

## **The Movement**

By Jody Sabral

For Bigem, Mesude and Atakan

**‘In war, truth is the first casualty.’ Aeschylus (525 BC – 456 BC)**

**‘Democracy is like a train, you get off once you reach the station.’ Recep Tayyip Erdogan,  
the Turkish Prime Minister**

*The nation’s land is sacred. It cannot be left to fate.*

He hardly recognised Zeynep this evening, her silky hair hanging loosely against bare shoulders, the scarf leisurely draped around her neck. Her fragile body in a vest and fitted jeans looked even more vulnerable without the tunic she wore to the mosque. His anger tightened when she lit a long slim cigarette and held it between lips painted a shocking red.

The youth sitting on the park bench next to her held her free hand. She pulled away playfully but let his fingers follow, touching her hair. *Allah askina*, what did she think she was doing? Boys would be boys, but she should know better. She was an honest girl and what they were doing was sinful. Did she... he... they... have no modesty? The prophet, peace be upon him, said that modesty is part of faith. Did she have no faith?

They had been sitting in this same spot for an hour, while thousands of anti-government protesters filed in and out of the park, between the giant sycamore trees that stood like ageless sentries at the park entrance. A bust of Ataturk watched paternally over the square from the shadows.

From his vantage point among a clump of bushes, he knew they had been cavorting like this for five days now, gazing at each other with their puppy dog eyes. Well, he decided enough was enough. Today would be the last time Zeynep would see this *kafir*. It might have been less offensive had she tried to hide the romance, but now there was only one way this could end.

He called her phone. She looked at the screen and her body language radically changed. She pushed the boy away, turned her back to him and stood to attention, stubbing out the cigarette while smoothing her hair. She pulled the scarf up over her hair and only when it was in place did she pick up.

‘Where are you?’

She wasn’t smiling now. The boy remained sitting on the bench, playing with something on his wrist.

‘With a friend.’

‘What friend?’

‘A girlfriend.’ How could she lie to him?

‘What are you doing?’

‘Chatting. Why do you always ask me such questions?’

‘Because I worry about you.’

‘I know.’

‘Have you eaten?’

‘Yes.’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘God.’

‘Good.’

‘You are wanted by the *Cemaat*.’

‘Okay.’

His call had worked. She turned to the youth, but he clearly wasn't happy with her appearance. He stood up. They were about the same height and build. He was skinny, dressed in converse trainers and ripped jeans. When she started to walk away he took her hand and pulled her back, whispering in her ear. Then he took a small item from his pocket and tied it around her wrist. She smiled shyly and kissed him on the cheek before they said goodbye. He watched as she walked away into the park, along the path past the Sycamore trees. She looked back twice before disappearing from sight.

The youth sat down and lit a cigarette.

Now to get this thing done.

He jumped down from the tree, slung his rucksack over his shoulder and walked up a flight of steps towards the bench. As he bent down to tie his shoelace, he was sure he could smell her scent lingering in the air.

He straightened, then smiled at the boy. 'You look happy.'

'I am.'

'Why?'

'I'm in love.'

He suppressed a scowl. 'Lucky you.' This boy was not worth his dear Zeynep. He could see the boy thought himself cool, but he was corrupt, a *kafir*.

He took out a cigarette from the pocket of his denim jacket.

'You have a light?'

The boy flicked the lighter and he leaned in. It was a brass zippo. Were they colourful wooden beads around his neck? The boy's hair was long and tied back. He wore a Besiktas football strip, as he had when they'd first met in the protests some weeks ago. Since then, they'd become acquaintances, who supported the same team.

He puffed on the cigarette, but it wouldn't light.

‘The tobacco must be damp.’

‘Here take one of mine?’

‘Thanks. What’s your name, by the way? I don’t think I ever asked.’

‘Fatih. Here let me. The lighter is a bit fiddly.’

The rush of nicotine helped slow the surge of adrenalin pumping through his veins at what was soon going to happen. Smoking on the bench, they watched the protesters moving in and out of the anti-government protest camp sprawling from the park to the adjoining square. There hadn’t been any traffic in that square for a while now, and the upturned cars and burned out city busses within it were broken reminders of life before the protests.

‘You been up there?’ He nodded at the glass-fronted building and giant slab of granite engraved with the words Ataturk Cultural Centre. The building, a relic of the 1950s, was draped in hundreds of anti-government banners.

‘No. Its derelict isn’t it? I mean they’re going to pull it down.’

‘You can get on the roof you know.’ Today was the last day Fatih would touch her.

‘Looks dangerous.’

‘It’s not. Look at all the banners up there.’

‘I like the building like that, covered with our thoughts, like the graffiti on the streets. We can have a voice that way.’

‘From up there you can get good view on what the police are doing, good for protecting that voice.’

‘That would be something. And I am sick of this view.’ Fatih said.

Despite his heart hammering away, he knew he had to appear calm and confident.

‘That’s settled then. Let’s go.’

‘It’s going to be another hot night.’ The boy wiped his forehead on the sleeve of his t-shirt.

‘All the more reason to go up there. You’ll feel the breeze on top.’

They made their way towards the Centre.

‘Do you think it’ll stay this way?’ Fatih nodded at the burned shells of vandalised city buses.

‘Who knows? This is Turkey and anything is possible.’

‘True.’

And tonight, my friend, you will know what that means, he said to himself.

It was darker on this side of the square. They walked the perimeter of a corrugated fence, covered in layers of graffiti so dense that the scribbles of protest had merged into chaos.

‘Here.’ He said, indicating a spot where they could get through. ‘You first, I’ll hold it open.’ He slipped through after the boy and pushed the fence back in place, picking up a good-sized rock, which he put in his jacket pocket.

The boy took out his lighter and flicked it on, leading the way.

Inside the fence a mattress and a small stove hinted that some of the protesters had been sleeping there. Beer bottles littered the uneven ground covered in rubble.

‘There’s a fire exit at the back. We can get in from there.’

He prised opened the door with his broad shoulders. There was something jamming the door, but he put his full eighty-two kilos against it and they entered a corridor. It felt smaller in the dark than it had earlier in the day. Fatih was making ghost sounds. In other circumstances they may have gotten along. He pushed that thought from his mind and swiped the torch on his iPhone into action. Better to keep his eyes on Fatih’s unclean hands, the darkness played tricks with his mind.

‘Are you sure this is okay?’

‘I’ve been sleeping here. It’s very safe.’

They walked along the corridor and through a fire door into a kitchen with broken taps and stray cables. At the far end of the cooking area swing doors opened into a café. The space opened out into the main reception area with high ceilings. The chandeliers, once suspended from above, were smashed on the floor. Scratch marks on the walls hinted at where signs used to tell visitors to take their seats for a performance they would never forget. The leather chairs were upside down and their chrome trimmings dented to the extent that they were no longer shiny. Their shoes crunched on broken glass. They walked through the grand entrance hall. Not quite so grand, robbed of its riches, artists and patrons.

‘I came here once.’ Fatih was looking at the bar where mirrored shelves once lived. It was stripped of such glamour now.

‘When?’

‘The Besiktas forward Nihat Kahveci was here for an event, I wanted his autograph.’

‘You get it?’

‘Yeah got him to sign that month’s programme. Keep it at home in a safe place.’ Fatih smiled.

They may have gone to a match together under different conditions. He almost smiled, but he stopped himself. This was not why he was here.

‘That’ll be worth gold if they win the league.’

The youth smiled.

They climbed the main staircase. The bannisters had been stripped bare. Tears in the red carpet revealed cold stone. Here inside the building, climbing the stairs, the youth’s fate was sealed. He had a duty and he would do it.

The nightly noise protest of women banging pots and pans started in the park. The constant clanging of rang through the square and was so loud it penetrated the building, although by the time it reached them it was much softer on the ear. The timing couldn’t be

better. No one would hear a shout for help. They had reached the top floor. The boy took a cigarette from his pack. He was looking around.

‘So how do we get on to the roof then?’

He’d turned around to face the back of the building. This was the moment. The moment was now. Dirty, filthy, immoral boy. He reached into his pocket and grabbed the rock in his right hand. It took one blow to the head to knock him down and a second to knock him out. The *kafir* lay at his feet in the middle of the floor just outside the toilets at the top of the stairwell.

He got to work quickly. The wire was in his rucksack, already cut into strips. He bound the wrists first, then the ankles. Sweat dripped off his nose. The air was still, not a breeze in sight, the humidity torturous. He took off his shirt and dabbed the sweat from his face and chest. When there was enough wire on the boy to prevent him from going anywhere, he lit a cigarette with Fatih’s lighter and walked over to the glass wall that was the front of the building. He admired his own physique in the reflection. Staring out of the window, gravity pinched his legs and stomach. They were high up. The adrenalin rush was a buzz. He held the lighter in his hands. It was heavy. It was quality. He played with the flame for a while.

From here he could see the protesters scurrying around like ants below. They were just dots, insignificant dots. This mob didn’t belong in his country. A haze lay across the city. From the rhythm of the chanting he knew they were shouting ‘Down with the government’ and ‘shoulder to shoulder against fascism’. The usual chants they made, before preparing for a stand off with the police. He shook his head. Citizens should support this government. They were pious Muslims and they’d done a lot for Turkey. The windows facing the square were dirty. He unlatched a lock and slid one open. The chanting became louder. The air outside was just as warm. The glow of burning coals from street vendors grilling meatballs, usually a comfort, annoyed him now. They were feeding the troublemakers

It hadn't started like this. He had supported the protests. But they were becoming a social nuisance. The din of banging wooden spoons against pots and pans grew louder. These women should be at home looking after their families. They had no business to be in the square. He turned to look at the boy, stubbed out the cigarette and walked back towards him and prepared for the final act.

He put on leather gloves. Taking the last strip of wire in his hands he knelt down and wrapped it around the boy's neck. He was strong, but this was going to take some effort. He yanked the wire tight and held it with all his strength. It was difficult. He prayed. Fatih's eyes opened. He was mumbling something and his feet were jerking around. He was going to hell anyway.

'I will protect her from your evil.'

He tried again to say something. But it was irrelevant now.

Then with all his strength he wrapped the wire tight around the boy's neck and said out of breath. 'When you meet in battle those who disbelieve, then smite the necks until when you have overcome them, then make them prisoners, and afterwards either set them free or ransom them, until the war ends.'

On his knees he leaned back with all his might. Fatih was still struggling against him, but he would not win. The wire cut into his neck, bursting an artery. Then blood was everywhere. It took several long minutes to kill him this way. After the last breath left Fatih's body he slumped exhausted from the physical exertion.

He stood up and looked down at what he'd done. It was the perfect kill. Fatih had suffered and would surely be in hell. His hands and knees were covered in blood. He had his gym kit in his rucksack and would change before leaving the building. But first he lit a cigarette and waited for something to happen. He didn't know what he should feel, but when he looked down he felt triumphant. He had done what he'd set out to do.

He took a piece of printed paper from his rucksack and pinned it to the Fatih's chest, leaving a message: *'The nation's land is sacred. It cannot be left to fate.'* He snapped four photos on the second hand phone he'd bought earlier from a street vendor, then walked back towards the window. It was time to clean up and get out of here.