Kuzguncuk, Salacak swaying gently in the breeze; Harem, the dusky threshold of Istanbul...

If you had woken up while I was dreamily watching the headlights moving on the coast road from Üsküdar to Harem and every other light on the other side, you would step gently into the living room. Sometimes I'd notice, sometimes not. You'd come, making your presence felt in respectful silence so as not to startle me. You'd stand beside me without a sound, spellbound by what you saw, sharing with me the scenery and the quiet. Sometimes

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you'd lean over and kiss me gently on the neck. You were the man who best knew how to kiss my neck! Your lips touched me soft and warm, as if kissing a baby's neck. A shiver would run from head to toe and a twitch in the groins. You'd step behind and put your arms around me, leaning your chin on my shoulder, and we'd gaze out at the same scenery for minutes without saying a word.

Sometimes, with incredulous eyes, we'd think of nothing more imaginative to say to each other, other than blurting out: "Aren't they beautiful, the lights on the other side? Aren't they beautiful?"

Those were moments when, with a profound sense of being, we were powerfully in touch with the time we lived in and the life we'd made for ourselves. Those moments, once again, made us come face to face with life, love, and the world.

Seeing the Bosphorus, not so much the sea, somehow made life different.

Our spirits revived, feeling luminous within, and once more in love with Istanbul, with life, and with each other, we'd make our way back to bed peacefully, hand in hand, and let go in the sound embrace of sleep, our arms around each other.

Now I'm living somewhere else. A place you've never been to, a place you don't know.

I don't see the lights on the other side any more.

I miss the days I was in love with you.

Some day, if I ever live again anywhere that overlooks the Bosphorus, I may ask you to come over one evening and watch the lights on the other side.

Just for us to watch together, once more, nothing else.

I can't help thinking, it was so much like love!

Murathan Mungan, born in 1955 in Istanbul. He studied drama. His poems and prose have been published in various reviews and newspapers. Famous for his poems, stories and dramas, he's also written radio plays, scenarios and song lyrics.

