

## **An Englishman in Aladağ**

Our village was a mountainous one. The ratio of the elderly population to the young was turning mathematical principles upside down.

Those who were able to earn their bread and discover the world outside the village would make their way to the big cities.

Master Faik was the headman and a smith, as well. He was competent in forging and injecting spirit into iron, a tradition of thousand years, at a corner of his house. However, he is not in demand anymore but he delivers the service when and wherever he is needed, without taking money or asking for a favor in return. My grandfather keeps saying "oldies but goldies". Master Faik is one of them. I wonder why.

I do not like my old clothes, old shoes and even old toys. I guess, what they mean by old must be past experiences, friendships and habits that are things strange to us. Those values to die for and things that make us who we are...

We reside in a mountainous village and we live on mining. My father is a beautiful soul who has never departed from his homeland and parents. They call him "*Gidi Mustafa*". We are two sisters. My sister's name is Fazilet. Five classrooms are taught by one teacher. It is obviously difficult. They call it "A Combined Classroom". Our teacher does it all. Serving as a secretary to the headman or a wedding witness or a tourist guide.

Our home is located right near the school. Our teacher pays a visit to us at night. She and my father talk about the country, migration and education. I keep an eye on the TV but I cannot help overhearing. They talk about modernism, democracy, human rights, animal rights... Then I am like "Uncle Ibo is now in trouble. He cannot make dogs fight, and chain them up and tether them at the doorstep anymore. Yay!" The veterinary physician will now have to travel to the village not only for our cows, horses and sheep but also for cats, dogs and even that monster trapped. Mom says that dogs are taken for a walk and vaccinated in big cities. They even get a haircut. Can you imagine! Uncle Binali has been a slob ever since I could remember. He is a miner having survived lots of landslides and firedamp explosions. They say he scanned MR of mines.

Located in the district of Şenkaya, of Erzurum province, the borough of Susuz is home to lignite coal mine sites. They are what people around there, shopkeepers and kids live on. My father is quite worried nowadays and looking absent-minded. He calls out to my mother, Latife to herald about the mining accident in Soma and all those people passing away. Now we are walking by the village's coffee house hand in hand with my brother to go to the school. Everyone is focused on the TV screen with nothing else to set sight on and they all pull a long face.

My father crossed my mind as well as Uncle Binali and many more. A question hit me like a ton of bricks. I had to ask my teacher and I did. A heating stove is like a national heat source to us. It is there situated at the place of honor in winter and summertime. It was cold. The kids were drying their snow-soaked feet and socks in front and back of the stove while giving an ear to their teacher at the same time. After giving some homework to the first, second and third graders, our teacher turned to us, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders and started talk . The subject was Citizenship, Democracy and Fundamental Rights. The teacher was upset yet cautious. "Kids, I am sorry for the loss of our country. There has been a mining accident in Soma. Many people have died" she said. "Mining....! The fathers of most of us are currently on mine sites, teacher" I said. I could not help myself and kept on talking. "Teacher! We hear, read and learn from news, elders and books, about mining accidents, natural disasters and many incidents. How does this work around the world? Our teacher was puzzled. She thought to herself for a while, got emotional and seemed perplexed. She raised her head and said: "Kids, every profession has its pros and cons. I am the daughter of an expatriate. I lived in Germany for years. My father was a miner and my mother was a leather worker. My relatives used to take me to their workplaces now and then. Many European countries and other developed ones around the world allocate a refuge chamber for miners and take special measures for those people like my mother who are exposed to chemicals. Their governments, non-governmental organizations, trade unions and people are quite informed .The compensation for the damage is quite heavy most of the time. The sanctions and measures are outstanding. To begin with, human life and all is safeguarded by the law on occupational safety. If a wild gazelle happens to fall into a pit, they'll go save her by a helicopter. Democracy, right to education and guiding everyone to a profession in line with their capabilities are all figured out, and the whole system functions well because of this. As you see, kids, Turkey has a long way to go to become a European country and this depends on you a little bit. Sevda took the floor and asked: "Teacher, will any helicopter come to the rescue when that monster slaughtering our sheep is trapped?" Maybe someday" the teacher said.

I raised my hand and asked: "Teacher, will there be any refuge chamber on the mine site where my father works just like they do in Europe?" "Hopefully, dear. Hopefully" she said. The teacher turned to us like she remembered something all of a sudden and said: "Do you

remember the time when a lady, a man and two strangers paid a visit to our village accompanied with the gendarmerie not long ago? The English engineers." We remembered. "Those people allocated funds for education, training and vocational courses for daughters and women of the families residing near the mine site. They spoke to the headman and us. They would like to cooperate with the Turkish government for girls in particular. Rest assured that they also exert efforts to avoid mining accidents." "Teacher, this thing called EU is good. Occupational safety for my father, security of life for peasants and vocational courses for all of us. We need to join the EU as soon as possible. None more so than my father... For all the fathers...