

TOM YUILL

THE WALNUT TREE

Freely after Nazim Hikmet

My head is the atmosphere, my head is clouds, I'm the sea
inside, I'm the ocean outside. I'm a walnut tree
in Gülhane Park. In Istanbul,
a walnut tree, knotted and scarred.
You don't know this, brothers . . . Police don't know either.

I'm a gnarled walnut tree in Gülhane Park.
My leaves meander and shimmer the way that fish swim.
My leaves flutter like silk handkerchiefs.
Break off one, dearest, and dry your tears with it . . .
These leaves are my hands . . . hundreds of hands . . .
and they all touch my Istanbul . . . all.
These leaves are my eyes, hundreds of eyes,
and I'm stunned by the bastards I see . . .
Shocked, I watch Istanbul with hundreds of eyes,
and all of them, all my eyes, sting . . .
And my hundreds of leaves, as they beat in stiff winds,
are hundreds and hundreds of hearts . . . and won't break.

I'm a gnarled walnut tree in Gülhane Park.
You don't know this, brothers . . . Police don't know either.

LIFE AND HOW TO LIVE IT

Freely after Nazim Hikmet

Fear of seriousness destroys. Living is serious; it's not a joke. Whatever gives you that dread of taking life seriously, get over it. Even a squirrel, placid in trembling indifference, taut, adorable dumbass, is living and serious.

Let's say you are sick, sick to danger and needing surgery, laid open on the white expanse. One possibility is never waking up. Even if it is impossible, really, to feel the true sorrows your dying too early will bring, you could know some thrill or quick terror at the loss, and you could still be chortling at a Bektashi joke, could still be seeing your city's rooftops through the window as it rains, could still be wondering what the latest news is.

Let's say your blood is up, let's say it's worth it, that Nazis are back. It's that real—there's no lying this time. You're at the front, where you should be, right there for the first shot from the first motherfucker . . . And let's say it hits you right in the face. As you fall, as you die on the irrelevant ground, your face can still show strange passion. The twists and concertos in your wincing eyes are a wonder, and you, in pain, dying, might daydream of peace still years away.

Or let's say you're in prison, you're almost
 into your 50s, and you have another 18 years
 before the iron gate swings wide. But that whole
 time you're also out somewhere with others,
 lovers, or children, or your father's bull pups,
 or just smiling as you and your brothers kick
 around town. You're also breathing
 deeply as the winds toss the fragrance of roses
 around, like they do outside the wall. No matter
 where we are or what they do to us,
 we can live like we never die.

The world will get cold.
 A star among stars,
 even the smallest one, just a dust speck
 in a velvet blue tumult, our world,
 froth and shimmer, our whole world,
 shake and glide though it does, will grow cold.
 Ice stacked in nothingness,
 not even vapours or dead clouds,
 but rolling in absolute stillness and some dark
 caprice of non-being. Not gone, not beyond,
 just *not*. Even those overwhelmed by grief,
 grief of the present, an awful eternity,
 who won't forgive life for its being, even such
 people in such mixed-up pain must admit,
 in some way or other, "I lived."

