

## Today Is Sunday

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Today is Sunday.  
For the first time they took me out into the sun today.  
And for the first time in my life I was aghast  
that the sky is so far away  
and so blue  
and so vast  
I stood there without a motion.  
Then I sat on the ground with respectful devotion  
leaning against the white wall.  
Who cares about the waves with which I yearn to roll  
Or about strife or freedom or my wife right now.  
The soil, the sun and me...  
I feel joyful and how.

## Last Will And Testament

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Comrades, if I don't live to see the day  
- I mean, if I die before freedom comes -  
take me away  
and bury me in a village cemetery in Anatolia.  
The worker Osman whom Hassan Bey ordered shot  
can lie on one side of me, and on the other side  
the martyr Aysha, who gave birth in the rye  
and died inside of forty days.  
Tractors and songs can pass below the cemetery -  
in the dawn light, new people, the smell of burnt gasoline,  
fields held in common, water in canals,  
no drought or fear of the police.  
Of course, we won't hear those songs:  
the dead lie stretched out underground  
and rot like black branches,  
deaf, dumb, and blind under the earth.  
But, I sang those songs  
before they were written,  
I smelled the burnt gasoline  
before the blueprints for the tractors were drawn.  
As for my neighbors,  
the worker Osman and the martyr Aysha,  
they felt the great longing while alive,  
maybe without even knowing it.  
Comrades, if I die before that day, I mean  
- and it's looking more and more likely -  
bury me in a village cemetery in Anatolia,  
and if there's one handy,  
a plane tree could stand at my head,  
I wouldn't need a stone or anything.

Nazim Hikmet, 27 April 1953

Moscow, Barviha Hospital

Trans. by Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk (1993)

# ON LIVING

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## I

Living is no laughing matter:  
you must live with great seriousness  
like a squirrel, for example-  
I mean without looking for something beyond and above  
living,  
I mean living must be your whole occupation.  
Living is no laughing matter:  
you must take it seriously,  
so much so and to such a degree  
that, for example, your hands tied behind your back,  
your back to the wall,  
or else in a laboratory  
in your white coat and safety glasses,  
you can die for people-  
even for people whose faces you've never seen,  
even though you know living  
is the most real, the most beautiful thing.  
I mean, you must take living so seriously  
that even at seventy, for example, you'll plant olive trees-  
and not for your children, either,  
but because although you fear death you don't believe it,  
because living, I mean, weighs heavier.

## II

Let's say you're seriously ill, need surgery -  
which is to say we might not get  
from the white table.  
Even though it's impossible not to feel sad

about going a little too soon,  
we'll still laugh at the jokes being told,  
we'll look out the window to see it's raining,  
or still wait anxiously  
for the latest newscast ...  
Let's say we're at the front-  
for something worth fighting for, say.  
There, in the first offensive, on that very day,  
we might fall on our face, dead.  
We'll know this with a curious anger,  
but we'll still worry ourselves to death  
about the outcome of the war, which could last years.  
Let's say we're in prison  
and close to fifty,  
and we have eighteen more years, say,  
before the iron doors will open.  
We'll still live with the outside,  
with its people and animals, struggle and wind-  
I mean with the outside beyond the walls.  
I mean, however and wherever we are,  
we must live as if we will never die.

### III

This earth will grow cold,  
a star among stars  
and one of the smallest,  
a gilded mote on blue velvet-  
I mean this, our great earth.  
This earth will grow cold one day,  
not like a block of ice  
or a dead cloud even  
but like an empty walnut it will roll along  
in pitch-black space ...  
You must grieve for this right now

-you have to feel this sorrow now-  
for the world must be loved this much  
if you're going to say ``I lived" ...

Nazim Hikmet  
February, 1948  
Trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk - 1993

## **SOME ADVICE TO THOSE WHO WILL SERVE TIME IN PRISON**

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If instead of being hanged by the neck  
you're thrown inside  
for not giving up hope  
in the world, your country, your people,  
if you do ten or fifteen years  
apart from the time you have left,  
you won't say,  
``Better I had swung from the end of a rope  
like a flag" -  
You'll put your foot down and live.  
It may not be a pleasure exactly,  
but it's your solemn duty  
to live one more day  
to spite the enemy.  
Part of you may live alone inside,  
like a tone at the bottom of a well.  
But the other part  
must be so caught up  
in the flurry of the world  
that you shiver there inside  
when outside, at forty days' distance, a leaf moves.  
To wait for letters inside,  
to sing sad songs,

or to lie awake all night staring at the ceiling  
is sweet but dangerous.  
Look at your face from shave to shave,  
forget your age,  
watch out for lice  
and for spring nights,  
and always remember  
to eat every last piece of bread-  
also, don't forget to laugh heartily.  
And who knows,  
the woman you love may stop loving you.  
Don't say it's no big thing:  
it's like the snapping of a green branch  
to the man inside.  
To think of roses and gardens inside is bad,  
to think of seas and mountains is good.  
Read and write without rest,  
and I also advise weaving  
and making mirrors.  
I mean, it's not that you can't pass  
ten or fifteen years inside  
and more -  
you can,  
as long as the jewel  
on the left side of your chest doesn't lose its luster!

Nazim Hikmet - May 1949

### **The Blue-Eyed Giant, the Miniature Woman and the Honeysuckle**

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He was a blue-eyed giant,  
He loved a miniature woman.

The woman's dream was of a miniature house  
with a garden where honeysuckle grows  
in a riot of colours  
that sort of house.

The giant loved like a giant,  
and his hands were used to such big things  
that the giant could not  
make the building,  
could not knock on the door  
of the garden where the honeysuckle grows  
in a riot of colours  
at that house.

He was a blue-eyed giant,  
he loved a miniature woman,  
a mini miniature woman.  
The woman was hungry for comfort  
and tired of the giant's long strides.  
And bye bye off she went to the embraces of a rich dwarf  
with a garden where the honeysuckle grows  
in a riot of colours  
that sort of house.

Now the blue-eyed giant realizes,  
a giant isn't even a graveyard for love:  
in the garden where the honeysuckle grows  
in a riot of colours  
that sort of house...

## THE STRANGEST CREATURE ON EARTH

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You're like a scorpion, my brother,  
you live in cowardly darkness  
like a scorpion.  
You're like a sparrow, my brother,  
always in a sparrow's flutter.  
You're like a clam, my brother,  
closed like a clam, content,  
And you're frightening, my brother,  
like the mouth of an extinct volcano.  
Not one,  
not five-  
unfortunately, you number millions.  
You're like a sheep, my brother:  
when the cloaked drover raises his stick,  
you quickly join the flock  
and run, almost proudly, to the slaughterhouse.  
I mean you're strangest creature on earth-  
even stranger than the fish  
that couldn't see the ocean for the water.  
And the oppression in this world  
is thanks to you.  
And if we're hungry, tired, covered with blood,  
and still being crushed like grapes for our wine,  
the fault is yours-  
I can hardly bring myself to say it,  
but most of the fault, my dear brother, is yours.



## **The Walnut Tree**

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My head foaming clouds, sea inside me and out  
I am a walnut tree in Gulhane Park  
an old walnut, knot by knot, shred by shred  
Neither you are aware of this, nor the police

I am a walnut tree in Gulhane Park  
My leaves are nimble, nimble like fish in water  
My leaves are sheer, sheer like a silk handkerchief  
pick, wipe, my rose, the tear from your eyes  
My leaves are my hands, I have one hundred thousand  
I touch you with one hundred thousand hands, I touch Istanbul  
My leaves are my eyes, I look in amazement  
I watch you with one hundred thousand eyes, I watch Istanbul  
Like one hundred thousand hearts, beat, beat my leaves

I am a walnut tree in Gulhane Park  
neither you are aware of this, nor the police

translated from Turkish by **Gun Gencer**

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Transcription by **Atila Kadak**.