

THE DEEP FREEZER

Selim Temo

“The Tanzimat period

The Emancipation period

The Republican period

I have seen them all:

What we got was massacre and catastrophe”

Sey Qaji

(1860-1936)

We are not unaware that everyone slights us. The tea we order comes late and cold, sometimes never arrives. The bosses might be thinking we do not have money to pay for the tea.

Weysi and I always run into each other here at the teahouse. He never goes to another teahouse and always leaves another place early to come here. I always come here on my way to another place. From the garage ahead of us rise raucous sounds of guns and bombs. It had been like this in the past. Then it wasn't like this for some time. Now it is always like this.

“Who is Weysi?” you might ask. Why should I describe him to the middle class, respectable readers who pay their monthly installments on time? To let them know about another life? Is this it? There is no need for the pen as the medium for this.

As if there were any shortage of Weysîs! Stop any Weysî on the street, befriend him, have a cup of tea with him.

We are having a cup of tea. He has polished only two shoes since this morning, yet we have enough money for soup.

The minibuses come and go one after another. The usual sonorous air is replaced with the murmurs of turning pages of newspapers, merging with sounds of televisions. Each shade left by the street vendors is now crowded with other people. Weysî and I are having a cup of tea in this place where everyone is waiting for something or somebody.

Weysî has been rather preoccupied these days. Through his broken, decayed teeth, he incessantly hisses the sentence, “*I feel blue.*”¹ He looks around, points to the gun barrels with his fingers beautified with dirt, and then turns around to tell me once again, “*I feel blue*” as if he had forgotten that I have been sitting there with him.

The village teachers appear suddenly. Those who are visiting the hospitals or coming out of the hospitals appear suddenly. Those who are going to see their beloved dead or who are running toward the survivors appear suddenly. The smell of wet soil is rising in front of the stores. The leftovers from yesterday are warming up. The enormous suitcases are being piled up.

(1) The original phrase, “eyle bi canım sıkılıyi,” means being up against the wall in Amed-Turkish slang.

In the past, it was not like this. In the past, the provincial teacher with a family to take care of used to look sheepish. Perhaps, because they now only take care of themselves, they have the apparent brazen looks that do not fit in this place. In the past, the locals and newcomers looked each other in the eye; now, they divert their eyes from one another.

In the past, the drivers wore their shirts open, revealing their chests; now, they stand with arms akimbo as if reading carefully massaged statistics. Yet the posture of waiting does not change. At least, one hand needs to be tucked into a pocket. There is perhaps a profound sorrow, isn't there? Or perhaps an absence of an answer... Or perhaps an answer that awaits its time to be answered... In the air is the fatigue left by the end of summer, a thick lethargy, a low cloud that finds itself out of place with the sky...

Weyşî's occupation is apparently known. Thus, he never bends down to people's feet to ask "ez boyax kim" or "boyalayım abê."² Weyşî was not used to being like this; in the past, no matter what happened, he could get his daily wages. Nowadays, he is always *feeling blue*.

He never went to school and, unlike me, had never learned to speak with an attitude of provincial snobbery to the sterile faces of people who attune their laughs in the world's exclusive salons. He never even passed by the house where Hugo wrote

(2) "Should I shine your shoes?" in Kurdish and Turkish.

the first sentences of *Les Misérables*. In this place where the gun barrels are pointing at us, he constantly *feels blue*.

Weysî and I have gotten used to the barrels and are never afraid. If fear is only the fear for your own life, it is inevitable yet hard to understand. But, at times like this, you fear for others. This is a feeling that is understandable. Weysî and I are talking about this and other strange things. We were not like this in the past, didn't speak of such strange things. He would talk about girls and I about my son, my students. When bored with each other, we would drink tea like we do now. And yet now we are constantly *feeling blue*. Even when things are going well, *we feel blue*. Even when we shine thirty pairs of shoes or when the soup is warm, *we feel blue*.

The air is still sweltering. What does one do? Drink cold water. I ask Weysî but he does not want cold water. He feels blue. This time he points, his fingers thickened with dirt, to a deep freezer near the entrance of a restaurant. We turn our gazes back to ourselves, *feeling blue*.

Whenever I hear the word “derin dondurucu” (deep freezer), the movie “Şwênek bo Yari,” whose title is mistranslated both in English (“Kick off”) and in Turkish (“Başlama Vuruşu”), comes to my mind. Şewket Emîn Korkî's film should be translated as “A Field to Play” and “Oyun İçin Bir Saha” respectively. In the movie, the expelled Kurds take refuge in a Kirkuk stadium. There is a wreckage of cars and bombs where some used to play football. On the player's bench sits a group of children who lost their eyes and limbs in the minefields.

In the tribunes, where some used to pay to watch the games, wander the skinny Kurdish goats. Like the closed artificial turf football field in Roboskî, this one is also used as a ‘mourning tent.’ Structures used by people with particular functions are repurposed here to face death. How about the “deep freezer?”

The deep freezer, which some use to keep their kurban ³ meats, preserves, or water, is used by Kurds to keep the corpses of their children to prevent them from reeking. We have seen it! Weysî and I are aware of everything, know everything. The tea can be served cold; the gun barrels can be pointed at us; everyone can slight us... none of this matters. There is an insurrection in our chests, we are not afraid, and yet we still feel deeply hurt, we still feel blue.

Translated by Öykü Tekten

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(3) Kurban refers to the animals sacrificed during the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha.