WELLELLE FELLETTE

Frosso Efthymiadi's memories from her childhood in Istanbul

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"Our home in Kadıköy, in Istanbul, was a very tall house, with a wooden facade and balconies, which cast its long shadow in its small garden. This small garden with big trees — our father's joy and pride — was a wonderland for me and my little brother.

We used to climb on the tall pine tree to watch the cicadas, with their big eyes, and whistled back to the night bird that came at sunset to sit on the northern fence with the clematis vines. We watched ants endlessly going to and fro, and waited for Hussein the ice-cream man to arrive at midday. Others bought his ice cream, but we gave him our pocket money to buy brown clay he got from the Çanakkale caiques.

I used this clay to obsessively make small pitchers and pots out of my six-year-old imagination, and my little brother fashioned shelves from wooden boards from the garden for me to place my "works" to dry.

Once, we were caught in the rain, and my works – a labour of love – melted, Mimis' shelves emptied, and our eyes filled with tears. Then Hussein talked to us about a "furnace". We were all ears and listened, astonished.

The following day – secretly from everyone – we got to work in a corner of the garden, behind the two peach trees. Digging, building, Mimis devising patents and me contriving, the kiln was ready in a few days – a kiln around 60cm. It seemed to us as big as the kiln in grand-maman's fairy tale.

Soon, my new production filled the kiln – always secretly from everyone: pitchers and four-legged fairies – to stand better – small vases and my two doves. Mimis kindled a fire, and the furnace started to heat up as a proper kiln – first came thick smoke, and then the kiln became alight with golden flames that devoured the wood, working round the clock. For

a moment, the flames went over the top of the kiln – built with clay and wood – and gushed out, ready to kindle the garden brushwood, the pine needles and from there to the wooden facade of our house.

"Yangın Var — fire!" cried the neighbours. Our parents popped out. Buckets full of water came down the stairs. The fire was put out. That was the end of the furnace..." The incident happened on a Sunday morning. In the afternoon, we were to go to the Russian circus visiting the city. For days, people would tell me about the Russian circus — about the animals, the exotic birds, the dwarfs. My eyes widened in amazement, and my soul yearned for the moment they would take me there. And then, my mother's voice was heard, saying, "No circus. You are grounded in your bedroom until tomorrow." I felt that it must have been a great crime to incur such heavy punishment. Sighing and sobbing, I was locked up in my room, crying all afternoon and all evening, sleepless, steeped in sadness, for the first time in my life.

Father came in the morning, saw my red, vacant eyes, the unhappy little face. He stroked my hair. "In the afternoon, he said, we'll go to the circus." I sparkled with joy, rushed into his arms. Afternoon came, but the circus didn't perform. It had starting packing to leave the following day, due to some trouble in Istanbul at that time. I locked myself up in my bedroom — this time of my own accord — filled with a new misery, for the second time in my life!

Night came, then another, then many more. How I loved those nights that I could dream that I went to the Russian circus. And I saw the water tanks with the mermaids, the clowns, the deer, or baby goats, with their tender mothers, and the dwarfs, laughing all the time and the other creatures, with their big wings and the clown's noses, the fairies with blond braids, just like aunt Roxanne's. What do they want in the circus? Mermaids, as

grand-maman says, in large water tanks, beating their tails, all-white, just like the little boats that Mimis makes.

As I reckoned, my fault did not deserve such punishment. And I turned stubborn and said to myself that the worlds revealed in my dreams demanded clay and kiln. And I turned stubborn and pledged for the day when I would grow up...

Kiln, clay, dreams, birds, fairies, mermaids.

That's the way it happened, isn't it?