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The Galata bridge! In reality this bridge only joined old Stamboul to Pera across the Golden Horn – but Nikolai had the impression that it was joining Europe to Asia. Across it walked or clattered the whole world or so it seemed to him. Turkish and Kurdish porters half trotted across – bent forwards with huge packs or cases on their backs attached to a thong which passed across their foreheads, calling out “Make way! Make way!” Turkish ladies, mostly still veiled, passed towards Stamboul to go shopping in the great bazaar or moved the other way towards Pera to go to the Taksim gardens. Portly merchants, Greek or Armenian, some still wearing the Ottoman fez, but many sporting panama or trilby hats and smart canes, strolled across. Allied seamen of all kinds swaggered past, staring around. Peasants from the nearby fields of Thrace or from the Asian side rode across on donkeys, even here in the city. Occasionally there would even be a shepherd from the hills driving a flock of sheep. Modern electrified trams, crowded to the doors, would clatter by and then, plodding along behind, would come a camel loaded with goods. In the middle of all that bustle, weaving their way in and out between them all, Nicolai saw new-fangled modern motor-cars.

Staring at all this he also recognised compatriot Russians of all types – émigrés, refugees, well dressed ladies and smart officers. He also saw broken-down soldiers who had left their commands now interned outside the walls, preferring to take their chances in the city, most of them evidently living rough and as far as he could see without hope.

He had never seen anything like it – but then neither had the elderly Turks sitting at the cafes on the shore at each end of the bridge puffing on their narghilehs and gazing with hooded eyes at all this life which had invaded their ancient city – a city now occupied by the troops of a Christian power for the first time in over four hundred and fifty years. The Armenians and the Greeks were beginning to ‘swagger’ a bit themselves. No one gave a thought to the rumours of a Turkish revival in the Anatolian interior – after all the British were here and the Greek army was close by and also in Smyrna. The old Turks smoked on

silently and watched.

Nikolai had to catch his breath. He walked over to the side of the bridge. Leaning against the iron rails, he looked out at the harbour and all about him. On his right was Stamboul – the original city – sheltering behind the great Theodosian walls still largely intact. Stamboul was Turkish despite containing both the Greek and Armenian Patriarchates. Dominated by the great mosques sitting on the top of the hills with their wonderful shallowly-rounded domes and pencil-like thin minarets silhouetted against the sky, it contained the great covered bazaar where most of the business of the city was carried out. On his left was Pera, founded originally as a suburb by the Genoese but now the centre of the modern city. Pera was populated by all the races of the Empire, but here the Turks were still a minority. Here lay all the bars and restaurants, the hotels and all the burgeoning nightlife of the city, and it was to this side that Nikolai turned.

He turned and walked up the hill, not bothering to take the funicular, to the Grande Rue de Pera, and strolled along this main road with its trams towards Taksim. Near Tokatlians tea rooms he found a music shop. He then spent the next hour trying out and putting back violin after violin, both new and second-hand.

His problem was that he was not entirely sure that this money taken out of their precious capital was going to be well spent. He knew that he was a competent violinist, but would there be any work available at the end? None of the instruments was less than at least six of his precious gold pieces. Everyone knew that Russian gold was not as valuable as Turkish. Nicolai dithered. Whenever this happened to him his mind would always go back to his father – Count Androv – “Any decision, my boy, is better than no decision at all, even if it is wrong. Now snap out of it – get on, move lad move!”

But in those days the count was living in a world where he was totally sure of himself and his surroundings, and where he was privileged. A wrong decision by the old count was never likely to be fatal. But for Nikolai ...

Nikolai felt faint and stifled. The Armenian salesman, probably related to the owners, was clearly getting impatient. Over in the corner another young man who had a violin case under his arm was fingering some sheet music preparatory to making a purchase. The salesman muttered some clearly disparaging remarks in Armenian to this young man, in which Nikolai heard the word ‘Russner,’ which must be referring to him. He turned away feeling sick and hopeless – he could not decide. He sat down dejectedly on the only chair in the shop. The other customer snapped at the salesman, who blushed deeply and went back behind the counter. The young man who had retorted at the salesman came over, looked down at Nikolai and said, speaking in French, “Good morning, monsieur, are you not feeling well?”

“I’m fine, thank you monsieur – I’ve just come over a little faint. I’ll be all right in a moment.”

“You’re Russian aren’t you? Let me introduce myself, my name is Vahan –

Vahan Asadourian." Smiling broadly the young man extended his hand warmly. Nikolai immediately jumped up, bowed and shook his hand.

"Count Nikolai Androv, at your service," he said in English, without thinking. At this the young man smiled and himself replied in English, a language with which he seemed more at ease,

"You appear to have a problem in choosing a violin. Perhaps I could help, I am myself a violinist."

Nicolai immediately warmed to this young man who appeared so sympathetic, without even knowing what problem was exercising his mind.

"Well, sir, the fact is that my means are limited and it is true that I do have a problem, but it is not a problem of choice of instrument."

Vahan Asadourian was a music student from the University of Stamboul, who had never completed his degree due to the circumstances which had intervened during the war. He was an Armenian from Caesaria who had managed to survive those traumatic years. He gave the young Russian to whom he had taken an immediate liking, perhaps in reaction to the rudeness of his compatriot, a shy smile and said –

"Count, my dear sir, problems are always worth sharing with others, perhaps I might be able to help. Would you accept my invitation for a coffee together. Let's leave this dreary shop. I can't find the Haydn quartet I am looking for in any case."

Curtly nodding at the assistant who was trying to exude disapproval in their direction, he led Nikolai out of the shop, and they went a little further down the road to the Tokatlian building and into the front cafe, by the main door.

"Iki kahve – shekerli – is that all right Count Nikolai?"

"Fine, but please I am Nikolai Petrovitch."

And the two young men, carefully appraising each other, entered into a long conversation with easy familiarity as if they had known each other for a long time. Nikolai saw a short rather squat figure sporting the ubiquitous Turkish-style crisp black moustache, dressed fairly formally in suit and tie, but not wearing a fez. Strong features but not very refined – no sign of any great sensitivity, not at least in the face. Big brown eyes like most Armenians Nikolai had ever encountered. Vahan, for his part, saw a young man, clearly younger than himself and much more conventionally good looking. Wild rather unruly fair hair, but with very black eyes – could there be a touch of Mongol blood.

Their difference in age was only two years but to Vahan it seemed enormous and brought out in him a paternal feeling. He had always been the oldest in his family, used to looking out for his younger brother. On the other hand, Nikolai thought to himself at the same time that here was a young man who had seen nothing of life as yet. They talked and gradually Nikolai's problem became clear.

"Well, Nikolai, my friend, I understand your problem completely. Obviously you cannot present yourself anywhere for a musical post without having your own violin. On the other hand you are worried at spending such a large proportion of the family money in case after it has gone, you can't find a job. Further-

more you are right, as I'm afraid that Russian musicians are two a penny here at the moment. We are inundated with Russian orchestras, Russian folklorists, Russian tearooms..."

Vahan paused for a moment then continued – he was after all two years older wasn't he?

"The answer is simple. You take my violin. Do the rounds. If, after going round everywhere you still can't find any work, at least you will have held onto your precious gold pieces. I'll give you a week, and when you do find work you can come and use your money wisely to buy a violin from that supercilious shopkeeper."

"Vahan, my friend, that is wonderful. But what will you do meanwhile?"

"Ah well, you see, while I have kept up my playing – I have a circle of friends and we meet and play chamber music together – I have not carried on with music as a career. You know, I suppose, of the terrible events that took place in Anatolia five years ago? I had to give up my studies. My father, one of the first to be arrested and deported, survived and in due course turned up here and opened up a small business. I now help him in that business. I am afraid that the world has changed and a career in music is no longer an option for me."

"And the rest of your family?"

There was a short silence as Vahan looked at Nikolai, not quite knowing what to say.

"My younger brother – Raffi – ran away and managed to survive. He is also now here and working with my dad. He's about your age, I think."

Nikolai said nothing, waiting.

"Yes – ah well – my mother and my sisters with their children all eventually had to leave their home on those awful deportation marches – despite all my efforts. They were never heard of again, like so many others."

"I'm so sorry – I shouldn't have pressed you."

There was another short silence, and then Vahan jumped up and said, "Look, I have to go. Here is my violin. We live up near Taksim, just round the corner from the Park hotel. Here is the address – please come tonight in any case and meet my family. We are an all-male household because... er... well, yes... as you know. Anyway, by all means try the manager here, but they tend to take only Armenians. There are many night clubs around in this area, but your best bet is the Pera Palace hotel which is further down. Make absolutely sure that they know that you have a wide repertoire and not just Russian folk music. I am afraid the town is beginning to get saturated with Russian folk music and Russian dancing girls and Russian restaurants."

Vahan pressed the violin onto Nikolai, paid the bill and hurried away. Nikolai stood outside for a moment and watched as Vahan walked briskly up towards Taksim. He pondered on the fact that his only experience of Armenians in Russia was as merchants and shopkeepers. In aristocratic circles they had a reputation as petty bourgeois money-grubbers not likely to be generous or open-spirited. Yet, here he had been trusted with a fairly valuable object despite the fact that

their acquaintance was only that of a few hours. Nicolai was aware that he had particularly trustworthy looks – people tended to trust him straight away – but this encounter was unusual. He wondered about this new friend – was he perhaps a touch naive. He turned to go back into Tokatlians to see the manager.

Meanwhile, Vahan hurried home. He had a rendezvous for tea at The Dansant room back at Tokatlians. The war had changed everything. It was now perfectly acceptable for a young man and a young girl from good families to go out together unchaperoned. However, even so, there was no question of young Nerissa Avakian being allowed to stay out late during night-time. Vahan never questioned this for a moment. The city was full of foreigners – French, British and Italian soldiers of the occupation forces commanded by the English General Harrington. They were relatively well-disciplined, but the town was also full of seamen of all nations and refugees of all kinds. The American fleet was in port and fights were regularly breaking out between the British and American sailors.

That absolute certainty which had existed under the old Ottoman culture that no lady walking in the streets, veiled or not, would ever be molested, no longer applied as the brash values of the West began to intrude into the city.

Vahan had said nothing about these meetings with the young Nerissa to his old-fashioned and puritanical father, despite the fact that he knew that his father would probably highly approve of any developing relationship with the wealthy and highly respected Avakian family. It was as if the knowledge that his father would push him on inhibited him in some way. His younger brother Raffi, tougher and more worldly-wise than him, had however been told all about it. He was at home when Vahan arrived.

“Hey Raffi, my soul, please tell Siran not to include me in the dinner tonight.”

“Well, well, brother, going out dancing again. What you need is one of those painted ladies in the Bayram Sokagh.”

“Don’t be coarse, Raffi. Look I’m in a hurry – the university classes will be closing soon. Come up and chat while I change.”

And he hurried up the steep stone staircase to his room at the top of the tall narrow house. Raffi came strolling up after him. He made a point of almost always disagreeing with anything his elder brother said, though he would then often adopt those very same thoughts with his own friends later as if they were his own. He would never admit it even to himself but he secretly deeply admired his brother. However, Raffi considered he had his own feet firmly planted on the ground, while his brother was a mere dreamer – an intellectual – a musician for heaven’s sake.

Raffi thought that Vahan was still a virgin, whereas he himself... Nevertheless, it was always the same. Life was considerably more interesting when Vahan was around. He sauntered into Vahan’s room and leant against the door.

“Vahan, why don’t you tell baba about your meetings with that Avakian girl?”

“Miss Avakian to you, my lad.”

“Yes – well whatever. If you’re serious, and you certainly seem to be, you’ll

have to let him know – and anyway why not? She sounds very suitable.”

“Oh Raffi, shut up. I can’t possibly make any serious move, could I. Think – her father is one of the wealthiest merchants in town and I haven’t even a home I can bring her to. He’s already looking around for suitable young men – I know. I would need my own home, and we can’t afford it. After all she couldn’t come here – there is no woman in the house. If mother was alive and here ... well, no matter.”

“Have a pleasant afternoon, brother, but I still say that the ladies in that street behind ...”

“Raffi, you’re one-track minded. I’ve got to go. Sort it out with dad please as you usually do.”

Vahan embraced Raffi as he hurried past him and down the narrow stairs. At the bottom, in the tiny hall before the front door, stood yet another young man leaning against the door of the sitting room. Thin, looking under-nourished as he always did regardless of how much he ate, about sixteen, he smiled up at Vahan.

“Vahan, my brother, my soul, where dost thou go?” he said in his old-fashioned accented Eastern Highlands style – an accent now rarely heard.

“Ara, you little pipsqueak, don’t ask – you’re not old enough to be told where Vahan is going, and Vahan is too prim to tell you anyway,” said Raffi, grinning as he came down the stairs behind Vahan.

Ara, the traumatised orphan lad rescued by Garabed, Vahan’s father, from the horrors of the deportations five years ago, looked back at Vahan questioningly.

“Ah well, Ara, my soul, I am going dancing at Tokatlians with ... er ... well, yes ... I’ll tell you all about it when I get back. Goodbye, everyone.” And Vahan still adjusting his tie hurried out.