

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## **The Top of the Slope: So It Comes So It Will Not Go On II (1976)**

Aziz Nesin (1915 – 1995)

Aziz Nesin, whose real name is Mehmet Nusret Nesin, is a writer of humor and fiction. He graduates from Kuleli Military High School in 1935, the Turkish Military Academy in 1937, and the Military School of Engineering in 1939. In the second volume of his three-part autobiographical work *So It Comes, So It Will Not Go On*, titled *The Top of the Slope*, he recounts his experiences from middle school up to the beginning of high school. He refuses to attend school for weeks, believing he doesn't have the right to study at Darüşşafaka, where only fatherless children are accepted. Eventually, he has to drop out. Not knowing what to do with his life, he runs away from home. By chance, he runs into Uncle Galip, who helps him earn a primary school diploma, and he returns home. After coming back, he enrolls in Vefa Middle School. But commuting from the island to the school is exhausting, and he cannot afford all the textbooks, which makes it hard for him to focus on his studies. After a while, his father finds work as a gardener in a house in Istanbul, and they move there. Yet Aziz, thinking he is still not a worthy son, runs away again—this time to Uncle Galip. He stays for a while in the village where Uncle Galip lives, then returns and enrolls in Davutpaşa Middle School. His father builds a makeshift house on a plot of land he rents, but Aziz is so unhappy in this home—where he doesn't even have a bed—that after finishing middle school, he decides, like his friends, to attend a military school. He moves into Çengelköy Military Middle School. In this boarding school, he finds the structured life he lacks at home. However, the abuse he witnesses there becomes a major disappointment. Though his sense of justice is shaken, he maintains a feeling of gratitude toward the state that gives him food, clothing, a bed to sleep in, and a good education. He becomes the top student and earns the affection of his classmates. The seeds of the writer Aziz Nesin are planted in this school. Yet one day, he reads a news article about the Highway Obligation Law, dated January 19, 1925, which states that villagers must either pay for road construction or work on it themselves, if they can't afford to pay. This becomes a turning point for him. While he spends his middle school years full of gratitude toward the state, by the time he enters high school, he is a young man who decides his gratitude should not be directed at the state—but at the people.

### PEOPLE

Adil Bey	Teacher
Atıf Bey	Teacher
Bahri Bey	Teacher
Cevat Bey	Teacher
Davut Şükrü	Teacher
Ali from Ünye	Friend of Ibrahim the Head-Seller
Fatma teyze	Neighbor
Fikri Servet	Teacher
Galip amca	Father's friend
Hafız Tevfik	Neighbor
Hasan	Father's friend
Hulusi Öktem	Music teacher
Ibrahim the Head Seller	Acquaintance of his father
Ismail Hakkı Bey	Principal and teacher at Çengelköy Military Middle School
Naci Bey	Father's boss
Nizamettin Bey	Teacher
Hakkı Raif Ayyıldız	Teacher
Haydar Bey	Mehmet Hilmi's father
Hayret abla	Naci Bey's daughter
Hikmet Bey	Chemist
Mehmet Hilmi	Friend
Mehmet Efendi	Tradesman
Nazmi the Jumper	Teacher
Salim Bey	Stepfather of his mother

Sami Yetik  
Suat Bey  
Süreyya Bey  
Zeynep Hanım

Artist and teacher  
Vice principal and teacher at Çengelköy Military Middle School  
Teacher  
Mother's friend

## SYNOPSIS

After leaving Darüşşafaka, Aziz Nesin sees his friends continuing school and finds himself lost, unsure of what to do with his life. He runs away from home, hoping to find work in some city. He boards a train to Izmit—a place he has never seen before. After spending all the money in his pocket, he sits helplessly on a bench. There, he meets a couple and learns that they are teachers who have come for training to learn the Latin alphabet. When they discover that Aziz already knows the Latin alphabet, they take him with them to the school where they are staying. Despite his young age, Aziz impresses the teachers he meets with his knowledge. After a meal in the cafeteria, he unexpectedly runs into Uncle Galip—one of the instructors teaching these teachers. Upon hearing about Aziz's situation, Uncle Galip arranges for him to take an exam to receive a primary school diploma from Akçakoca Primary School. Aziz returns home holding his diploma. He enrolls at Vefa Middle School. But the commute from the island takes six hours each day, and he struggles because he doesn't have a bag to carry his many school materials. To save money, he also wears his Darüşşafaka school coat, which lets him ride the ferry for free, but it makes his load even heavier. To ease the burden, his father suggests he leave some of his belongings with Ibrahim the Head-Seller, an acquaintance who stays in an inn. But this change causes his daily commute to stretch to seven hours. Exhausted and unable to afford all his textbooks, Aziz begins falling behind in his classes. He spends some days and nights at the inn. During this time, he comes face-to-face with Istanbul's darker side—entwined with crime and violence. Later, when his father finds work as a gardener at the house of a man named Naci Bey, they move into the city. Still unsure about his future and disappointed with his school performance, Aziz heads to the village where Uncle Galip now lives—without telling his father. This time, Uncle Galip is not a teacher but a village imam. Aziz stays with him for a while, then returns and enrolls at Davutpaşa Middle School. His father begins selling vegetables and fruit grown in a rented garden and sets up a makeshift home there. But the house is so uncomfortable that, seeking an escape, Aziz enrolls at Çengelköy Military Middle School with his friends. Although he is deeply disillusioned by the cases of sexual abuse he witnesses there, he still feels grateful for the opportunities the state provides. That gratitude changes when he reads a newspaper article about the law enacted on January 19, 1925, which forces villagers to pay road taxes or, if they cannot afford it, to work in road construction. By the time he begins high school, Aziz no longer directs his gratitude toward the state but toward the people who keep it standing.

## EVENTS

### *The Mulberry and the Fig Tree*

Because his mother loves mulberries and figs so much, before her death, she asks his father to plant a mulberry tree at the head of her grave and a fig tree at her feet. She says that birds will perch on the branches of these trees and sing. Aziz Nesin and his father go to her grave on Heybeliada, and his father plants a mulberry at the head and a fig tree at the foot, just as she wishes. But the saplings don't grow. His father plants them again, but those saplings also freeze during the winter.

### *Shame*

Since there is water scarcity on the island, being a water vendor is a profitable job, and three of their neighbors work as water vendors. One of them, Şerif Efendi, is one of the island's old residents, a man from the Black Sea region. He has a stone house built to the right of their home and rents it out. He has a son and a daughter. The son goes to military school and eventually becomes a general. Above the slope in front of their house stand three houses belonging to Ahmet Agha. He and his wife live in the two-story house at the front; Hafız the Waterman lives in the single-story house at the back. He rents the third house as a summer home.

When his mother dies, Hafız the Waterman brings them three donkey-loads of water so they can wash her body. Aziz Nesin's father gives him thirty cents to pay the waterman, but for some reason, Aziz Nesin doesn't hand over the money. After a week of waiting, the waterman asks his father for the payment. The father doesn't say anything about having given the money to his son and immediately pays the debt again. That evening, when he comes home, he asks Aziz whether he gives the money

to the waterman. Aziz doesn't say a word, but he feels such shame that he carries that feeling within him for the rest of his life.

### *Hafiz the Waterman*

Because Hafiz the Waterman starts the job later in life, he isn't as wealthy as the others; he is a tenant. His name is Tefvik, but he prefers to be addressed as "hafız" meaning a Quran reciter or memorizer. He is from Erzincan and, due to his fast speech, often spits while talking. As he doesn't have a stable for his donkey, he uses theirs. Aziz Nesin's father doesn't charge him rent for the stable. Moreover, he particularly likes him because, just like himself, Hafiz is a bigoted man who is hostile toward Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. When they talk about Atatürk, they refer to him as "the Blind One" due to his strabismus, and as a "dönme" since he is from Salonica and is believed to be of Jewish origin. ("Dönme" originally refers to Jews who converted to Islam in the 17th century during the Ottoman Empire. These converts were often from the Sephardic Jewish community who had fled the Spanish Inquisition and settled in the Ottoman Empire).

Hafiz exaggerates stories from his time fighting at the Sinai Front. Even as a child, Aziz Nesin doesn't find one of his stories believable, and after that, he never believes anything he says. In that story, Hafiz claims that while fighting alongside the Germans, he gets very angry at the German infidels who constantly ask him for cold beer. One day, when he sees there is no cold beer left in the icebox, he panics and fills the bottles with mule urine. After chilling the bottles, he gives them to the Germans, who drink them thinking it's beer. Although Aziz Nesin has never tasted beer, he believes the Germans would have noticed and concludes that Hafiz is lying.

Hafiz Tefvik has a child named Cazip. Aziz Nesin occasionally goes to their house to play with him. But one day, he hears that Hafiz has beaten his wife because of him. Allegedly, Hafiz comes home for lunch and finds his wife breastfeeding their baby. At that moment, Aziz is supposedly watching her breasts. Aziz Nesin can't recall any such incident. But after hearing this, he never goes to their house again.

### *A Note*

After the previous parts of Aziz Nesin's memoirs are published, he hears that he is being discussed in mosques and initially thinks that it's because of the charity work he did by establishing a foundation. However, later on, his lawyer friend Burhan Apaydın's acquaintance and one of his clients, who is an imam, tells him that the writings of Aziz Nesin are being used by reactionary imams in mosques to promote hostility towards Atatürk. Upon learning this, Aziz Nesin states that the things he says about Atatürk are not his own thoughts but those of his father, that by sharing them, he sheds light on a certain period, that he has respect for Atatürk, and that those who deny Atatürk's place in history do so either out of being misled, ignorance, or treason. He points out that he is not a Kemalist or an Atatürkist but that Atatürkism is a step in Turkey's progress.

### *Uncle Galip*

His father sends him to Uncle Galip to keep him away from the sorrowful atmosphere at home. At that time, Uncle Galip is teaching in the village of Balçık in Gebze, a place written in Arabic letters as Gegbuze. After Aziz Nesin arrives at Gebze station by train, he walks to the village. The village is entered through the cemetery, and in the middle of the village, there is a mosque with a collapsed minaret. No call to prayer is heard, nor are there prayers performed there. Uncle Galip lives in an old two-room house next to this mosque. He stays in one room and uses the other room as a classroom. Everywhere is covered in dust. He sleeps with Aziz Nesin on a dirty bed on a divan in the room.

Uncle Galip seems to have aged twenty years. He has lost his former cheerfulness and hope. He writes satirical verses to himself. Due to his very low monthly earnings, he cannot bring his mother from Gereede to stay with him, nor can he visit her, which deeply saddens him. The villagers, just like they used to do with imams, send him food every day. Every day, two bowls of meatless food, unsalted ayran, and homemade bread arrive, but since the bread is baked weekly in each house, it is usually full of worms.

One day, when they go to the market in Gebze, they sit in a coffeehouse with Uncle Galip's dervish friends. Uncle Galip reads one of his poems from a notebook he takes out of his pocket. Then, his friends read their poems. Another day, they go to a neighboring village. It's there that Aziz Nesin rides a horse for the first time. The horse carries him to the barn door. The saddle hurts his thighs, so for several days, he walks with difficulty. However, Uncle Galip does not show much interest in him. He is

not the same as before. In the end, his father comes and takes him back, and they return home together.

### *Skiping School*

As Aziz Nesin gets more and more afraid that his father will be discovered to be alive, he starts to involuntarily use expressions like “my father said” or “when my father suddenly comes” while talking with his friends at school. One day, a friend named Fikret asks him whether his father is alive or not. Not knowing what to say, he stammers. Since he doesn’t want to go to school, he writes many fake excuse notes from his mother’s mouth. Although he enjoys spending Ramadan at school, he spends that Ramadan at home. Since the only mosque on the island is at the Naval High School and people have difficulty coming and going for Taraweeh prayers, his father starts leading the prayers in the house of Ahmet Agha. To call people to prayer, he recites the evening azan in front of the house. Even though he thinks his voice is beautiful at the time, he gradually realizes that people appreciate him not because of his voice but because he is just a child reciting the azan.

### *Mother Fatma*

While Ahmet Agha is a difficult man to communicate with, his wife, Fatma, is a woman of great manners and a kind heart. Fatma is a Black woman, and according to the traditions of her country, she has three scars on her face. She speaks beautifully, has no children of her own, but loves everyone’s children as if they were her own, and everyone around her addresses her as “Mother Fatma.” Aziz Nesin finds maternal tenderness in her.

When Fatma cuts watermelon or melon at home, she spreads the seeds on a piece of paper and dries them in the sun. When Aziz Nesin visits her, they sit together in a room with two windows facing the sea and eat these seeds while watching the sea. Even after many years, Aziz Nesin still can’t bring himself to throw away the seeds after eating melon or watermelon, and, just like Mother Fatma, he dries and eats them.

He wonders how she came to Istanbul, how she learned Turkish, and how she married Ahmet Agha, but he never finds out. No one can imagine Ahmet Agha as a match for her. In fact, everyone attributes the three houses of Ahmet Agha to Mother Fatma’s thriftiness. However, one day, Mother Fatma becomes angry at the whole world. A couple moves into the summer house rented by Ahmet Agha. Although the rent for the summer house is normally paid in advance, Ahmet Agha does not collect it, and the couple doesn’t pay the rent either. Moreover, they do not leave the house even after the summer is over. Ahmet Agha begins to visit the house frequently.

One day, when Mother Fatma goes there as well, she finds him having sex with the female tenant. Without saying anything, she returns home. Though she does not tell anyone, both Ahmet Agha and the woman talk about it. Mother Fatma is hurt, and she never speaks to anyone again. The curtains are always drawn in the windows where she once watched the sea while eating seeds. Aziz Nesin can no longer visit her as he once did. Over time, they grow distant from each other.

### *The Burden of Making Ends Meet*

During the time when the economic crisis in the U.S. spreads around the world, unemployment and scarcity also affect Turkey. Since Aziz Nesin’s father does not have a fixed job, he can never speak clearly about his father’s profession when talking about him. While living on the island, he works as a gardener at a summer mansion, but once winter arrives, that job ends. However, every day he leaves the house as if he has a steady job, taking the ferry to Istanbul, and returns in the evening with inexpensive food. He even buys bread from Istanbul because it is cheaper there. Aziz Nesin and his sister collect plants and non-poisonous mushrooms from the countryside that they can cook and eat. They raise chickens and turkeys in their garden and sell the eggs to tuberculosis patients who come to the island for treatment. They carry water from a nearby fountain with churns. While carrying the water, Aziz Nesin envies the children who ask the housemaids or their mothers for water. However, years later, he realizes that this poverty gives him resilience and strength. He even writes a column thanking his father for not being a big man, which saves him from various disasters.

### *The Panic Created by a Mother and Daughter*

One day, as sunbathing on the rocks, Aziz Nesin hears footsteps and turns to see a mother and daughter from the neighborhood approaching. For a moment, he stands up, wanting to show himself to the neighbor’s daughter, but then dives into the sea. As soon as his head hits a rock at the bottom,

he quickly exits the water. When he notices blood flowing from his face, he looks around with embarrassment, trying to find the mother and daughter, but they have already passed by. When the bleeding doesn't stop, he goes home and applies salt and tobacco to his wound. He carries the mark for the rest of his life.

Another day, as he walks home with water-filled churns from the fountain, he struggles as the water spills every time the churns hit his legs, and his shoes fill with the spilled water. When he tries to let his arms hang down to carry the churns more comfortably, they hit the ground instead. Soon, he sees the mother and daughter walking towards him again. Upon seeing them, he quickly drops the churns. One of the churns topples, and the water pours out. He doesn't lift the churn, feeling as though he is being judged by them. The mother and daughter pass by without even noticing him. He goes back to the fountain, fills the churn again, and continues his walk.

### *The Neighbor's Wallet*

Autumn has arrived. The summer tenants in the house at the top of the slope in front of their house have not returned yet. One evening, as usual, the tenant comes back home on a donkey rented from a Greek man. When he arrives in front of the house, he dismounts with the help of the Greek man, rummages through his pockets, and, not finding what he's looking for, takes out his wallet from the inner pocket and pays the Greek man. The Greek man gives him the change and leaves, prodding the donkey. As the man raises his arm to ring the doorbell, the wallet falls to the ground. The door opens, and the man enters. Watching all this, Aziz Nesin immediately jumps up and presses the doorbell. When the man opens the door, Aziz Nesin points to the wallet on the ground. The man takes his swollen wallet and begins to count the money inside. He waits there, hoping the man might give him a little pocket money, but the man thanks him and closes the door.

### *Mother's Gravestone*

They wait one winter before having a gravestone made for his mother, thinking the grave needs time to settle properly. His father buys two gravestones with an old iron fence removed from another cemetery. Because the iron fence is bent, he spends days trying to straighten it. One of the gravestones has a floral relief; the other has some writing. His father asks him to erase the writing and inscribe the phrase "*Ve hüvel baki*" meaning "Only God is eternal." Aziz Nesin ties two pencils together and writes it in Arabic letters, along with his mother's name, birth and death dates. He adds "*Ruhuna Fatiha*" at the end. It is an Arabic phrase commonly used in Islamic cultures. It means "Fatiha (the first chapter of the Quran) for [someone's] soul" or "May the Fatiha be recited for their soul." It is a prayer or a wish for the deceased, asking for blessings and peace for them, specifically through the recitation of Surah Al-Fatiha, which is often recited for the dead. His father then carves what Aziz Nesin wrote in pencil into the stone with a chisel. The result is not perfect, but they feel satisfied with it. That's how his mother finally has a gravestone.

### *Marusa*

A beautiful Greek woman named Marusa and her husband Recep move into one of the neighboring houses. Recep falls in love with Marusa while serving at the Naval Academy, and after his discharge, he marries her. Recep is a fisherman, a handsome man whose smile suits him no matter what he wears. Since Marusa's mother and sister beg on the docks, Recep forbids her from seeing them. However, when he's not home, Marusa secretly invites them over and feeds them. After a while, the couple moves out. Aziz Nesin's father also moves their own house from the island to Istanbul, but they still visit it from time to time. During one of these visits, Aziz Nesin learns that Recep has killed Marusa out of jealousy and been jailed.

### *The Fire*

One day, before noon, a fire breaks out in a neighboring house. Since the houses are wooden and attached, everyone panics and rushes to carry their belongings outside. But Aziz Nesin's father stays calm. He insists the fire won't reach their house and that the wind will change direction. He remains inside, praying, and doesn't allow any furniture to be taken out. When people come to persuade him, he laughs and says, "Our house is insured—it won't burn!" Meanwhile, everyone fears that nails flying from the burning houses might ignite the pine trees. The fire truck arrives very late but sprays water on the houses at risk. Eventually, the wind really does change direction, and their house is saved.

### *A Sick Woman*

One of his father's friends, Hasan, works as a cook at the Naval Academy. After his first wife dies, he marries a younger woman who has epilepsy. When Hasan goes to work and his son leaves for his apprenticeship at the grocery store, the woman stays home alone. On days when she has seizures, she bruises herself by hitting walls and furniture. Not wanting to leave her alone, Hasan sometimes asks Aziz Nesin to keep her company. Aziz Nesin's father also visits often and reads prayers for her. One day, while Aziz is alone with her, she begins to have a seizure. He cannot leave her in that state or call for help. He waits nearby, making sure she doesn't fall down the stairs. Eventually, she starts crying with hiccups and wets herself. When she regains consciousness, she gets up and begins talking to herself. That's when he understands why people say she talks to jinn. Some even claim she's married to a male jinn. He stays with her until Hasan comes home in the evening. Later, his father asks her if she remembers what happened during the seizure. The woman talks about a young man, but Aziz Nesin believes she actually remembers nothing and is only repeating what his father suggests.

### *Sexuality*

Aziz Nesin never hears his father make an indecent comment. One day, as they walk past the house of his father's retired navy officer friend, his father complains about this man, who had suffered a stroke at a young age and hadn't taken good care of himself. He says that men who sleep with many women often suffer strokes and argues that a man shouldn't go too far in sexual relations. This is the only sexual education Aziz Nesin, who is only twelve years old at the time, receives from his father. He is pleased that his father thinks he is old enough to discuss such matters, but he listens silently without saying anything.

### *The Reflection of War on Children*

Five years have passed since the war with the Greeks ended, but hostility has not ceased. Because of this hostility, the children don't even like the blue and white colors of the Greek flag. One day, Aziz Nesin wears a blue and white striped athletic shirt his father had bought for him. When he wears it to school, his classmates scold him. After that, he refuses to wear the shirt again. Moreover, the children on the island also tease the Greek children. One day, a friend of Aziz Nesin convinces the children to collect stones. When they see a few Greek children, they start throwing stones at them. The Greek children flee without being able to defend themselves. Aziz Nesin, feeling ashamed, cannot bring himself to throw any of the stones in his pocket. He secretly throws them on the ground, away from his friends. Later, he distances himself from the friend who had organized this. Thirty-nine years later, when the book is translated into Greek, Aziz Nesin refers to this childhood memory in the introduction, wishing for a world full of peace.

### *Photographs*

Hasan's upstairs neighbor is a history teacher. This teacher, who is blind due to an illness, has sons who gradually lose their sight as well. These three boys, who never leave the house, either play the violin or wrestle with each other. Among the various belongings in the house, around two hundred or three hundred photographs somehow end up in the hands of Hasan's son. Aziz Nesin, believing that the men in the photos can be recognized by their posture and gaze as Turks, looks at these photos, thinking they are Turkish. However, none of them are dressed like Turks. Almost all are dressed in white. Many wear glasses and short pants or shorts. Some even have the colonial hats worn in warm, colonized countries. They all wear white sneakers. On the back of all the photos, the word "Malta" is written. Years later, Aziz Nesin realizes that these people are intellectuals sent to Malta by the British who occupied Istanbul, and he feels deeply saddened that he was unable to keep or save the lost photos.

### *Salim Bey*

Salim Bey, who adopted Aziz Nesin's mother, opens a shop selling products like olive oil and soap. On some days when Aziz skips school, he visits Salim Bey's shop. He feels embarrassed that people might think he goes there only to get pocket money, but secretly he wishes to receive it because he needs the money. He promises himself not to visit the shop again but later gives in and goes back. He doesn't want to go home because, since his mother died of tuberculosis, everything he uses is kept separate from their own things. However, throughout his life, he feels loved by Salim Bey and his family.

### *Paper*

Aziz Nesin mentions that, in his childhood, when people saw bread or a piece of paper on the ground, they would immediately lift it up to a higher place, and he always respected both empty and filled paper. The reason for this is an old man he knew as a child. This man, a friend of his father who was older than him, was a well-dressed and clean-shaven Cretan petition writer. At the time, the Latin alphabet had not yet been accepted, so he wrote petition letters in Arabic script for the courts. One evening, Aziz Nesin and his father go to the courthouse and, with this elderly man, they board a ferry to Haydarpasa. From there, they take a train to Pendik. Since they will be staying overnight at the Cretan petition writer's house, Aziz Nesin wonders what kind of poor house this man must be living in and, feeling sorry for him, reflects on it silently. However, when they arrive at a three-story house, a hybrid of a mansion and a seaside villa, near the shore, he is astonished. That night, they sleep in a comfortable bed with white sheets.

The next morning, his father explains the situation. The elderly Cretan man is actually from a very wealthy family, but when he left Crete, he had to leave most of his possessions behind. In exchange for the property he left, the government had given him this house, one of the many houses left abandoned by non-Muslims who had been forced to leave the country. Due to his old age, he could not find work, so he had to start working as a petition writer.

The next day is the weekend, so they spend the entire day in that house. Aziz Nesin, after carelessly tearing a piece of paper in half, is told by the elderly man that anyone who does not respect paper cannot be enlightened. The man then carefully folds the paper and, along the fold, gently tears it in half. Unlike the torn paper Aziz Nesin had created, the paper the elderly man tore was smooth and evenly divided.

#### *Uncle*

After his mother's death, Aziz Nesin's father begins to see his older brother Şaban, whom he has never liked due to his selfishness and irresponsibility. However, they only meet occasionally. As a result, on some days when Aziz Nesin skips school, he stays at his uncle's house. His uncle had moved from Bebek to a small two-story wooden house in the courtyard of the Arab Mosque in Beyoğlu. He lives there with his wife, son, and daughter. His uncle works as a night watchman at a tobacco warehouse, but because he likes to dress well and have fun, he looks more like the owner of the warehouse than a night watchman. He raises his four-year-old son to be just like him, encouraging him to curse more and break more things whenever the boy does so.

His uncle has a few chickens and a rooster. One day, when he sees his rooster being beaten by another rooster, he gets angry and decides to kill it. However, Aziz Nesin prevents him. He immediately goes to Heybeliada, where he picks up their rooster that have been beating other roosters in the neighborhood. On the ferry, a man sees him with the rooster and asks where he is taking it. When Aziz Nesin explains the situation, the man tells him that the rooster is not a fighting rooster and needs to stay with the hens in the coop for a few days to get used to its place before it can fight.

Following the man's advice, Aziz Nesin keeps the rooster in the coop for a few days. One day, when the rooster faces the other rooster in the mosque courtyard, it starts to fight. As the roosters fight, many men come to watch. The muezzin of the mosque, who owns the other rooster, also arrives and cheers. Because Aziz Nesin's rooster is shorter, it gets beaten by the other rooster. As the blood of his rooster sticks to the white rooster's feathers, Aziz Nesin wishes for someone to stop the fight, but it seems that everyone is enjoying watching the fight. Finally, the rooster manages to stab the white rooster in the neck with its spur, mortally wounding it. The other rooster's owner quickly takes it away. Realizing that the man will eventually kill the rooster, Aziz Nesin regrets what happened. After all, a rooster will end up being killed either way. A while later, when Aziz Nesin skips school again and goes to visit his uncle, he learns that his uncle has had his own rooster killed. Thus, he loses his own rooster as well.

#### *Father's Trust*

On the days when Aziz Nesin skips school and stays at his father's acquaintances or at his uncle's house, he encounters his father visiting. He lies, telling his father that school is on vacation. Each time, his father believes him. Aziz Nesin feels crushed under his father's trust and dreams of achieving real success to impress him. He looks at job listings in a newspaper called *Köroğlu*, but none of the jobs are suitable for a child his age. Eventually, he lies to his father, telling him that he was promoted to the sixth grade without an exam because he was so successful at school. His father, believing this lie, tells

him that he is smart enough to even skip to the seventh grade. Aziz Nesin notes that this kind of unquestioning trust from his father shames him, forcing him to become a truly trustworthy and credible person. He mentions that this approach will have positive outcomes for some children, like it did for him, but for others, it may backfire.

#### *Magazine*

When he has money, he buys the magazine *Children's Voice*. Sometimes, he also participates in the competitions that the magazine organizes. Along with the magazine, he reads a newspaper called *Köroğlu*. This newspaper publishes the photos of students who successfully complete their grade and the writings they send about what they think about the future. He sends an article with his photo about what he expects from the future. This is his first article published in the press. However, Aziz Nesin doesn't remember what he wrote in that article.

#### *A Hat*

One day, he plans to go to school by taking the ferry from the island. When the ferry stops at Burgazada, he almost cannot resist the urge not to get off. A little later, when it arrives at Kınalıada, he cannot hold back and gets off. It is his first time on Kınalıada. He walks around the island. Since it is winter, there aren't many people around. While walking on the pier, he notices something hitting the shore. As he approaches, he realizes that it is a black velvet hat. His father has started wearing a cap instead of a hat because he considers wearing a hat as something impious. However, when Aziz Nesin returns home and tells his father that school is canceled due to an infectious disease, he gives him the hat, and since they got it without paying for it, he wears it for a while.

#### *Lice*

In the days when he skips school, one of the people he stays with is Ismail Efendi, who lives in a two-story wooden house in Kasımpaşa. He lives with his wife, Fatma Hanım, and her son and daughter from a previous marriage. The woman's son is a sailor, so he rarely comes home, but her daughter always roams around with dirty clothes, messy hair, and drooling.

Whenever Aziz Nesin stays in their house, he starts itching because he has gotten lice. One day, the neighbor's daughter tells him that Fatma Hanım has bathed and cleaned the mute girl, but some bodies always produce lice, and the girl is suffering from that. On a day when he goes to school, he sees the neighbor's daughter and her mother working as janitors. They are happy to see him, but he becomes upset because he fears they might tell his father that he skipped school.

#### *Doing a Job Well*

Ismail Efendi, who is a master of pier construction, enjoys talking about his successes at work. Since he has worked on piers along the Marmara and Aegean coasts, he visits home once every two weeks. Aziz Nesin vividly remembers the joy he saw in him when he returned from Karabiga. While repairing the pier in Karabiga, Ismail Efendi tells the engineer that the tree trunks used as pilings should not have their bark removed. The engineer disagrees, claiming that insects, fish, and other marine creatures will make nests in the bark. Ismail Efendi explains that the bark will turn into lime and stone over time, allowing the tree trunks to remain sturdy at the bottom of the sea, whereas peeled trunks will rot more quickly. However, the engineer doesn't agree, and his instructions are followed. Days later, the engineer admits he was wrong. He tells Ismail Efendi that he saw a pier with both barked and peeled wood pilings, and the barked ones remained stronger. Ismail Efendi joyfully retells this story many times. Aziz Nesin is so impressed by this that in his play *Can You Come For a Bit*, he has a master tell his apprentice that even if a person does a job as simple as whistling, they should do it in a way that distinguishes them from others. In other words, someone may not be doing something grand, but they can still be the best at it. Aziz Nesin learns this from Ismail Efendi.

Fatma Hanım's son from her previous marriage, Ismail, rarely comes home. When he does, Aziz Nesin joins him to go to the ship where he works as a crane operator. Ismail unloads goods from the ship's hold with the crane. Aziz Nesin, who watches him all day, wonders if he could ever become a crane operator if he cannot study, as he is so impressed by Ismail's skill in moving large things with just a few hand movements.

#### *Zeynep Hanım*

Zeynep Hanım, whom he stays with during the days he skips school, is the woman who marries a fourth time to an Albanian after her first husband is murdered by stabbing, as mentioned in the first



volume of his memoirs. To reach her house, one has to pass through a steep slope in the Gypsy neighborhood in Kasımpaşa. This neighborhood, filled with one-story wooden houses covered with tin, is so full of children that Aziz Nesin can never believe how so many children fit into these small houses. Every time he passes through, he is afraid of the children bothering him. However, this fear never comes true. Years later, he becomes friends with some of the people from this community in prison. In fact, he thinks some of them might be the children who once feared him. But back then, because of this fear, he chooses to take a quiet rural path to avoid passing by their homes on his way to Zeynep Hanım's house.

One day, when he is on his way from Fatma Hanım's house to Zeynep Hanım's, there is no one around, so he starts scratching comfortably. However, the urge to scratch is so strong that he cannot stop himself. Eventually, a louse crawls into his hand. He immediately climbs into a ditch and takes off all his clothes. When he sees the lice on his underwear, he feels disgusted. He carefully picks off every louse he finds. He then gets dressed and goes to Zeynep Hanım's house.

In the evening, Zeynep Hanım notices that he has been scratching and calls him over to check. When she realizes that he has lice, she asks him to take off all his clothes. Aziz Nesin notices that she secretly cries, and he understands that a woman as clean as his mother would be upset that her son has become infested with lice due to neglect. In reality, he is not infested because of neglect, but because he is going to a house that he knows is full of lice. He wears the clothes that Zeynep Hanım washes and dries for him.

Zeynep Hanım's husband's three brothers also live next to their house. They all grow the fruits and vegetables they need in their gardens. The gardens stretch up a hill, where there are fig trees. One day, a group of students on a field trip with their teacher comes to this hill and starts climbing the fig tree in the garden to eat the figs. Zeynep Hanım's Albanian husband calls out to the children, but since he does not speak good Turkish, he is mocked and ignored. Aziz Nesin gets angry at the situation and, taking courage from his Darüşşafaka uniform, similar to that of an official, goes to the children. As he approaches them, he begins to feel more intensely that he is actually a child as well. However, especially upset by the fact that the teachers do not warn the children, he says a few words to them. But no one takes him seriously. The teacher does not even care. He returns, crying with anger. He plans to write to the *Köroğlu* newspaper, which publishes pictures and writings, to shame these students and their teacher who ate the figs from the tree without permission. But he does not know which school they are from, what grade they are in, or who their teacher is. Moreover, while scolding the children, he asks them how they could behave this way, even though they are students. The reason he asks this is that he can no longer see himself as a student. According to him, a student would never do such a thing.

#### *Physical and Sexual*

On a day when Aziz Nesin is not able to fully recall the season but is certain that the weather is warm, he throws one of the mattresses from the room onto the floor, spreads a cold sheet on it, and crawls under the cold blanket. As the curtains flutter with the wind, everything seems to be moving. He feels like he is lying in a boat on a rolling sea. In a state between sleep and wakefulness, as he lifts the blanket, he sees a woman lying beside him with her bare legs spread open. He then relaxes with a feeling of dizziness. He is aware that he is experiencing something secret, but he also knows that everyone goes through this.

#### *In Kemerburgaz*

One of the people he stays with when skipping school is his father's acquaintance who lives in Kemerburgaz. This man grows vegetables and fruits, brings them to the market with a cart, and sells them to the vendors. Aziz Nesin remembers this man every time he sees celery because he saw celery on his cart several times in the past.

During his stay at his house, the man's son takes him to the café. After the elderly people leave, the young men remaining inside ignore him, treating him like a child, and talk indecently. One of them talks about his visits to a brothel with great enthusiasm, and his friends listen with curiosity. Aziz Nesin hears these things for the first time.

The man's brother is a blacksmith. During the day, he goes to his shop to watch how horseshoes are made. He is very impressed by how the blacksmith cuts the horse's hooves so neatly. To him,

trimming the hooves so perfectly is as difficult as performing surgery. This skilled blacksmith also pulls out his aching tooth one evening. One night, when his tooth hurts, the man he is staying with takes him to the café, and his blacksmith brother pulls his tooth with pliers under the luxury lamp.

#### *The Issue of Skipping School*

His father somehow realizes that he has skipped school and calmly asks why he didn't go. He cannot tell his father that he feels ashamed to take the rights of children without fathers because his father is alive. He stays silent. But this time, his father presses further. Finally, he lies and says that he was expelled from school. When his father hears this, he freezes. With a calmer tone, he wants to know why. He then says that on the day he was supposed to come home, he accidentally wore someone else's pants and was expelled for stealing them. At that moment, his father turns pale. He asks no more questions.

One of the reasons he skips Darüşşafaka is that his father is alive, but another reason is that his classmates mock him. Years later, one of his sons, who studies abroad, says that he wants to move to a house because his friends make fun of him for reading so many books in the school he attends. He tells his son that he, too, went through similar experiences. Because he knew more than his peers, they treated him like an old dwarf and called him "Kart," which means "Old Man." But over time, he learned to ignore what others said.

Because his father doesn't believe what he says, he investigates and learns that it isn't true. After realizing that he was not expelled for theft, he relaxes and no longer cares whether his son goes to school. However, Salim Bey, who adopted his mother, looks for ways to get him back into Darüşşafaka, and he has a friend who knows the school principal, Ali Kâmi Bey (later known as Akyüz). He has the friend write a letter asking the principal to take him back to the school.

Twelve-year-old Aziz Nesin takes this letter and goes directly to the school. He promises himself that if the principal accepts him into the school, he will work hard and not fall behind his friends. However, after the principal opens and reads the letter, he tells him that it is no longer possible to accept him back into the school, and he will write a reply to the person who wrote the letter. After hearing this, Aziz Nesin leaves the school with great disappointment. It is impossible for him to return here now. However, for years, he repeatedly dreams of walking down the corridors of the school and entering the principal's office to deliver that letter.

#### *Running Away from Home*

School is on break, and all his friends have graduated from elementary school and moved on to middle school. He, however, is left behind, unsure of what grade he's even in. Every time he remembers what his mother said before she died—how comforted she felt knowing he was in boarding school—he feels compelled to act. One night, just before dawn, he secretly takes some money from his father's pocket and sets off to a city in Anatolia, hoping to find work somewhere, doing anything.

He boards a train from Haydarpaşa and decides to get off wherever looks nice. This is his fourth time leaving Istanbul. The first time, he goes to Tekirdağ with Uncle Galip; the second, to a village where Uncle Galip works as a teacher; and the third, to Karabiga, where Ismail works. When the train reaches Izmit, he gets off. It's his first time there. He starts wandering the streets, looking for work. He peeks into restaurants, trying to guess whether they might hire him. He sets his eyes on one but hesitates to go in. After a while, he gathers his courage and steps inside. As soon as he enters, a waiter, mistaking him for a customer, rushes to show him a seat. Since he can't bring himself to say he's looking for a job, he has no choice but to sit. Besides, he is very hungry.

After eating, he walks along the street. He stops in front of a cinema, goes in, watches a film, and comes back out. A few steps later, he spots a small ice cream shop. Craving ice cream, he uses his last bit of money to buy some. After finishing it, he walks toward the sea. He heads to a park he sees and sits on a bench, wondering what to do next. Then, a young woman and man sitting on a nearby bench catch his attention. The young woman plays with the man's coat buttons, while he strokes her hair. After a while, he finds himself talking with them. They are both teachers from Istanbul. Since the Latin alphabet has been adopted, they have come to Izmit for a training program on the new writing system. When the young teachers find out that he can already read and write using the Latin alphabet, they become more interested in him. In the evening, they take him along to where they're staying.

They go to Akçakoca Elementary School. In one of the classrooms, in the presence of other teachers, they ask him to write something on the blackboard using the Latin alphabet. As he writes, the teachers are amazed. Enjoying their attention, he also draws caricatures of a few politicians. He has learned to draw caricatures by studying those in the newspaper *Köroğlu*. When it's time for dinner, they go down to the dining hall. Around two or three hundred teachers are there. Male and female teachers sit at separate tables. He finds a spot among the male teachers. After the meal, as they are climbing the stairs, something surprising happens—he runs into Uncle Galip coming down. As soon as Uncle Galip sees him, he asks what he's doing there. Without thinking, he replies, "I came to see you, Uncle Galip." Uncle Galip, curious about the boy who can write in Latin letters and draw caricatures, has come to the dining hall to see him. When he realizes the boy is him, he tries not to show any emotion, but Aziz Nesin believes he is pleased.

### *Not Caring*

During the day, while the teachers are in class, he wanders around Izmit. Two well-dressed, arrogant young men, older than him, stand at the doors of neighboring lumber shops. Every time he passes by, they tease him. He ignores them and keeps walking. Though he could take a different route and is afraid they might attack him, he always walks past them slowly, showing no emotion. Besides fear, he also feels anger because they are well-dressed. He especially imagines beating up the one who's closer to his age. Eventually, the two stop teasing him. In fact, when they see him coming, they start going back inside. What he couldn't do to the boys who mocked him at Darüşşafaka by calling him "Old Man," he now does to them. He feels he has defeated them through indifference.

### *With Uncle Galip Again*

For the first time in years, he sees Uncle Galip dressed so elegantly. Uncle Galip shaves every day and wears a tie. Almost everyone around him shows him respect. When he tells him that he's not attending school, Uncle Galip reserves a spot next to his own bed in the dormitory. There is a place to sleep, but since there is no bathroom, everyone goes to the public bathhouse. He is too shy to tell Uncle Galip that he feels dirty. He turns his pillowcase inside out and keeps using it that way. One day, because his head itches badly, he washes his hair at a street fountain without using soap.

One evening, Uncle Galip takes him to the house of the director of education in Izmit. This director is also a dervish like him. They enter a small room on the second floor of an old two-story house. The director casually subjects Aziz Nesin to an oral exam by asking him questions without making him uncomfortable. At one point, he pulls out a history book written by E.A., which is taught in middle and high schools, and asks if he has read it. Aziz Nesin mumbles vague answers because the book is actually intended for sixth-grade students.

Eventually, the teachers at Akçakoca Primary School decide to give him a diploma and examine him. He enters a classroom with a few teachers and easily answers questions in Turkish, spelling, grammar, and arithmetic. But he struggles with subjects like geography and history. That day, they give him his primary school diploma. Uncle Galip gives him some allowance and sends him back to Istanbul by train.

### *A Note on Historian E.A.*

Aziz Nesin notes that historian E.A. represents the intellectual type of the previous generation. Years later, he meets him through Yusuf Ziya Ortaç. E.A. is someone who sees correcting historical inaccuracies as his mission and has close relations with the entire literary circle. He marries a much younger woman but later personally arranges for her to marry a more age-appropriate man. One night, while a foreign singer performs Spanish songs in a hotel in Taksim, he stands up and yells that songs in Turkey should be sung in Turkish and leaves with his wife. Sitting two tables away, Aziz Nesin watches the scene unfold in surprise, just like everyone else.

### *The Return*

When he returns to their house on Heybeliada, his normally reactive father—who always remains calm with him—gently asks where he has been all this time. He tells him that he received a primary school diploma and exaggerates how impressed the teachers were with his knowledge. Since Salim Bey is in charge of what school he will attend next, he tries to enroll him in a vocational school. When Aziz Nesin sees that the school offers carpentry, blacksmithing, lathe work, and electrical training, he chooses electrical work, thinking it's the most refined among them. But he absolutely does not want to

attend this school. He submits all the necessary documents and takes the exams. However, he fails the exams and is not admitted.

#### *Becoming a Middle School Student*

So, he begins attending Vefa Middle School. He promises himself to make up for all his past failures, but it's not easy. To get to class by 8 a.m., he takes the ferry at 5:30 in the morning from Heybeliada and arrives at Galata Bridge about two hours later. From there, he takes a tram to Sultanahmet. With the return trip, he spends five to six hours a day commuting, and the travel expenses become a serious burden. Moreover, since he has no school bag, he wraps his books, notebooks, a boiled egg, or a mackerel sandwich in newspaper and carries them in his hands. When he returns home at night, he's too exhausted to study.

Since the ferry is free for Darüşşafaka students, he begins carrying his old Darüşşafaka jacket to wear while boarding in order to reduce costs. This adds to his burden. He also fears being seen by his classmates from Vefa Middle School. One day, while trying to avoid one of them, he gets his finger caught in the ferry's lounge door and can't sleep that night due to the pain.

Because he can't ask his father for more money, he cannot buy all his books and notebooks on time. Whenever the teachers see that he doesn't have the required books, they kick him out of class, and he starts skipping school again. On days when he avoids classes he lacks books for—especially when it's raining—he kills time in places where his father's acquaintances work. One day, in such a place, he runs into his father. On the way home, his father tells him not to mistake the hospitality shown to him for his own merit, as it was only due to being his son.

Eventually, he manages to buy almost every textbook, but he still can't find the English book *Method Alge*. While searching for the book at second-hand shops, he notices the nearby Astoria Cinema and begins watching Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton movies during school hours. Over time, he spends enough money on movie tickets to have bought multiple copies of *Method Alge*, but since he gets the money in small amounts from his father, he never has enough at once to buy the book. He always sees boys in front of the cinema selling trimmed film frames to other children. The most expensive frames show the hero's face or a kiss. He never has the money to join in but watches from afar. Eventually, he finds a used copy of *Method Alge*, but by then, he feels so far behind his peers in English that he skips the class anyway.

If the other children around him were like him, he wouldn't skip school. But most of the students coming from the island are from wealthy families. Their hair is always neatly combed, their clothes and shoes are new. Poor children can't bear to go to school after seeing them—they lack the strength to compete. All of Aziz Nesin's clothes are second-hand, and his shoes have been patched many times. Looking at the well-dressed children, he imagines wearing their clothes and shoes himself. He questions what they've done to deserve such good things. The idea of deserving becomes so important to him that for the rest of his life, he examines everything he gains, questioning whether he truly deserves it.

#### *When It Snows*

One day after school, he gets caught in a blizzard. He barely makes it to the ferry, but it doesn't depart due to the weather. Some passengers get off to go to relatives or hotels. He doesn't leave the ferry but wonders what he will eat when he gets hungry. As he ponders what to do in the smoke-filled second-class cabin, Mustafa Efendi spots him. Mustafa Efendi is a janitor at the archaeology museum and, with his wife, cares for a bedridden woman on Heybeliada. After the woman passes away, she leaves her house to them, and they continue living there. Mustafa Efendi takes him off the ferry. They go straight to the home of a relative living in a beautiful house in Şehzadebaşı with a brick lower floor and a wooden upper floor.

The house is filled with laughter. The daughters support Galatasaray, while their father is a Fenerbahçe fan, and they playfully tease each other. The girls talk about their favorite football players and young men they are dating, which Aziz Nesin finds strange. He is especially shocked when the girls, acting like little children, sit on their father's lap and get kissed on the cheek. He finds this relaxed family atmosphere so unappealing that he never learns to appreciate such an environment for the rest of his life.

### *At Uncle Yusuf's House*

On some days after getting off the ferry, he decides not to go to school. On one such snowy day, he visits his Uncle Yusuf's house in Bebek. Uncle Yusuf, son of Uncle Şaban, is a tall, slim, charming man. He lives in the same house with two wives, but since he is a strict person, tensions between the wives are rarely voiced. That night, Aziz stays at his house and tries to draw a pencil sketch of a woman, inspired by a friend at school who draws actors seen in magazines with great precision. But while that friend has pencils of various hardness and a good eraser, he only has a single graphite pencil. So no matter how much he tries, he can't match his friend's skill.

### *Lightening the Load*

His father instructs him to leave his Darüşşafaka jacket—which allows him to board the ferry for free—with his friend Ibrahim the Head-Seller, who lives in Tanburacı Inn in Tahtakale, to lighten his load. So he gets off the ferry, goes to Tahtakale, leaves the Darüşşafaka jacket with Ibrahim, puts on his school jacket, and heads to school. On the way back, he leaves his school jacket there, puts on the Darüşşafaka jacket, and boards the ferry again. Although this eases his load, the time he spends on the road each day approaches seven hours.

Moreover, there are two places in Istanbul where all kinds of crimes take place: Galata and Tahtakale. Tahtakale is more dangerous than Galata. The room where Ibrahim the Head-Seller lives is a narrow, dirty, foul-smelling place that receives no sunlight. Yet the inn is always a lively place. In every room, workers are busy at all hours of the day. In the upstairs rooms, people prepare cookies, pastries, desserts, and buns, send them to the bakery at night, and get them back baked by dawn. After sunrise, all kinds of street vendors grab their trays and rush out of the inn into the street.

### *Ibrahim the Head-Seller*

Ibrahim is of medium height, slim, and a bit of a street tough. He always carries a knife but isn't quarrelsome. He solves his problems with cunning and clever plans. Aziz Nesin notes that tough guys, fearing an attack, don't keep their knives in their sheaths because it's hard to draw them quickly; instead, they cap the blade with a wine cork and carry the knife in their pocket with the handle facing upward.

When writing Turkish in Arabic script, almost everyone makes mistakes. If someone writes without error, it means they've had a good education. Edirne-born Ibrahim writes almost flawlessly and legibly, so Aziz Nesin assumes he is well-educated.

He is nicknamed "head-seller" because he cooks and sells sheep heads. There are five or six head-sellers in Istanbul, each operating in a different area. If one enters another's territory, a fight breaks out. All the head-sellers get their heads from a man named Hacı, an Albanian. Hacı's favorite is Ibrahim. Ibrahim stations his vendors in Tahtakale, Galata, Arap Mosque, and Karaköy. Every late morning, one or two baskets of skinned and chopped sheep heads are delivered to Tanburacı Inn. One of Ibrahim's workers boils them in a copper cauldron until the afternoon. When he lets the cauldron cool, a layer of fat forms on top, which he skims off and stores in another container to sell separately. Chickpeas are cooked in the broth first, followed by rice.

Later, the vendors divide the heads into portions; during this process, worms cooked in the boiling water fall from the heads. The cleaned heads are placed on the outside shelves of their glass display cases. Chickpea pilaf is placed in the center. Small white plates, forks, and spoons are stored in a compartment under the display case. Vendors place a cloth cushion—called a "simit"—on their heads, balance the case on top, and head out to sell. Ibrahim supervises them until midnight, then returns to the inn to sleep. The vendors report back to him when they return.

Across from Tanburacı Inn is another inn. In it works another head-seller who used to work for Ibrahim but later became his rival: Şükrü. Şükrü sometimes gets drunk and picks on Ibrahim, but Ibrahim, knowing his intent, doesn't respond. However, Ali from Ünye—Ibrahim's favorite vendor—can't stand what Şükrü does. Every time, Ibrahim restrains him.

### *Ali from Ünye*

Ali is a handsome young man of about eighteen or nineteen. He sleeps in the bed Ibrahim vacates in the morning after returning from his shift and sleeps until noon. When Aziz Nesin stays in that room, he sleeps on the wooden bench by the door. Although they try to hide it, he knows they smoke hashish.

On nights he stays there, he accompanies Ali to his sales spot. Ali sells in Karaköy, right at the corner in front of Ziraat Bank. Afterward, they go to a morning coffeehouse, then return to the han after sunrise. One night, while selling together, Ali finishes his goods around four. Since the Galata Bridge is lifted to let ships pass from the Bosphorus into the Golden Horn, they go to a morning coffeehouse to wait for the bridge to reopen. It's the first morning coffeehouse Aziz Nesin ever sees. The place is full of old men and small boys. Everyone who dozes off is constantly nudged awake by the waiter. A man at the next table lifts his head from the table, sees the Darüşşafaka emblem on Aziz Nesin's jacket, and asks if he attends the school. When Aziz Nesin says yes, the man tells him he also went there once but ran away after being tempted by the devil. He urges Aziz Nesin to appreciate the school and continue his studies, then rests his head again and goes back to sleep.

Soon after, another man enters the coffeehouse asking if anyone has seen a "dear daddy" boy who stole from him. The man wears the apron of those who collect tolls at the Galata Bridge. Aziz Nesin hears the word "dear daddy boy"—used to describe boys who sit on older men's laps and play sexual games—for the first time, along with the fact that some of these boys steal from the men.

#### *Sexual Jokes*

The laundry of the men living in Tanburacı Inn is washed by a woman in her forties named Emine. Every time Ibrahim talks to her, he makes obscene jokes. Although Aziz Nesin sees and hears these, he pretends not to notice. One day, he goes with Ali to a coffeehouse in the part of Galata where the brothels are. A young woman walks in and jokes around with everyone. When she comes to Ali, he slaps her belly and asks, "Hey girl, is your machine broken?" She replies, "Just came back from repair, smooth as ever." These sexual conversations are things Aziz Nesin has never heard before, though he has long sensed their existence.

#### *Street Children*

On another cold night, he goes with Ali to his selling spot. The weather is freezing, but since he doesn't have a coat, he walks up and down with his hands in his pockets. At one point, a younger boy walks past him, and after a short distance, starts whistling. His pants and shirt are in tatters, and he's barefoot. Another boy responds to the whistle with his own. A little farther ahead, there's a well-lit greengrocer's stall. The second boy walks up to the stall, says something quickly, and runs off. As the greengrocer chases him, the first boy rushes in and steals two bunches of bananas. When the greengrocer returns, he doesn't notice the missing fruit.

In Istanbul, homeless children take shelter in the floating docks on the Karaköy end of the Galata Bridge. On a cold night, Aziz Nesin enters one of these docks. Inside, there's a strong smell of rust. The children are lying tightly huddled together on straw and hay laid on the metal floor. Among them are children as young as four or five. A few steps away, some boys try to heat the space by burning pieces of wood. Aziz Nesin notes that the phrase "bridge kids" refers to these children living in the docks under the bridge, at the edge of the sea. He says that novels have been written and films made about them, but despite all this, nothing has changed—the children are still stuck in this life.

#### *Theft*

One day, thinking he'll eat with Ibrahim, he skips lunch at school. When he leaves school in the evening, he's dizzy from hunger. He goes to the inn, but no one is in Ibrahim's room. When he sees some coins on the workbench, he takes two twenty-five cents and heads out. He buys some bread, cheese, and grapes and satisfies his hunger. Later, he returns to the room and places the leftover money next to the other coins. Not long after, Ibrahim arrives, but he doesn't tell him he took the money.

#### *Ibrahim and Ali*

At one point, Ali disappears. Ibrahim searches everywhere he can think of but finds nothing. He gets so caught up in looking for Ali that his business suffers. Other head-sellers take over his sellers and his selling spots. When asked why he's searching so obsessively, he says Ali is his most talented and trustworthy seller. Eventually, he learns that Ali has gone back to his hometown, and he starts writing him long letters. Ali returns to Istanbul, and Ibrahim immediately has a navy blue suit tailored for him. Years later, looking back as an adult, Aziz Nesin concludes that their relationship was more than just friendship.

### *A Dark World*

After Ali returns, Ibrahim's business recovers. His rival, Şükrü, shows up at the entrance of the inn as usual and starts harassing them. Around this time, Ali struts around like a tough guy, with a gun Ibrahim gave him tucked in his belt. One afternoon, while Aziz Nesin is sitting in the room with Ibrahim and Ali, Şükrü barges in, drunk, and hurls curses at them. Finally, Ali can't take it anymore. He jumps up and shoots Şükrü. As Şükrü collapses in a pool of blood, Ali flees. Aziz Nesin goes straight home afterward and says nothing to his father.

Hacı, who sells heads to Ibrahim, finds out his wife is cheating on him with a member of parliament. One day, he sees them getting out of the same car and stabs the man to death. Then he asks Ibrahim to help him escape. Ibrahim arranges with a ship captain to sneak Hacı onto a foreign freighter at the harbor. They get into a rowboat to reach the ship, but a short distance out, the boatman pulls a gun and tells them they're surrounded by the police. Both are arrested. When Aziz Nesin later visits Ibrahim in prison with a friend, they find him looking gaunt and broken. Ibrahim buys them tea and, during the conversation, says, "I won't make it out of here alive." A while later, he dies. Not a single relative comes forward to collect his belongings.

### *Mehmet Efendi and the Pastry*

After Ibrahim is imprisoned, Aziz Nesin stays at the home of a pastry cook, Mehmet Efendi, who lives on the second floor of a two-story wooden building in Tahtakale. With slanted eyes and prominent cheekbones, Mehmet Efendi is either Dagestani or Turkmen. Aziz Nesin enjoys watching him make pastry so much that he's sure if Mehmet Efendi performed in front of a crowd at a circus, everyone would be mesmerized.

Mehmet Efendi, wearing an apron around his neck, rolls up his sleeves and stands at a zinc-topped table. He takes a ball of dough from the bowl to his right, places it on the table, oils and kneads it, then flattens it out. The dough gradually becomes thinner and wider. He lifts it by the edges, swings it above his head, and slaps it on the table, making it even thinner and wider. Eventually, it becomes as thin as muslin. Once the dough is ready, he starts assembling the pastry and sends them to the oven to be baked.

Three of the people working with him are his assistants; the remaining five or six are vendors. The vendors place the pastry in glass display carts and hit the streets. One Muslim Indian man carries his display on his arm.

### *A New Kind of Hospitality*

Mehmet Efendi lives in part of an old, large mansion between Tahtakale and Süleymaniye. His wife is older than him and extremely meticulous, but she talks so much that she becomes unbearable. She's been through every kind of hardship with him over the years, but once he grows his business, he wants to leave her. He wants children, but since she's older, that's no longer possible. Mehmet Efendi can't bring himself to leave her easily because she is so kind-hearted. Still, because she keeps repeating all this endlessly, she becomes intolerable. Despite everything, Aziz Nesin dreams of marrying a woman like her—someone to face all of life's difficulties with. But he also understands Mehmet Efendi's point of view: the man wants to have children, after all.

### *Kindness and Its Return*

He is now thirteen years old and in the first year of secondary school, but until that day, no one has ever bought him ready-made clothes or had clothes tailored just for him. On the eve of a religious holiday, Mehmet Efendi takes him to a store and tells him to pick out a suit. The shop assistant shows many options, but not wanting to take advantage of Mehmet Efendi's desire to do good, he chooses the one he likes the least—a light coffee-colored linen suit. Yet even the one he likes the least seems incredibly beautiful to him. From there, they go to a shoe store. This time, he picks the shoes he likes the most: a pair in a mix of yellow, red, and brown.

Later, Mehmet Efendi asks him to write a letter to send to his relatives back in their hometown. However, Aziz Nesin doesn't mail the letter because he spends the money meant for postage. He carries the letter in his pocket, planning to send it once he has money. But he never does. One day, while heading to the island, he tears it up and throws it into the sea.

He carries the guilt of that act with him for the rest of his life. Over the years, Mehmet Efendi expands his business, opening new branches in various places. Aziz Nesin becomes an officer, always telling

himself he'll visit Mehmet Efendi and thank him once he's in a better position. But he delays it again and again. Eventually, Mehmet Efendi passes away. Aziz Nesin feels sorrowful for not being able to repay him, but notes that he tries to make up for the debt by doing good for others.

#### *Affection, Trust, and Mother's Expectations*

He fails and is held back in school because of his one-third absenteeism rate. No matter what he does, he cannot escape the sense of aimlessness. It is during this aimlessness that he reflects on how, despite everything, he never became a delinquent, and he attributes this to three factors. First, although his father occasionally treats his mother roughly, he loves her deeply. His mother knows she is loved and returns that love. His parents, who love each other, treat him affectionately. Second, his mother's words before her death. Third, his father, regardless of the situation, never loses faith in him. He constantly expresses how much he believes in him. These three things force him to become truly trustworthy and good in life.

#### *Moving to Istanbul*

As summer approaches, families with summer houses on the island gradually begin to move to their summer homes. Even though it is never discussed at home, Aziz Nesin is aware that his father is always looking for work. Finally, his father takes on the responsibility of maintaining the garden of a house in Çapa, Istanbul. One day, he goes to this garden with his father. The four-gate garden consists of an upper and lower garden separated by a stone staircase. The mansion where the owner lives is in the lower garden. A little further from the two-story house in the upper garden, there is another single-room house. This single-room house used to be the kitchen of the former dervish lodge, and the owner, Naci Bey, has told them that they can stay there.

When Aziz Nesin learns that his father's work, which is done for just a meager amount of money, is to take care of the flowers in a garden filled with all kinds of trees, he realizes how hard the job really is. Maintaining the flowers in this large garden requires a gardener who works constantly and an apprentice. Although Naci Bey seems to be doing a favor by offering this work, he is actually making a profit from it.

#### *Naci Bey and Sister Hayret*

After the proclamation of the Republic, Naci Bey, who was the sheikh of the closed dervish lodge, works as a branch manager in the Istanbul Treasury Department. He is a well-groomed, youthful-looking man in his forties or fifties who gets shaved every day and wears stylish clothes. Aziz Nesin is surprised by the number of clothes he owns since he constantly changes outfits. Shortly after, Naci Bey realizes that Aziz Nesin's father is not just any gardener and allows them to stay in the lower part of the two-story house.

Naci Bey has an adopted daughter, Hayret. She is a quick and skilled girl who does all the household chores, and that's why her name is Hayret (Surprise). Since Naci Bey forbids her from even going to the grocery store, she spends all her time either at home or in the garden. She does all the household chores on her own. When guests arrive, she is the one who serves them. Since Naci Bey treats her like his own daughter, the guests also treat her like his daughter. Every morning, she milks the goats and sheep, and then looks after the chickens. She, like Naci Bey, has many clothes and shoes. She is always laughing joyfully around the house.

Aziz Nesin particularly enjoys being loved by Hayret. In fact, she is the first person he feels affection for as a boy. Aware of this, when Hayret sees him staring at her legs or breasts while milking the goats in the morning, she doesn't get angry but merely smiles. Aziz Nesin thinks she enjoys these feelings because, through him, she has the opportunity to test her self-confidence in a safe environment.

As Aziz Nesin gets to know Naci Bey better, he begins to think that his affectionate treatment of Hayret might be motivated by stinginess. After all, if he treated her like a servant, he would have to pay her a salary, but by treating her like his daughter, he has free labor for meals and cleaning.

Naci Bey also gives Aziz Nesin small tasks to do. Every morning, Hayret fills a jug with milk that she has cleaned with ash water and then soda soap, and Aziz Nesin takes it to a ice cream shop in Beyazıt. Since the grapes in the small vineyard in the garden are attacked by bees, Naci Bey orders bags to be sewn and tied around the grape clusters. However, since some grapes ripen later, not all of them have bags. As a result, Aziz Nesin's other job is to catch the bees by their thin waists with small



scissors and kill them. For each bee he kills, he earns a small coin. Although he kills many bees, he never tells Naci Bey how many he has killed, as he is sure that Naci Bey will never pay him. Occasionally, he does small errands for him, like taking something to someone or delivering something to his workplace.

Some people gossip that Naci Bey is keeping Hayret for himself and hasn't married her off. However, Hayret finally marries a handsome captain living in Izmir and moves there. Aziz Nesin is very happy that she has married such a man. However, a few months later, when she visits them, he sees how much Hayret has changed and doesn't like her new self. Hayret talks about how she goes to balls in Izmir and how the men she meets there fall in love with her. She is so flirtatious that Aziz Nesin realizes her marriage won't last long.

Six years later, when he is an officer, Aziz Nesin visits Hayret at her shack-like house in a muddy alley. After divorcing her husband, Naci Bey had refused to take her back in, and she had to live on her own. When Aziz Nesin visits her, he sees how ill she is and how much she has aged since the last time he saw her. He can't understand how she has aged so quickly in such a short time.

#### *A Little Money*

One day, Aziz Nesin sees the Arab servant, who used to work at his old love Feride's house, now working as a shoe polisher in Aksaray. He learns that he has been kicked out of his job at the house. Since he has nowhere to stay, Aziz places him with his father in the old dervish lodge kitchen, where they once lived.

In the garden, there are pink roses, from whose petals rose jam is made, and every day five or six kilos of petals are discarded. One morning, Aziz Nesin wakes up early, collects these rose petals, and places them in a basket. When his father says that these roses are mostly bought by the Greeks and Armenians living in Şişli, he walks with the young Arab man to Şişli. Indeed, many people buy fifty or two hundred grams of rose petals.

However, the weather is very hot, and since the young man is lame, he struggles to sell door to door. One morning, when Aziz Nesin wakes up, he finds that he is gone. Years later, he sees him working as a messenger for a publishing house, but neither of them acknowledges the other.

#### *Second Escape from Home*

Ashamed of the trust his father places in him and believing that he must accomplish something in life, he decides to leave home, not knowing exactly what it is that he wants to do. He believes that if he studies, he will become an important person. Uncle Galip writes in his last letter that he has finally taken his mother with him. He decides to go to the address in the letter. He will decide what to do afterward. He secretly takes money from his father's pocket and leaves early in the morning, wearing the clothes and shoes Mehmet Efendi bought for him.

When he leaves the house, he takes with him the photos he had taken a week before and was supposed to pick up that day, as well as his father's old felt hat, which had been given to a hatmaker to be shaped. He first picks up the photos, then the hat. After paying the photographer and hatmaker, the amount of money he has left is considerably less. He then heads to Haydarpaşa to catch a train. Since he doesn't know how to get to Akyazı, he buys a ticket to Adapazarı, thinking he will walk to Akyazı from there.

In the third-class compartment, at the front of the train, the soot from the locomotive makes his eyes tear up, and he instinctively closes his eyes. Before he closes his eyes, he sees Lake Sapanca to his right, but when he opens his eyes again and sees it on the left, he cannot understand it.

#### *Unforgettable Kindness*

Aziz Nesin gets off the train in Adapazarı and asks how to get to Akyazı. He walks to the place shown to him. Since it's hard to walk with his hat in his hand, he puts his father's hat on his head and starts carrying his straw hat in his hand. He asks everyone he meets along the way how to get to Akyazı and how long it will take. They tell him he can walk there in eight or ten hours. In the evening, when a man learns where he's going, he asks why he didn't take the bus. Ashamed to say he doesn't have money, he tells the man he didn't know there was a bus. The man tells him that even if he walks all night, he won't make it to Akyazı and invites him to his house. He goes with the man to his house.

Aziz Nesin cannot remember the name of the village he visits, but he never forgets the man's name: Zeybekzade Mehmet Efendi. He tells him that he is going to his uncle's house in Akyazı and that he is in ninth grade. Zeybekzade Mehmet Efendi introduces him to the children of his own age at home. In the morning, he says they will put him on the bus. Since Aziz Nesin is too ashamed to admit he has no money, no matter what they talk about, his mind only remains on getting on the bus. He eats his meal with them at the low table, then sleeps on the clean blanket spread on the floor. In the early morning, afraid of being put on the bus, he wakes up, sneaks out without waking anyone, and leaves. He remains grateful to Zeybekzade Mehmet Efendi for the kindness he showed him throughout his life. He imagines visiting him one day to thank him for the kindness but never manages to do so.

Years later, when he is the class representative at military school, he must prevent noise in the classroom to avoid getting scolded by his superior. If he reports the ones making noise, he will be ostracized by his classmates. In military school, even if one has a valid reason, reporting a friend is considered treacherous. In such a moment, he starts telling the story of his escape from the house to quiet the class. His classmates listen so attentively that even when the bell rings for recess, they continue to listen, not leaving. Whenever there is noise in class, he tells the same story again in the same way, and although his classmates know where the story is going, they still listen intently.

#### *With Uncle Galip Again*

While walking to Akyazı, he strays onto the shortcut path he's been told about and finds himself in a cornfield, struggling to get out of the swamp he's fallen into. Though he doesn't know the name of the village where Uncle Galip is an imam, he eventually finds his house. Uncle Galip looks much different from the way he looked when he was attending the teachers' course in Izmit. While teaching, he used to dress well and shave every day, but now he has grown a beard and looks much older.

During his time in the village, he doesn't make friends with any of the children. He forgets why he ran away from home and lets himself wander around. Finally, with the money Uncle Galip gives him, he returns to Istanbul.

#### *Return*

He arrives home after midnight, walking, and jumps over the wall into the garden. He curls up in a corner of the old dervish lodge kitchen and plans to find a job and stay secretly at night without showing himself to his father. But in the morning, he wakes up to the sound of his father's merciful voice. While having breakfast, he lies to his father, saying that he has been accepted to an art school in Izmir. He can't understand how this lie came to his mind.

#### *Back to School*

Near the opening of schools, he enrolls at Davutpaşa Secondary School. His father never asks him anything about the school in Izmir. On the first day of school, while students who chose French and English are being separated, he chooses English. However, the most taught languages are French and German. The English teachers are usually retired naval officers. His teacher is a man who serves as an imam in Fatih. During World War I, he was captured by the British and taken to India, where he learned English over the two years he stayed there.

Since his house is far from the school, he passes through the ruins of buildings destroyed in fires. Among these ruins, vagabonds, drug addicts, gamblers, and prostitutes live. He hears that some students pay a penny to see the sexual organ of an old woman living there, and others pay five pennies to have sex with her.

Due to the effect of his days in Tahtakale, in the early days of school, he carries a small dagger he took from Ibrahim the Head-Seller's room. He even shows it to his friends, trying to show off. However, as his connection with the school grows, he stops carrying the dagger.

In the sixth grade, undeterred and without losing hope, he eagerly applies himself to his lessons. His favorite teacher is the Turkish teacher, who wanted to be a literature scholar but couldn't. He always praises his composition assignments. He never likes the art teacher because he is strict, wanting the children to take the lesson seriously. The physical education teacher is the type who puts newspaper on his back and chest to avoid the cold. Years later, when Aziz Nesin meets him again, he reminds him of this and mentions what he did to stay warm, but the teacher remembers neither him nor what he did. The math teacher is no different than a robot teaching lessons. The history teacher comes from

Maltepe Military High School. It is also his music teacher who indirectly encourages him to pursue playwriting.

### *Theatre*

In Şehzadebaşı, Ferah Theatre and Millet Theatre stand opposite each other. During the school year, he goes to see plays there a few times. One day, he notices that Ferah Theatre is holding a playwriting competition open to everyone. He gets excited and tries writing a play but fails. Years later, when his play *Would You Come Over a Bit* is published as a book in 1957, Kemal Tahir accuses him of writing such plays only because he looks down on comedy. In a heated argument, Kemal Tahir shouts that he expects his first play to be a masterpiece, that he himself writes only novels and is content with that. Aziz Nesin suspects he says this because he has tried and failed at writing plays. After all, Kemal Tahir has mentioned this in his letters to Nâzım Hikmet. But Aziz says nothing. He doesn't even bring up the ten or fifteen plays he wrote earlier.

### *The Influence of Hulusi Öktem*

Although he treats all his subjects seriously, he can't seem to take music seriously. He can't convince himself that music is necessary. He hears that before the Turkish national anthem is composed, at an international sports event, Turkish athletes sing a folk song because foreigners wouldn't understand Turkish.

His teacher, Hulusi Bey, does his best to teach music to him and students like him. When the first report cards are handed out, and he sees that he gets a 2 (out of 5) in music, he feels deeply upset. From then on, he begins to pay close attention in class. One day, when the teacher calls him to the board and asks him to sing notes, his classmates laugh out loud because he can't find the right tones. Some even suspect he does it wrong on purpose. Hulusi Bey, however, insists on helping him find the correct pitch.

In his next report cards, he gets a 5 in music too. Hulusi Bey even hands him a large envelope. Inside, there's an invitation to a concert at the City Theatre in Tepebaşı. On the day of the concert, he wears a suit, and for the first time in his life, enters such a grand theatre hall. Showing his invitation to enter gives him a unique sense of joy. Seeing the crowd sit silently fills him with awe.

A moment later, his teacher Hulusi Öktem comes on stage as the conductor. He finds out that the teacher he once saw ridiculed in class is actually the founder of the first choir in Turkey, a teacher at the City Conservatory's boarding department, fluent in five languages, and the author of books on music. He wonders how such a man ends up teaching kids like him at Davutpaşa Middle School who don't take his class seriously. He realizes that teachers of that era carry the excitement of the War of Independence in their hearts.

Thanks to this concert, Aziz Nesin becomes aware of the existence of the City Theatre and turns into a regular viewer of plays there—thus begins his interest in playwriting.

### *Writing A Novel*

His deskmate, Reşat, lives in a rented room in Aksaray because his family is in İzmir. He constantly talks about a sexual relationship he has with a widow in that house. Inspired by his tales, Aziz begins writing a novel set in İzmir, a city he has never visited. He reads chapters aloud to his father, who tears up while listening. Convinced his novel is tragic enough, he writes to a few publishers asking if they'd consider publishing it. Two publishers respond that their publication schedule is full, but the fact they start the letter with "Dear Sir" makes him very happy.

He fills an entire notebook with this novel. Although he forgets the plot over time, a classmate named Mehmet Karahasanoğlu, who also decides to write novels, remembers it. The story is about a flirtatious, parentless girl.

He befriends a senior student named Tahir, known for his literary flair. Tahir introduces him to Hüsametdin. Aziz lends the manuscript to Hüsametdin for a few days. When he returns it, Hüsametdin points out that Aziz writes the word *alev* (flame) using the Arabic letter *ayn*, though it should be the letter *alif*. Aziz can't believe he makes such a mistake. Years later, while writing his memoirs, he checks the dictionary and sees that *alev*, being a Turkish word, indeed starts with *alif*. The Hüsametdin

mentioned here is the writer, journalist, and publisher Hüsametdin Bozok. When Aziz reminds him of this event, Hüsametdin remembers nothing.

#### *A New House, New People*

When Naci Bey rents out the two-story house they live in, they move to a place called Uzunyusuf, into a house next to a former dervish lodge. His father continues to work in Naci Bey's garden and sells the fruits and vegetables he grows there. His sister milks Naci Bey's goats. Since Aziz now goes to school, he no longer delivers milk.

The new house belongs to the sister of the lodge's late sheikh. Unlike the calm and composed Naci Bey, the sheikh is unreliable. His sister, however, is a gracious lady. Her daughter, who lives upstairs, is young, beautiful, divorced, and has a son and a daughter. Aziz, his father, and sister stay in one room on the ground floor.

Aziz finds himself captivated by the woman. He cannot understand how her husband ever left her. He occasionally plays games with her young daughter. Later, he hears the woman is seeing a young engineering student. Even though the man is polite and well-mannered, Aziz instinctively dislikes him. After the girl dies from meningitis, the woman tells Aziz that she had hoped to marry them one day. The age gap between him and the little girl leaves him stunned.

He remains friends with this family for many years and sees the woman as one of those who are doomed to unhappiness because they can't find a suitable partner.

#### *The Mischievous Friend*

In sixth grade, he has a classmate in the French section who is either older or just looks older. This tall boy always dresses well and wears a bow tie. Since memories of the War of Independence are still fresh, there's a mutual wariness between Greeks and Turks. The well-dressed boy picks up a cane, pretends to be a teacher, and takes about twenty students to a church between Davutpaşa and Kocamustafapaşa. He asks the priest to show his "students" around. The priest respectfully opens the door and guides them. Some students steal icons and candlesticks from the church. Eventually, they thank the priest and leave.

#### *A Friend: Halit*

Among his classmates is a lisping boy named Halit. Clearly poor, Halit wears oversized clothes that look second-hand. He isn't ashamed of his poverty and always smiles, revealing bright white teeth. One day, when Aziz wants to get his shoes patched, Halit suggests buying sole leather from the tanners and doing it themselves for less. So they go to Halit's house.

It's a shack in a half-collapsed courtyard. The inside is like a warehouse, full of stuff and kids of all ages. Halit is the eldest. His father is a day laborer who does whatever work comes along. Halit patches Aziz's shoes himself.

#### *A French Teacher: Hüseyin Hüsnü*

After earning a 5 in music, Aziz wants to take French lessons too. Halit's mother works as a cleaner for their math teacher, and says someone in the same building gives French lessons. One winter evening, Aziz and Halit go to the house. It's a four-story building on Tramway Avenue, on the way from Aksaray to Samatya. Their math teacher lives on the top floor, and the man who gives French lessons lives with his wife and two kids on the floor below.

They discover that the man is actually a painter. Soon, the math teacher's daughter comes over to correct one of his paintings. Actually, two girls arrive, but Aziz can't remember if they are sisters or friends. He is surprised that the stern math teacher has such a daughter. One girl is named Piraye and studies at the American College. When she says she takes art history, Aziz admires her school. Because Piraye impresses him, he later uses her name for characters in his stories and novels.

The French teacher eventually moves to a three-story stone house in Yenikapı and rents the second and third floors. His name is Hüseyin Hüsnü. He fought in the War of Independence, went to France for some reason, learned French there, and left the army as a cavalry captain. His wife is the daughter of a general who disapproved of their marriage. At home, he wears "shorts"—a term not yet common. At first, Aziz finds it odd to see him in the colorful shorts his wife sews, but eventually gets used to it.

Later in life, Aziz wears shorts at home too, though even then it's frowned upon. A cleaning lady once refuses to come just because he wears shorts.

Aziz senses that Hüseyin Hüsnü harbors a deep bitterness toward life. Years later, he forms a theory: men like Hüseyin Hüsnü, who genuinely serve their country, see others use these services to enter politics and profit through influence. Meanwhile, principled people like Hüseyin Hüsnü struggle to survive. He lives in poverty, earning a living by selling oil paintings. Once, he sells a painting to a fisherman, who pays him in fish. In summer, the same man sells watermelons. Every time Aziz passes by, he stops to look at the painting.

Hüseyin Hüsnü stops tutoring all his French students, except for Aziz Nesin. He continues teaching Aziz for a very low fee because he likes him. However, Aziz secretly criticizes his lifestyle, feeling it doesn't suit him. When Hüseyin Hüsnü's family has money, they spend it all without thinking about tomorrow and consume only the best; when they have no money, they get by on just cheese and olives. Aziz thinks they should find a middle ground instead of swinging between these two extremes.

Because he goes to French lessons after school in the evening, Aziz feels more exhausted than usual. One evening, Hüseyin Hüsnü notices how tired he is and suggests he lie on a patch of grass or bare earth and look up at the sky to rest. At the first opportunity, Aziz tries it. Looking at the sky feels so refreshing that even years later, he continues to do it whenever he needs to rest.

#### *Masturbation*

In those years, Dr. Lokman Hekim, who writes medical articles in *Cumhuriyet*, often refers to an article titled "*The Harms of Masturbation*." When Aziz Nesin starts boarding school, some teachers and officers exaggerate these so-called harms to such an extent that some students become terrified, believing they have committed a grave sin, will become stupid, or even die after masturbating.

At his middle school in Davutpaşa, there is a very skinny classmate who suffers from tuberculosis and comes to school only once every ten days. Each time he shows up, he gathers his friends around and tells them that he has fallen ill because he couldn't quit this bad habit, and that's why he is going to die. After a while, he starts coming even less frequently, and eventually, news of his death arrives.

#### *Friends*

Apart from Reşat who inspires him to write his first novel with sexual stories, there is another Reşat—this one quarrelsome. Tall, blond, blue-eyed, with a small face, Reşat always carries a knife. His older brother, who supports the family, works as a slipper-maker. Reşat himself is a poor student. One day, he pulls a knife on the assistant principal; in the scuffle, the blade ends up in Mehmet Karahasanoğlu's leg. Aziz Nesin sees Reşat forty-two years later in Eminönü and recognizes him immediately. When he asks what he does for a living, Reşat says he works at a museum. But since he's just a janitor, he feels ashamed and doesn't want to talk. Aziz senses his discomfort and keeps the conversation short.

There's also someone whose name he doesn't remember, but he knows he is the son of a major. Because he's not good at sports, he tries to compensate by wearing better shorts and shoes. He joins the volleyball team just because he owns the ball and starts acting superior to the others. One day, he removes a skilled player from the team just because he owns the ball. Aziz immediately walks off the court. Following him, the others quit the game too. The major's son is left standing alone. Even when he invites others to join, no one does. After hitting the ball a few times, he walks into the school building. Aziz never forgets this spontaneous act of solidarity.

There's another boy—quiet, clean-faced, never plays—named İhsan. His father, a municipal officer, has recently remarried, and İhsan is deeply afraid of his stepmother. Seeing him in that state makes Aziz feel sorry for him. All his life, whenever he hears something good has happened to someone named İhsan, he wishes it is that İhsan.

His Tatar friend Mustafa lives in a tiny house that resembles a shanty, yet the inside is spotless. While Aziz is studying in Ankara, a young man approaches him one day, shakes his hand, and tries to remind him who he is. He says he's now a student at the Faculty of Agriculture, but Aziz simply cannot remember him. Frustrated, the young man walks away. The moment he leaves, Aziz realizes it was Mustafa—but it's too late to run after him. He feels ashamed for not recognizing him. For years afterward, he remembers that moment—Mustafa's irritated departure—at the most unexpected times.

His desk mate is named Müfit. One day, they visit Müfit's house with another boy whose name Aziz doesn't recall. But this usually quiet boy keeps taunting him throughout the journey. Eventually, Aziz has to hit him to make him stop. Although he doesn't like to fight, the boy always provokes him. One day, as they're fighting again, the boy runs off and starts throwing stones. Aziz is so afraid of stones that he takes a different route home and never walks with that boy again.

His closest friends are Mehmet and Ş. Mehmet is tall, strong, and hardworking. After his father dies, he stays with his uncle, a wealthy man in the leather trade. Their friendship lasts for years. Mehmet eventually retires as a colonel. Ş., on the other hand, has a sharp sense of humor. He finds something funny in everything he experiences or observes. His father works as a porter but leaves the house each morning like a civil servant, at the same hour, leaves his basket at work, and returns in the evening to put on his pajamas. Aziz senses that Ş.'s parents feel uneasy that their son might be ashamed of his father's job.

### *A Makeshift House*

Because his father, Naci Bey, struggles to visit home regularly and earns little, he rents a four-acre garden in the Karabaş neighborhood of Mevlanakapı, where the ruins of a burnt-down mansion lie. The garden holds pear, walnut, pomegranate, fig, and quince trees, along with large grapevines and other fruit trees. There is also a water well. His father builds a pulley for the well. The garden, enclosed by a stone wall, has only one thing missing: a house.

Using stones of all sizes collected from the garden and elsewhere, his father constructs a makeshift house by sticking them together with mud. He lays a wooden floor in the first of the two rooms, using discarded planks, but the floor of the second room is just compacted earth, trodden down. The first room, which opens to the street through a door, has one window, a daybed, a bed, and a stove. Aziz Nesin shares the bed with his father in that room. The other room has no window and resembles a storage space; his sister sleeps there.

Attached to these two rooms, his father builds a barn with a separate entrance, and in front of that, a toilet. They raise chickens in the barn. In winter, rain and snow leak into the toilet, making it torture to use. In fact, rainwater also seeps into the house. The garden walls often collapse, and his father constantly repairs them, along with the roof. At that time, the Karabaş neighborhood is home to drug addicts. Not far from their house, people slaughter horses and donkeys illegally. Aziz Nesin feels so ashamed of living in such a place that he cannot invite friends over for a long time. When he finally does, he only entertains them in the garden.

Despite everything, his father earns a good income from the spinach, lettuce, cabbage, leeks, tomatoes, onions, and cucumbers he plants in the garden. Their financial situation improves significantly compared to before.

### *The Neighbors*

The people in the neighborhood impress Aziz Nesin so much that he later uses many of them as characters in his stories and novels. One of them is a woman known as Sister Şeker (şeker means sugar), who lives in a small, single-story house with a younger woman. She is so masculine that, when disguised in a veil or coat, she resembles a tall man. Her voice is deep. She is thin but muscular. Rumor has it she carries a knife. The way she smokes, coughs, and talks with a confrontational tone is entirely manlike.

Another figure is a bearded man known as "Varyemez" (the stingy), who lives in a large two-story house. Every morning, he leaves home early and collects whatever he can find in burnt ruins, roadsides, and empty lots, then brings it all home in the evening. When World War II begins in 1939, nails become one of the most sought-after items. He even sells the rusty nails he has collected on the black market.

### *Animals*

To sell the vegetables he grows, his father buys a donkey. Every morning, he fills the baskets loaded on either side of the donkey's saddle with vegetables and heads out to sell them. Sometimes he sells them wholesale at the market. To protect the vegetables in the garden, they also get a dog. The dog gets along very well with the house kitten. They constantly sleep and play together. Since the dog

always runs after his father whenever he goes out, they lock it in the barn before his father leaves. After the chickens hatch their chicks, kites begin to show up to snatch them. So the hen makes a sound to warn her chicks. Upon hearing that sound, the chicks hide, and the cat and the dog rush to help the hen. Sometimes even the donkey joins them, and when they hear this animal chorus, they go out into the garden to see what's going on.

One day, while he's not at home, a rusty nail pierces the donkey's hoof and it contracts tetanus. After it dies, some butchers want to buy the carcass from his father, but he refuses. However, during the night, someone cuts up the donkey's body and steals its haunches.

### *Yearning for a Room*

Old Istanbul houses have spacious rooms, large living areas, broad staircases, and high ceilings. But over time, as apartment buildings replace them, the dimensions shrink. That's why the elders begin to call these new homes "chickpea-sized rooms, broad bean-sized halls." Aziz Nesin, so unhappy in his shared bed with his father, in a house without electricity, a desk, or a bookshelf, becomes willing to settle for even the smallest room. Sometimes when he enters a toilet, he finds himself wishing he had a room the size of that toilet.

On weekends, he goes to the library in Beyazıt and spends the whole day reading. One day, a Russian short story deeply moves him: it tells of two wealthy young men can live inside a room for twenty years without stepping outside, the other promises to grant him a fortune. The man shuts himself in and keeps asking the guard at the door for books. He reads nonstop for twenty years. Meanwhile, the other loses his fortune to gambling. His only hope is for his friend to abandon the challenge. He tries everything, bribing the guard to ignore him, even removing the lock from the door. With just an hour left in the twenty years, he enters the room—only to find it empty. The man has left behind a letter saying that the books made him so rich in knowledge that he no longer wants the money and is grateful instead.

Aziz Nesin begins to form a similar relationship with books. He dreams of shutting himself in a room and reading forever. He asks his father if he can turn the ruins of a water cistern once attached to the old mansion on their property into a library. His father, who never says no to him, says yes. But it remains just words. For years, Aziz dreams that place is his little library.

### *Desire to Succeed*

Except for one music class where he gets a four, he never scores below a five for the entire school year. On his report card, he even gets the note "worthy of praise." Following this success in middle school, he continues to receive perfect scores throughout high school. He sees hard work as his only weapon in life. He's convinced that with even one failure, he'll be thrown into the ranks of the worthless. Getting perfect scores in every subject makes him feel as if he's avenging himself against those who live privileged lives. He believes that everyone who manages to succeed in life despite a poor background carries this kind of rage.

### *Vacation*

He spends nearly every day of the holiday with Mehmet (Karahasanoğlu) and Ş. Only when he reads does he spend time apart from them. That summer, he reads most of Hüseyin Rahmi's novels printed in old Ottoman Turkish. In the last days of the holiday, they swim at the Samatya shore. Aziz takes some bread, cheese, boiled eggs, and home-grown tomatoes and pears, and goes to Mehmet's place. Together, they head to the beach and spend the whole day there. Since they don't have swimsuits, they swim in their underwear. One day, while swimming, Mehmet begins flailing and shouting as if he's drowning. Aziz panics, yells for help, and jumps into the water. A few strokes later, he finds himself next to Mehmet, under the blows of a fisherman's oar. The fisherman had come to save Mehmet, only to realize he was joking and got furious. Believing Aziz was in on the joke, he hits them both with the oar.

Occasionally, they hear explosion sounds from the sea. Fishermen illegally throw dynamite into the water, quickly gather the stunned fish that float to the surface, and flee before getting caught. Upon hearing the blast, Aziz and his friends tie their underwear around their legs and swim toward the stunned fish to scoop them up. But the three daughters from the house by the sea also jump in with bags in their hands, and usually manage to get most of the fish.

### *Admiration*

Because Ş. is very witty, his friends call him “Şarlo” and believe he’ll become a humorist one day. He buys *Akşam* newspaper every day just to read Cemal Nadir’s cartoons. Admiring Cemal Nadir deeply, he is determined to meet him. He finds out where he lives—in one of the narrow apartment buildings across from Laleli Mosque. Whenever they pass by the building, he says he wants to stop by and introduce himself. One day, he can’t resist any longer; he and Mehmet go all the way to his door. Aziz Nesin waits for them outside. But since Cemal Nadir’s wife brushes them off, they’re in and out of the building in a flash.

### *The Yarin Newspaper*

The *Yarin* newspaper, published by Arif Oruç, sells so well that even a black market forms around it. But then one day, while walking down the street, Aziz Nesin sees the walls plastered with posters that say “Registered traitor Arif Oruç” over his photo. People say that these posters are printed by Ali Naci Karacan, who is publishing *Milliyet* at the time. While Ali Naci supports Ismet Pasha, Arif Oruç aligns himself with the Free Republican Party.

Although Aziz Nesin attributes the paper’s success to its support for the opposition, he says he doesn’t fully agree. He believes the reason *Yarin* becomes so popular is because it does something unprecedented: it reports on corruption within state institutions. Seeing this kind of journalism for the first time, people rush to buy the paper.

Years later, when Arif Oruç returns from Bulgaria and republishes *Yarin* in the 1950s, the paper fails because no one buys it. Aziz Nesin believes this is because people have gotten used to corruption news. In fact, as long as the government seems to function, people begin to overlook minor corruption altogether.

### *Military School*

Mehmet and Ş. decide to apply to military school. Although Aziz Nesin doesn’t like the idea of military life, given the conditions in his home, he can’t imagine how he would attend high school or university otherwise. One day Mehmet asks him, referring to Mustafa Kemal Pasha, “Was the Ghazi a soldier?” Aziz replies that he was. He then asks about Ismet Pasha—also a soldier. What about Marshal Fevzi Çakmak? He too is a soldier. At the time, everyone in civilian leadership turns out to have a military background. Finally, Mehmet asks whether there is any great man in Turkish history who is not a soldier. Realizing that all the “great men” he knows are soldiers, Aziz Nesin concludes that one has to become a soldier in order to become a great man in Turkey.

One day, as he walks home after saying goodbye to Mehmet and Ş., Mehmet shouts at him, “Mama’s boy!” because he doesn’t want to go to military school. Aziz Nesin is stunned; he has never seen his friend act this way. But being called a “mama’s boy” bothers him so much that the next day he tells them he has decided to go to military school after all.

### *Certificate and Guarantee Letter*

Mehmet and Ş. gather all the documents required for enrollment: a petition stating their wish to enroll, six ID photos, a certificate of good conduct, and a school-issued diploma certificate. Aziz Nesin prepares everything except for the diploma certificate and goes to school for it. Since it’s holiday season, the only person on duty is the history teacher, Memduh Bey. He tells Memduh Bey he needs the diploma to apply to military school. Memduh Bey tries to talk him out of it, saying he would become a notable intellectual if he stays in a civilian school. Knowing that his teacher can’t understand how impossible that is given his home conditions, Aziz simply says his decision is final. This time, Memduh Bey refuses to give him the diploma.

Two days later, when he returns to school, the duty teacher is Sait Bey. He gives him the certificate right away.

Years later, when Aziz Nesin runs into Memduh Bey somewhere and reminds him of the incident, Memduh Bey neither remembers him nor seems to know he has become a writer.

After completing all the paperwork, they go for a medical examination. Since the examination is extensive, it takes a full week. During this time, they hear all kinds of urban legends. For example,



people say they throw a coin on the ground to see how a boy bends down to determine if he is homosexual, or that they hurl insults to a boy's face to test his temper, and if he reacts, he is deemed unfit for military school. One story is both absurd and hilarious—they say a boy is told to fart into a container full of ash, and if the ash flies into the air, it means he's strong. Supposedly, the phrase "leaves no ash on the grill" to describe someone bold comes from this.

After the examination, they take an entrance exam. All three pass and qualify for enrollment at Çengelköy Military Middle School. When they go to enroll, a captain opens the iron-gated door. He checks their documents and lets in those whose paperwork is complete. Mehmet and Ş. hand in their documents and go in. When it's Aziz Nesin's turn, the captain says his guarantee letter is missing. This document states that someone agrees to pay double the state's cost if the student leaves the school and that the student commits to mandatory service after becoming a soldier. Aziz Nesin is devastated. He is so convinced that everything required to become a "great man" lies beyond that gate that he cannot accept being left out.

To spend that night under the same roof as his friends, he immediately takes the ferry from Çengelköy, hops on a tram in Sirkeci, and returns to Karabaş Mahallesi.

His father has dozed off after lunch. Aziz wakes him in a rush and says he needs a guarantee letter. His father says it would be fine to submit it the next day, but Aziz insists. He wants to spend that night at the military school, just like his friends. They go to the shop of a locksmith in Tahtakale who co-owns the garden they work in. The man agrees to provide the guarantee. They get the letter notarized and head straight to Çengelköy. The captain checks the document and lets him in. He is now officially student number 4162 of the military school.

Years later, when he reflects on why he panicked so much about being turned away at the gate, he realizes the real reason is his desperation to escape the miserable conditions at home. Faced with the chance to live under a different roof, he simply cannot bear to stay in that house one hour longer.

### *Shock*

The school consists of three separate structures. Outside the large iron gate, in the outer courtyard, there's the infirmary, a pharmacy, the principal's office, and the staff quarters. Through the iron gate, in the middle courtyard, there's a single-story dining hall and the school's bathhouse. And on the steep slope descending toward the sea, stands the main school building, which appears to be one story from the front but has three floors in the back. The dormitories are located in the wards beneath the first floor.

In Aziz Nesin's ward, there's no one who entered the school with him. Mehmet and Ş. are placed in different wards. When he lies down on the lower bunk of one of the beds, he feels incredibly happy. But in the early morning hours, he wakes to the creaking of a bed and soft, labored breathing. He realizes there are two boys on the bed next to his. To avoid being noticed, he keeps his eyes shut. One of them gets up and leaves, and shortly after, another boy quietly takes his place. Aziz Nesin lies still, frozen in shock and fear, pretending to remain asleep.

The next day, he learns that the boy sleeping in that bunk is called Gilman Orhan from Üsküdar. A pale child, slightly taller than him, with delicate bones. Aziz never sees him laugh, fight, or interact with the other children. He never speaks to him—not even once. He has an unshakable sense that if he does, something disgusting will cling to him. Fifteen days later, Orhan is expelled from the school.

### *Neglect and Abuse*

Kazım Karabekir Pasha, who was fond of children and even wrote a playbook for them, had, after the war, sent many orphaned children in Eastern Anatolia to state-run boarding schools free of charge. Some were placed in orphanages, others in military schools. As a result, some children admitted into elementary school were as old as twelve. Because some students had repeated grades year after year, there were even twenty-year-olds in the seventh grade.

Those who failed were transferred to the Çengelköy Military Middle School, so the year Aziz Nesin enrolled, the seventh grade had close to seven hundred students. These students were referred to as "returnees," while new enrollees were called "registered-admitted." Among Aziz Nesin's classmates, there were returnees in their twenties. If a new student dares to express an opinion, they silence them

by saying the ink on their registry forms hasn't even dried yet. These newcomers are sometimes tricked into guarding the toilet, having been convinced it is the ammunition depot.

Older students regularly abuse selected younger boys. Yet, as in Orhan's case, when such incidents come to light, the abused child is expelled along with the perpetrator. There is no possibility of returning to school after that. Typically, a successful student becomes an officer and cannot leave the military until completing fifteen years of compulsory service. Those who fail or are transferred to the barracks are assigned as sergeants. If they are too young to serve, they are sent home to wait until they are of age. For some, being sent to the barracks is a dream; for others, a nightmare. Some failing students submit to these abusive relationships simply because they do not want to be posted to the barracks—and instead, choose to get expelled from the military altogether.

### *M.'s Story*

M., whose father died in the War of Independence, also attends boarding school. When he is only eleven, he is abused by an older student named R. Later, R. gets expelled. Then another older boy, K. Habip, begins harassing M. After some time, he too is expelled. When M. moves on to high school, he hits a growth spurt and turns into a handsome, athletic young man. He is cheerful and gets along well with his peers.

But R. begins visiting him every few months. Despite being shorter and weaker, R. somehow has a grip on M., who shrinks back into a frightened child whenever R. is near. Rumors spread that M. even gave R. money. Upon hearing the gossip, M. once stands on the classroom podium, tearfully confessing that he was raped as a child, that he wasn't able to protect himself, and that he is aware of what is being told about him.

After graduation, M. gets married and has children—but he later takes his own life. Many can't understand why. The truth is that R. had taken degrading photos of M. during the abuse and had been blackmailing him for years. Unable to bear it any longer, M. kills himself. But he plans the suicide so meticulously that some believe it was an accident.

Eventually, R. is convicted as a murderer. While Aziz Nesin is serving time in prison, he encounters R., who doesn't recognize him, allowing Aziz to keep his distance. One day, in Üsküdar Paşakapısı Prison, the infamous gangster "White Nuri" nears the end of his twelve-year sentence. While talking to a female visitor, R. and two accomplices attack him with razors stolen from the prison barber. Blood is everywhere.

### *Writing These Things*

When Aziz Nesin is sixty-one, he begins writing his memoirs but hesitates about including the abuse he witnessed in military school. On the last Sunday of 1975, he meets with fourteen of his former classmates to ask for their opinion. Most argue that he shouldn't disrespect the military. Only four of them encourage him to write. One of them, a retired staff colonel, points to his crooked nose and tells the story of how he got it: He had fought a boy at school, only to later discover the boy had been a victim of abuse. So, he has an older "protector." The older student holds his arms, while the victim punches him in the face repeatedly.

Another classmate supports Aziz, noting that in villages, some men turn to animals to satisfy sexual urges and that no one finds a solution for how such needs are handled in urban boarding schools.

Influenced by the era he was born into and the experiences he lives through, Aziz Nesin equates homosexuality with pederasty and considers it a sickness. He makes clear that he chooses to write about abuse in military schools because he doesn't want future children to suffer the same fate.

### *Bugle Calls*

The school's daily routine is regulated by the bugle, blown by the janitor. The first bugle of the day signals bath time. Whichever class is scheduled, its students head to the bathhouse. The "returnees" send one of new students to the duty captain's door to ask for soap. When the captain is woken, he either chases the student away or beats him.

An hour after the bath bugle, the long morning wake-up call is blown. Their favorite bugle call is the one for meals, sounded three times a day. After breakfast, there's a one-hour study session, and

another two-hour session after dinner. They go to these sessions at the sound of the bugle too. The last class of the day also ends with a bugle. And the final call is the bedtime bugle, drawn out and slow, signaling the day's end.

### *Clothing*

After a few days without uniforms, they are given two sets of clothes to wear—one for inside the school and one for outside—along with two pairs of shoes, two sets of underwear, and a set of pajamas. Almost all the students come from poor families. Some, even poorer than Aziz Nesin, pretend not to like the pajamas and sell them for fifty cents or one lira. Since Aziz Nesin has never worn pajamas, wearing a nightgown instead, he buys a pair of pajamas and gives them, along with his own, to his father.

The clothes worn inside the school are silver-colored, while the ones worn outside are navy blue. The hats have ribbons indicating the student's grade. Students who want to hide the fact that they've failed change the number of ribbons when they go home on Thursday afternoons.

Students who are obsessed with appearances modify their hats at milliners to resemble the officers' hats in American films. Since pants with flared cuffs are in fashion, they also have their trousers altered to have wide hems at the tailor's. Although growing long hair is prohibited, they do whatever they can to grow it. Since all of these actions are technically forbidden, they also try to avoid the officer who checks their appearance and clothing before they leave for home on Thursdays.

However, some students don't care at all about their appearance. Over time, they are called "potas." Aziz Nesin is neither interested in showing off nor is he a "potas." Only once, in his second year of high school, he changes the style of his clothes at the tailor's because he falls in love with a girl and buys a new hat from Faron, the famous Jewish milliner known among the students.

### *The Need to Find a Middle Ground*

All the students who repeat a grade are clustered by their hometowns in the classroom. For example, the students from Konya sit on one side, the ones from Tokat on another, and those from Erzincan on yet another. And they all constantly clash with each other.

On the first days of school, during a botany lesson, while the teacher, Kemal Bey, is teaching, Aziz Nesin takes notes carefully. In fact, they have to memorize the Arabic terms for almost all the Latin terms they learn. However, during the lesson, the students sitting in the back constantly push each other. Kemal Bey, ignoring the students who are acting out, finishes his lesson and then asks if anyone wants to repeat what he has taught. Grateful for the regular life he has now, Aziz Nesin eagerly raises his hand. As he walks toward the blackboard, a child trips him, calling him a "smartass." Stumbling slightly, he quickly turns to the child and says they'll talk after the lesson. He gets to the blackboard and repeats what he has learned. Kemal Bey is so pleased that he thanks him repeatedly.

When the bell rings for the break, Aziz Nesin goes out to look for the child who tripped him. He finds him in the yard, and they get into a fight. But the child tries to scratch him and bite his hands. When Aziz knocks the child down with a punch, someone comes up behind him, grabs him by the neck, lifts him up, and then lets him fall to the ground. In front of him is a tall student, at least five or six years older than him. Later, he learns that this student is the "protector" of the child who tripped him.

The child who tripped him is called "M. from Kadıköy." by his friends. At the end of the school year, M. from Kadıköy. appears to have failed, but in reality, he is expelled due to the kind of relationships he forms with older students.

Aziz Nesin, referring to the medical sources he read at the time, mentions that students living in boarding schools go through a process where they may develop homosexual tendencies, but he thinks M. from Kadıköy. has a hormonal disorder. He shares a secret told to him by his classmate, T.R. During the period when classes are suspended to prepare for exams, students can work as they wish, and M. from Kadıköy. goes out to the countryside with T.R. to study, where they end up having sex. T.R. never attempts anything like that again, but Aziz Nesin expresses his discomfort with M. from Kadıköy. and people like him who manipulate those around them to fulfill their desires.

However, all of this makes him realize that he must find a way to be liked by both the teachers and his classmates. He must succeed but also avoid being ostracized and called a “smartass.”

#### *The Bully Students*

While Kemal Bey is teaching, a fight breaks out among the students sitting in the back rows. Kemal Bey tries to calm them down, but one of the students raises his hand and snaps, “You stay out of it, just teach your lesson!” Then he gets up and walks out of the classroom.

One of Aziz Nesin’s friends tells him about a similar incident in his own class. A teacher calls on a student from the back row to answer a question. When the student gives a silly answer, the whole class bursts out laughing. But one student, known as Jewish Fahri, laughs louder than anyone else. The teacher tells him to stop. At that moment, the student who gave the answer swears, telling the teacher he’ll settle things with Fahri during recess. Even though he’s reacting to someone mocking him, he doesn’t realize that he shouldn’t be swearing at all—especially in front of a teacher.

Gambling is also widespread among these students. After stepping out for recess, Jewish Fahri doesn’t return to class for a full fifteen days. He spends all that time gambling in the basement of the school.

#### *Zeki Bey*

After Kemal Bey leaves the school, Zeki Bey takes over. He’s in his thirties and originally trained as a dentist. He assigns all the students a plant and flower collection project. Aziz Nesin carefully labels each specimen he glues into a large notebook—name, type, details—and keeps this notebook for the rest of his life.

Toward the end of the school year, Zeki Bey becomes quiet and withdrawn. Later, they find out from the newspapers that his fiancée has died by jumping out of a window.

#### *Those with Families in Istanbul and Those Without*

On weekends, students who have a home in Istanbul are called *evci* (home-goers) and those who don’t are called *bekâr* (literally bachelor). While the *evci* kids spend weekends at home, the *bekâr* ones spend the day outside and the night at school. The younger *evci* children return to school nervously on Sundays because older students are waiting at the gate to force them to buy chickpeas.

Chickpea pilaf is usually served on Fridays, but many students are absent, so a lot of food remains. The students who stay behind dry the chickpeas under the sun, funnel them into cones made of newspaper, and sell them as roasted snacks to the younger ones. The little kids buy them out of fear. The older students do this because they have no one sending them pocket money.

#### *Sister Nimet*

Behind the school, up on a hill, there’s a mansion. A chemist named Hikmet Bey lives there. His housemaid, Nimet, walks from her home in Vaniköy every morning and returns on foot each evening. When the students see her, they call out, “Sister Nimet!” and lie down in front of her path. But she never looks at them. She doesn’t laugh when they try to make her laugh, and she doesn’t get angry when they try to provoke her. She walks past, unbothered. Because of this stoic dignity, they respect her.

Later on, Aziz Nesin finds out that Sister Nimet is married to a student from the school.

#### *Wrestler Münir*

Münir, known as “The Wrestler,” is about 22 or 23 and is the school’s undisputed tough guy. He’s chubby and cheerful-faced, transferred from Halıcıoğlu High School. He has many boys under his protection, but there are four who never leave his side. Münir doesn’t wake up at the sound of the bugle like everyone else—he wakes up when he feels like it. The four boys sleeping in the beds next to him stroke and coax him awake. One puts on his socks, another helps him into his pants. Someone else brings his breakfast to bed. In the evening, they circle around him, giving him massages.

One night, while everyone heads back to their dormitories, anyone who tries to enter their ward immediately backs out. Aziz Nesin doesn’t understand what’s happening. Suddenly, someone shoves him inside, but he comes out just as quickly. The lights inside are off. A flashlight lies on the floor, its

beam cast upward and expanded on the ceiling. In the center of that projected circle, Münir's genitals appear as a shadow two or three meters long, growing and shrinking as it moves. Münir lies stretched out between two beds while the four boys play with his genitals.

### *Bullying*

Sexual jokes are very common among the students. Sometimes, students with heavy sleep have their faces or penises painted. Sometimes, while they sleep, their feet are painted, and a string is tied around their ankles, making them move like a puppet. Because the water is very cold, children who cannot wash their faces are sometimes scolded by their teachers or even beaten when they go to class, as the teachers think they intentionally paint their faces. Aziz Nesin always tries to avoid being one of these children, living alert, anxious, and faint-hearted.

### *Babik Salahattin*

Because he is short, Babik Salahattin sits at the very back of the row, even though Aziz Nesin, who is also short, sits in the front row. The student who "protects" him has seated him there. At this student's request, Babik Salahattin's pants have no seam at the back, only easy-to-open and close snap fasteners.

Babik Salahattin, trusting his protector, starts to provoke others. Aziz Nesin points out that homosexual children tend to accept such situations more easily and live without much trouble, but those who are forced into relationships compensate for their damaged masculinity by picking fights, like Babik Salahattin.

At the end of the year, four hundred out of seven hundred students in the seventh grade are expelled under the pretense of academic failure. However, the real reason is different. Some of the students, who are left without a protector, engage in sexual relations with other students for money. One of these students later becomes a famous football player.

### *Ibrahim from Kazan*

In the classroom, there is a child named Ihsan, who is always thinking about food. As lunchtime approaches, he says his stomach starts ringing, and so he is called "Zil Ihsan" (Bell Ihsan). There is another student, called "Zil Cavit," who plays the bell in the school band. When Aziz Nesin writes his memories, he calls Cavit and asks him to recall the events from those days. Cavit talks about Ibrahim from Kazan.

One day, when Ibrahim goes to the bathhouse, the bath attendant tells him about the things that happened to him when he was captured by the Russians. Ibrahim argues with the bath attendant because he speaks ill of the Russians. When the bath attendant complains, Ibrahim is discharged from the army on the grounds that he is a spy. Years later, Cavit sees him on the street as a policeman. A while after, he reads in the newspapers that a policeman has killed his unfaithful wife. Many years pass, and when Cavit goes to the Haydarpaşa Agricultural Equipment Institution to buy an oil seal for a relative's tractor, he sees Ibrahim working as a doorman there.

### *Lending a Coat*

Children with new clothes or patent leather belts rent them out to friends on their free days to earn money. The most expensive items to rent are the coats in the color of baruti (a deep reddish-brown), with a red lining under the collar. In addition to the school-issued six-button coats, there are also eight-button coats custom-made by tailors. The buttons on these custom-made coats are very close to each other at the waist, which makes the shoulders appear broader and the waist thinner.

Cahit has one of these custom-made coats. On a free day, Aziz Nesin asks to borrow it. Cahit agrees, on the condition that the coat is not damaged. Aziz Nesin imagines meeting a girl while wearing the coat. However, despite walking a long way home, no one shows him any special attention along the way. When he gets home, neither his father nor his sister notices the coat. On the day he plans to return to school, he decides not to go outside because it is rainy and thinks no one will be able to see his coat properly. He goes back to school on Saturday morning. He arrives just in time for class, but when he passes under a stove pipe, coal tar drips onto the coat, staining it. When Cahit sees it, he starts complaining. He scolds Aziz Nesin for not taking proper care of the coat, which he had lent without asking for any payment. Aziz Nesin, knowing that Cahit is right, apologizes several times. After that, he never asks anyone for anything again.

### *A Painter in Military School*

The art teacher, Cevat Bey, is a man who believes in the new regime. Even though the students do not take the art class seriously and mock it, he tries to make them love art. One day, he tells the story of the book *All Quiet on the Western Front* while crying. Telling such a book, which criticizes war, to military school students deeply affects Aziz Nesin. Since he doesn't have enough money to buy the book, he goes to the bookstore in Beyazit, but he can't find it there.

Cevat Bey tells him that if he wants to learn to paint, he must first learn to draw sketches. He shows him human heads drawn with a pencil in a notebook he takes out from his coat and advises him to draw everyone he sees, everywhere. Aziz Nesin cannot follow this advice, but instead, he mentally engraves everyone as a writer and writes about them.

### *Nizamettin Bey*

The chemistry teacher, Nizamettin Bey, is so strict with grades that he is called "Zero Nizam." It is said that he has deep knowledge of chemistry, but he does not put much effort into teaching it. Aziz Nesin thinks this is perhaps due to his weariness or his desire to teach adult students rather than young ones. One day, while talking about protons, electrons, and neutrons, he loses himself in the subject. When the bell rings, he comes back to himself and hints that what he said might not be understandable for them. However, Aziz Nesin has been listening to him attentively. Occasionally, he reads the magazines and books of Naim, the son of Salim Bey, who has finished Istanbul Boys' High School and is in his second year of medical school. In one of these magazines, it is mentioned that elements can be changed by altering the number of protons in an atom. Because of this, Nizamettin Bey's talk that day catches his attention more.

Nizamettin Bey gives a grade of four at most, claiming that five belongs to God. However, Aziz Nesin is a student who strives to get a five in every subject. After an exam, Nizamettin Bey does not want to give him a five and calls him to answer questions orally. When Aziz Nesin succeeds orally as well, Nizamettin Bey, looking upset, says that he has received God's grade.

### *The Grocer and the Imam*

Students who dislike the meals provided by the school buy sausages, pastirma, halva, and other things from the nearby grocer. They also chat with the grocer. The grocer, a man from the Black Sea region, is also the imam of the mosque. But, when talking to some students, he curses frequently and tells crude jokes. Aziz Nesin thinks that he does this not out of desire but to protect his daughters from male students. In this way, he frees himself from being someone whom the students can dominate.

### *Süreyya Bey*

Süreyya Bey teaches calligraphy once a week. He draws lines so perfectly and writes on those lines so beautifully that Aziz Nesin is in awe of his skill. Even years later, when he is a student at the Fine Arts Academy, he sees that Ismail Hakkı Altunbezer also draws perfect shapes on the blackboard with similar skill. Arif Dino, the brother of the painter Abidin Dino, attends the class just to watch his drawings. One day, Arif Dino talks about how impressed he was by the shapes masters in Crete drew in a single stroke on vases and how he watched them to learn their secrets.

Aziz Nesin forgets most of the couplets and quatrains Süreyya Bey taught him, but only one couplet stays in his mind. It means: "O friends! Winter passes, but the sting of reproach never fades, so stop seeking approval by kissing the hem of a coat that lacks a skirt!"

### *Quarrelling for No Reason*

Everyone who shares the name Şevket is called "Mud Şevket" because of a tough guy known as Mud Şevket. Aziz Nesin finds Şevket, who was his classmate in Vefa Middle School, here. When Şevket was successful, he was unsuccessful, but it is reversed in military school. One day, for no reason, he punches Aziz Nesin. Aziz Nesin thinks it's a joke and responds lightly, but when Şevket prepares to strike seriously, Aziz Nesin lets his arms fall to his sides, as he finds quarreling for no reason senseless.

Şevket fails again and becomes an officer a year later. Years later, Aziz Nesin sees him struggling to walk on a street. As he climbs the hill, he unintentionally hears the wheezing in his chest because he is walking right behind him.

### *The Place of Sports*

Nazmi Bey, a cavalry captain, is the physical education teacher at the military school. Despite his age, he should have been a lieutenant colonel or a colonel, but he has not achieved that. When exercising with the students, he is so good that he cannot be distinguished from a young gymnast. Due to financial difficulties, he sells brochures with pictures of Gazi Mustafa Kemal Paşa to the students every year.

Nazmi Bey is ridiculed for practicing sports. Everyone calls him “Zıdır Nazmi” (Jumper Nazmi) because he practices gymnastics, which involves jumping. Many teachers do not look kindly on those who practice such sports. However, according to Aziz Nesin, Nazmi Bey is a man who sees ahead of his time. People like him live their lives humbly and pave the way for those who come after them.

On a rainy day, since there is no gym, Nazmi Bey holds class in the classroom. While explaining the place of gymnastics in daily life, he says that a civilized person is someone who can adapt themselves to civilized techniques. Acting as though he is walking between cramped cars, he demonstrates how to walk in traffic to the students.

Every year, during the school trip to Beykoz, lamb is roasted, pilaf, salad, and semolina dessert are eaten. Before the meal, Nazmi Bey has everyone perform a gymnastics show, then lines them up arm in arm, forming a chain. This picturesque scene makes him happy when seen from outside.

### *Ismail Hakkı Bey and Suat Bey*

Ismail Hakkı Bey, the school principal, is a chubby man who gets angry quickly. When he is angry, his face turns bright red, and behind his back, they call him “Redhead.” When he calls students to his office, he always beats them. Aziz Nesin’s retired major general friend, Mustafa Onanç, tells a story about being called to the principal’s office. He says that, fearing the stick the principal used to beat, he wrapped towels around his body and wore his clothes on top of them.

The vice principal, Suat Bey, is a cheerful man. During his time as a major general, it was forbidden for soldiers to marry foreigners, so he resigned to marry a German woman. After his son, an aircraft engineer, dies in a plane test, he loses his cheerfulness. Aziz Nesin is surprised to learn that he never goes to a barber and cuts his own hair. After the age of fifty-five, he, like Suat Bey, starts cutting his own hair.

### *Cultural Hybridity*

There is a single textbook printed by the State Printing House for every subject in the country. The “Country Knowledge” textbook was written by Afet Inan and Recep Peker. However, it is said that it was written by Mustafa Kemal Paşa or was corrected by him after they wrote it. The teacher of this subject has a unique character for that time. He is perceived as a blend of East and West in every way. He wears a long-tailed jacket under his melon hat, like a tailcoat. Sometimes, he wears a tuxedo jacket. However, he has a traditional-style beard. He speaks like someone from the provinces. Aziz Nesin sees him as a man dressed in the attire of those known as “revolutionaries” at that time, yet reminiscent of a mosque imam.

### *Holiday*

The school is closed on Thursdays, and the students return on Friday evening. However, although Aziz Nesin’s house is in Istanbul, he does not go home. He is not comfortable at home. He does not have his own room, nor does he even have his own bed. It is uncomfortable to eat while sitting cross-legged. He is much happier running and playing with his friends in the fields and hills near the school on Fridays.

Sometimes, the school is quarantined due to an epidemic. When the students are forbidden to leave for two weeks, Aziz Nesin writes a letter to his father so that he will not worry. His father comes to the school and leaves food for him. This is the only time his father visits the school. He never asks about the situation at school, not even knowing what grade he is in. However, this is not due to his indifference but because of his trust in his son.

### *Hikmet Bey*

Hikmet Bey, the history teacher, tells history lessons with such enthusiasm that he always seems to be telling a story about something he personally experienced. Aziz Nesin listens to him with admiration

every time and takes notes in notebooks. There are always things to memorize. However, over time, he learns that history should not be told like a fairy tale, and he realizes why he could not develop a deeper understanding of history, just as with other subjects.

#### *Atif Bey*

Atif Bey, the English teacher, is a vague character in Aziz Nesin's mind. Despite his hard work in class, Aziz Nesin is unable to learn English through his lessons. He tries to take notes in English but fails. The only two students who leave school having learned English are those who focus entirely on the language. Other students learn it not at school, but through their own efforts. Therefore, Aziz Nesin points out that English taught in schools is both improperly taught and inadequate.

#### *Being Different from Others*

From time to time, Aziz Nesin becomes emotional, withdraws into himself, and writes poetry. He sees this emotional state as a quality that makes him superior to his friends. One stormy night, he stays in the classroom and writes poetry. However, before finishing school, he realizes how bad what he has written is and destroys everything.

Outside of class, he reads many books. Since he has no choice in what to read, he reads whatever he gets his hands on. One of these books is about self-discipline. One of the exercises in it is to speak less. To follow this advice, he refrains from speaking to anyone for a while. However, fearing that his friends will make fun of him for what he's doing, he gives up after two weeks.

#### *Being Rich*

In order to gather the capital needed by the local bourgeoisie, banks start running ads for savings accounts and distribute piggy banks. Aziz Nesin believes that, having been told by his elders that "drop by drop, the lake will form," he can become rich by saving money. In his free time at school, he works hard to find a unique signature for himself and finally settles on the sharp-edged "M. Nusret." Although İş Bank distributes piggy banks, the ones it gives are plain-colored. On a holiday, he goes to Esnaf Bank instead and opens an account there because they offer colorful piggy banks. When the bank clerk sees his signature, he calls other clerks to show it, and they all laugh. Aziz Nesin cannot tell whether they are mocking him or genuinely admiring it. He feels both proud and embarrassed. With his bankbook and blue piggy bank in hand, he leaves the bank.

Every week, his father gives him fifty cents. The school is supposed to provide a monthly allowance of sixty cents, but it is often cut, and he ends up receiving only thirty to forty. Salim Bey's son also gives him pocket money whenever he visits. Aziz Nesin saves all of this in his piggy bank and regularly deposits it in the bank. Each time he walks past the bank, he feels powerful, as if he owns the place.

But one day, when he goes to the bank, he finds it has gone bankrupt. He follows the instructions to an address in hopes of retrieving his money. Upon seeing the tiny balance in his account, the clerk makes him feel ashamed for chasing such a small sum. Although he's told he'll be paid back according to a queue number, he never receives the money and finds no one to help him. Still, he doesn't give up on his dream of becoming rich. This time, he goes to İş Bank, opens another account, and gets a new piggy bank.

#### *Deadly Chocolate*

Some children buy cheap chocolate boxes with forty or fifty pieces of chocolate from chocolate factories in Tahtakale. The chocolates have numbered cards inside, and two children pull chocolates; the one with the smaller number pays for both. Or bets are made depending on whether the numbers on the chocolate cards are odd or even. Some children make money by pulling chocolates this way.

One of them is Zil Cavit. He buys the chocolates won by other children at a low price and resells them. He even manages to sell the same box four times. By doing this, he earns fifty liras, which is equivalent to an officer's salary. He hides this money in his designated cash box. Many students make a hole in the front of their box and insert a long nail into the hole, securing it with a ring on the lid. This creates a hidden lock. If someone doesn't know where the nail is, they can't open the box. However, someone who knows the nail's location steals Zil Cavit's fifty liras. Zil Cavit follows the thief for four days and finally catches him trying to change the money at the canteen.

Another one of those who makes money through chocolate pulls is Tombalak Ali, who comes from



Maltepe High School and is known as one of the "returnees." He bets with Selim, who comes from the same school, to eat all the chocolates in a box. Tombalak Ali starts eating the fifty chocolates in the box. But after eating the last one, he falls ill. He is taken to Haydarpaşa Military Hospital, and he never returns.

Knowing that most people who go to Haydarpaşa Military Hospital end up dying there, no one wants to go there even if they are sick.

#### *Captain A.*

Around a thousand students are supervised by five captains serving as class officers. Midway through the academic year, Captain A. joins them. Aziz Nesin notes that, having just emerged from war, it's impossible to find an ideal cadre of administrators. Like the others, Captain A. is a skilled officer with war experience—but none of them, he says, understand how to educate students.

But Captain A. is different. He dresses impeccably—his clothes are tailored by a master. At the time, it's forbidden for soldiers to wear medals or insignia on their uniforms. The only one he wears is the Independence Medal, awarded to him for fighting on the Eastern Front at the age of nineteen. Without ever using violence or even uttering a harsh word, he commands respect from everyone. He speaks so beautifully that whenever he opens his mouth, all ears turn to him. He frequently uses the word *zagon*, a local term meaning "honor." "Zagon is everything! First comes zagon!"

#### *The Piggy Bank*

Aziz hides his second piggy bank inside the slot in his desk. But one morning, he finds it stolen. He goes to Captain A.'s office and reports the theft. Captain A. scolds him for not storing it in his office in the first place. So Aziz gets a third piggy bank and begins saving again, this time keeping it in Captain A.'s office. Sometime later, the second stolen piggy bank is found—emptied—in the basement where some boys, known for engaging in sexual activity for money, tend to gather.

After a week-long holiday, Aziz returns with more coins to add to his piggy bank. But when he goes to the captain's office, it's gone. When Captain A. arrives, Aziz explains what happened. The captain insists that no one has entered his office and blames Aziz for the loss. Without saying a word, Aziz leaves. He buys a fourth piggy bank and hides it inside a friend's suitcase stored in the depot. That one is also stolen.

#### *The Fall of Captain A.*

One morning, word spreads that Captain A. and several students have been arrested. Some students, as if only now noticing, begin whispering that Captain A. used to pluck and shape his eyebrows. As it turns out, Captain A. had tried to get close to a student named B., whose family lived in Fatih. When B. went home and told his father—a retired officer—what happened, the father reported it to the school administration. A thorough search of Captain A.'s office was conducted, and his diaries—kept over many years—were found. In them, it was revealed in meticulous detail who he had been with and when. Everyone named in the diaries was arrested. Only then does Aziz Nesin begin to understand who stole his piggy bank, and why Captain A. reacted with such anger.

Years later, Aziz sees Captain A. in civilian clothes, working as a legal clerk in Istanbul. Despite everything, Aziz still feels respect for him. They chat briefly, but Aziz behaves nervously and shyly during the conversation. Later, he scolds himself for this awkwardness. Knowing that Captain A. has three children, he also feels a particular sorrow for them.

Just a few months before writing his memoirs, Aziz asks a friend who had been mentioned in the diaries to recount what happened. Though he doesn't go into full detail in his writing, he notes that a significant number of the boys involved were not driven by desire, but by fear. Being "disgraced" meant being transferred to units to serve as regular soldiers, a fate so dreaded that some students were willing to engage in such relationships just to be expelled from the academy.

#### *Head Representative Ap.*

One of the expelled students is Ap., the head student representative. Later, he makes headlines for strangling and killing a cashier during a robbery. While in Sultanahmet Prison, he notices that the guard plays with the chain holding the keys like a rosary. He chats with the guard and eventually starts fiddling with the chain himself. The guard doesn't mind.

Ap. presses one of the keys into a piece of wax hidden in his palm, secretly creating a mold. He finds a way to smuggle the mold outside and has the key duplicated. After escaping from prison, he eventually turns himself in. Only then do the authorities discover how he escaped. Years later, he is released under a general amnesty.

#### *The Sheep That Made the House Bearable*

Aziz never feels comfortable in his house and can't bring himself to like it. But since he loves animals, he asks his father to buy him a sheep. They go to the weekly livestock market and purchase two sheep. These sheep must be kept in shade during summer and in the barn during winter.

Just before the school breaks for the holidays, the sheep give birth, and now they have four. Aziz takes care of them in the garden, and thanks to them, the house becomes more tolerable.

#### *Bastards*

The children who organize to protect themselves from bullies at school are referred to as "bastards" and their group as the "Bastard Team" or "Bastard Regiment." When one of these children is wronged, they all gather in the evening, put a coat over the wrongdoer's head in a secluded spot, and then beat them up together. This is called the "coat beating."

Aziz Nesin feels the need to protect himself but does not join these bastards. Instead, he adopts their tactics. He constantly harasses the person he fights with. For example, during lunch one day, he throws a pudding dish at a larger, stronger boy sitting across from him, making everyone laugh at the boy's reaction. This way, the boy's reputation is tarnished, and he is considered defeated. Aziz Nesin consistently uses this quick-thinking approach to defend himself against the stronger boys.

#### *Old Friend*

One day, on his day off, he runs into an old friend from Davutpaşa Middle School. His friend is Mehmet Hilmi. His family calls him Mehmet, while his friends call him Hilmi. His father, Haydar Bey, is the sheikh of the Karababa Lodge. The Karababa Lodge on Karababa Street in Çemberlitaş has been closed, but the family, including the eldest son, still has the right to live there. The lodge is divided into two sections: the harem and the selamlık. The family lives in the two-story harem, while the selamlık section is unused.

Aziz Nesin finds the comfort he cannot find at home in their place, so he starts spending his weekends there. They share a bed at night. However, Hilmi, who is fond of uniforms, insists on sharing Aziz's uniforms too. Sometimes, when Aziz wakes up in the morning, he finds that Hilmi has worn his uniform and gone out. So, Aziz has to wait for him until the evening.

Hilmi is obsessed with ceremonial life and aspires to become an officer, but after middle school, he cannot continue his studies. He earns a good income by making dentures at a dentist's office in Nişantaşı. He dresses like a big man and speaks like one. He even wears gaiters on his shoes, which were once worn only by dandies or those who admired the French. He has sexual relations with women. Aziz listens to his stories as if he is hearing a fairy tale.

#### *The Belching Sheikh*

Mehmet Hilmi's father, Haydar Bey, was the chief muezzin under Abdulhamid and worked as an accountant for the Duyûn-u Umumiye, (Public Debt Administration which was an institution established in the late Ottoman Empire in 1881 to manage and oversee the empire's public debt, particularly the foreign debts that the government had accumulated). During the National Struggle, he helped smuggle weapons to Anatolia, and after the declaration of the republic, he worked in the Salt Monopoly, as salt was a state monopoly. Due to eczema on his chin and neck, he always kept a beard. However, when the manager of the institution he worked for asked him to shave, he resigned. Two years later, he passed away when his eczema turned into cancer.

Mehmet Hilmi's mother is a Circassian girl who was raised in the palace's harem. One day, she is told that she will be married to a sheikh and thinks she will be marrying an angel. In her view, sheikhs are like angels, beings with no human needs. But after marrying Haydar Bey, she sees him belch the day after the wedding and is stunned. She begins to question whether those who said she was marrying a sheikh had lied to her.

Mehmet Hilmi's mother, who later asks Aziz Nesin to address her as "mother," laughs as she tells him this memory.

### *Bayram*

One of the children's favorite places during the holidays is the Cinci Square in Kadırga. With Hilmi's insistence, they go there to have fun. However, despite Hilmi's efforts to look mature, he behaves more childishly than the others. Aziz Nesin, on the other hand, is overly stiff because he is wearing a military uniform. They watch a play in the tent theater and shoot nails at painted cans. Later, when Hilmi wants to ride a horse, they get on the thin, tired pack horses ready to sleep, but Aziz Nesin can't control his horse. Hilmi proves to be more skilled at this than he is.

### *Extraordinary Men*

Aziz Nesin is intrigued by some interesting men. One of them is Mevlüt Efendi, who works as a surgeon at the dental clinic where Hilmi works. Even in hot weather, he wears many things, and Aziz Nesin mistakes him for an Arab. However, Mevlüt Efendi, who served as a surgeon in Arab regions during World War I, speaks Turkish with an Arabic accent. Another person is Dentist Musta Bey. This man, who speaks fluent French, travels around the Yenikami area as a traveling dentist. In those days, dentists who have diplomas but cannot open their own clinics work as traveling dentists. Across from the dentist's clinic is Çakır Mehmet's Beyaz Gül tavern, where former bullies gather. Çakır Mehmet, after making a lot of money through some secretive dealings, opens a nightclub facing the sea in Yenikapı.

### *Failing Students*

Since Aziz Nesin is the top student in his class, he does not want to be seen as an unlikable student by his peers. To make friends, he starts helping them cheat. Over time, however, he begins to see this as a duty, sometimes helping students cheat and other times forcing some to study harder.

Some students, who are good at writing, prepare speeches to read during the last lesson at the end of the school year to pass the teacher's exam. Listening to these students' pompous, patriotic speeches, some teachers get emotional, while others are unimpressed. After the teary-eyed teacher leaves, the students who think the teacher has been "fooled" burst into laughter.

### *Rifle*

At the end of the school year, the 15-day camp period begins, and each student is given a rifle, a sabre, a belt, and a log. Although Aziz Nesin enjoys military training, he never gets along with the rifle. While the hats, shoes, and clothes given to everyone are tailored to fit their body sizes, the rifles are all the same size, and since Aziz Nesin is short, the rifle he carries hangs like a third leg, almost invisible beneath his other gear.

### *Being Sent to the Regiment*

On the first morning of camp, about ten or fifteen students' names are called, and they leave as if going to be shot by firing squad. The students who are not called feel relieved, but the next morning, another ten or fifteen names are called again. Thus, every morning, ten to fifteen students are sent to the regiment. Those over the age of fourteen undergo training and are promoted to sergeants, later becoming non-commissioned officers. Those under fourteen are made to serve long enough to cover the cost of their training once they reach military service age.

Although the apparent reason for being sent to the regiment is failure, the real reasons are moral, such as sexual behavior or theft. Among these students, there are bullies who, when sent to the regiment, make the remaining students feel relieved.

### *Two Friends*

Since Aziz Nesin is the top student in his class, he believes he knows more than anyone else. However, one day during a physics lesson, he gets into an argument with Nihat from Bursa over the concept of light reflection. Nihat claims that objects appear upside down on frosted glass, while Aziz Nesin, not understanding how someone who failed could argue with him, is perplexed. Nihat suggests they conduct an experiment, but Aziz Nesin denies the idea, saying that there is no frosted glass. However, Nihat insists on doing it himself and goes outside to scrape a broken glass shard on wet sand to create frosted glass, showing that the reflections are indeed inverted as he claimed.

From that day on, Aziz Nesin realizes that everyone has something they excel at, and he befriends Nihat. He begins to help him with his lessons, but despite his efforts, Nihat never succeeds in school. Nihat is sent to the Orhaniye Barracks for the signals regiment. When the school is on holiday, Aziz Nesin and a few friends visit him at the regiment. Nihat tries to appear satisfied with his situation. After that day, they never see each other again.

Another classmate, I., who is very polite and known as “Civelek,” (meaning lively) is expelled when he fails the class, but for some reason, he is not sent to the regiment. He asks Aziz Nesin for help in finding a job. The year is 1931, during the Great Depression in the US. Since labor is cheaper in the US, Ford plans to open a factory in Istanbul. Aziz Nesin writes a petition in his friend’s name and, one day, skips school to deliver it to the factory. However, Ford decides not to open the factory. Five years later, Aziz Nesin sees his friend as the director of a shooting range in Ankara. At that time, he is still a student at the Military Academy. His friend ignores him and turns his head away whenever he looks at him. Aziz Nesin is deeply hurt by the way his former schoolmate, who once asked for his help, now treats him.

#### *A Holiday at the School*

After the camp ends, report cards are handed out. Because Aziz Nesin ranks first, the assistant principal, Suat Bey, praises him. And so, the holiday begins. But Aziz doesn’t want to go home—he can’t find comfort there. Instead, he stays at school with a few friends. During the day, they wander through the countryside together.

One day, they undress and swim off the coast of Kandilli. Since Kuleli High School is still in its camp period, a marching band leads students during their drills. While they are in the water, they suddenly hear the sound of the band. They’re too far from shore and freeze, unsure of what to do. Moments later, Captain Ömer Lütfi orders them out of the sea. In a panic, they start swimming toward the opposite shore. But then the captain threatens to confiscate their uniforms on the beach. Defeated, they return one by one.

The captain seizes their clothes and commands them to march naked in front of the band. When the music starts, they walk in formation at the very front. Once they reach the school, the captain tells them to dress. Then he warns them never to swim there again and lets them go. From that day on, they only swim in places hidden from passersby.

At some point in the holiday, Aziz is finally forced to return home. Their flock of sheep has grown. Every morning, he takes them out to graze. While the sheep roam the gardens of Balıklı Greek Hospital, he reads books until evening.

#### *The Beni Amar Circus*

The largest circus Aziz has ever seen is the Beni Amar Circus. He recalls that where Taksim Gezi Park now stands used to be the Taksim Barracks, and the flatland called Talimhane, once without a single building, was where soldiers did drills. The circus sets up on that very plain. Its advertisements are so grand that crowds flock from all over Istanbul to see it.

There’s a rumor: anyone who brings a cat or a dog gets in for free. In those days, the number of stray cats and dogs on the streets noticeably drops. People believe these animals are used to feed the lions and tigers in the circus.

#### *An Unforgettable Shame*

Aziz’s father sells fruits and vegetables he grows in their garden, loading them onto their donkey, Çelebi. But he doesn’t sell them by shouting in the streets or in a market. He visits acquaintances at their homes or shops, sipping tea or coffee while chatting, and sells his produce that way.

During summer vacation, Aziz sometimes stays with the family of Hilmi. One day, when Haydar Bey asks who his father is, Aziz—thinking quickly—lies and says he’s the brother of Naci Bey, whom they used to work for.

On Fridays, Hilmi's family go on family outings—to the islands, Çamlıca, Çırpıcı, or similar places. His mother prepares food ahead of time: stuffed grape leaves, meatballs, pastries, fried chicken, salads—even soapy cloths for cleaning hands.

On one such outing, they plan a visit to the Sümbül Efendi Tomb outside Mevlanakapı. It's both a site of pilgrimage and a recreational spot, with tombs, a cemetery, and an ascetic lodge. On the way, they stop by a dervish lodge. The sheikh there is a friend of Haydar Bey. When Haydar introduces Aziz as the nephew of Naci Bey, the sheikh is surprised and begins to question him—because he knows Naci Bey has no brother. Once the lie becomes obvious, they let it go without pressing further.

They leave the lodge and arrive at the tomb, where they watch the wells inside the lodge. Aziz Nesin explains how, in the past, dervishes seeking to train their egos would retreat here—sometimes for forty days—surviving on just two olives and two dates a day.

A few days later, as Aziz walks with Hilmi from Beyazıt to Şehzadebaşı, he sees his father on the street with the donkey. He turns his head away. But his father notices him and calls out, "My son!" Aziz, filled with shame, stops and talks with him briefly. Later, Hilmi's family meets his father and they become friends. But Aziz never forgets the shame he felt for the way he treated his father. Whenever others praise or honor him, the memory returns.

In the years 1953–54, to support his two young children, he wakes before dawn and walks from their home in Levent—a newly built neighborhood—to Cağaloğlu. He buys newspapers from a vendor and goes door to door distributing them in Levent. At age 38, as a well-educated writer, he has to take on this job to survive. He senses that his children are ashamed of him. In this silent reproach, he sees the price he pays for how he once treated his own father.

#### *Ice Cream at the Music Hall*

One summer day during the holidays, Aziz and Hilmi wander around all day and decide to go to an open-air music hall in the evening to watch a Romanian revue. But Aziz desperately needs to use the toilet first. Since public restrooms are scarce and always a problem, he ends up urinating in a corner of the park in Taksim. Only after that can they head to the music hall.

When the waiter places the menu in front of them, they regret coming the moment they see the prices. Yet, they can't summon the courage to stand up and leave. Spotting ice cream as the cheapest item on the menu, they each begin to secretly count the coins in their pockets without anyone noticing. Once they're sure they can afford two ice creams, they order them.

Meanwhile, all the other tables are piled with all kinds of appetizers and drinks. The ice cream arrives, and the revue begins on stage—but both boys keep recounting the coins in their pockets to make absolutely sure they've done the math right. The stress keeps them from enjoying the ice cream or paying any attention to the women on stage.

Soon the waiter brings the check, and they see that a 10% service fee has been added. They panic. Thankfully, the small amount of money left over just barely covers the extra charge. They leave the music hall and walk side by side in silence for a while. Then, all at once, they burst out laughing. Since they don't even have tram fare, they walk all the way to Hilmi's place. That night, Aziz Nesin reflects that if everything had gone as planned, he wouldn't remember the evening at all. But it's moments like these—the kind that leave a mark—that are real life.

#### *Defense Mechanism*

When the holiday ends, Aziz becomes an eighth-grade student. Although many students have been transferred to the army, some newcomers who failed eighth grade at other schools now join. They start mocking the successful students by giving them nicknames. The term "inek" (cow) is actually coined by Aziz Nesin's generation as a form of ridicule. A student who answers all the teacher's questions is called a "milky cow."

No one wants to be labeled a cow, so many secretly study or try hard to appear as if they don't study at all. Aziz believes that underachieving students try to ease the pain of their own failure by spreading it to others. To protect himself, he first becomes the kind of hardworking student who helps his peers, and later, he joins in mocking everything and everyone. He gives most of his classmates nicknames. He writes fake newspaper articles that satirize and exaggerate every kind of flaw. Eventually, his

classmates begin to respect his dedication. If someone makes noise while he studies, the others silence them so he can concentrate better.

#### *The Knot of Life*

In their anatomy class, their teacher İsmail Hakkı Bey explains that there is a vital point at the base of the neck called the *ukde-i hayat*—the “knot of life.” He says if a needle pierces it, a person dies instantly.

One day, while playing a rough game in the classroom, a boy named Cemal—transferred from Bursa Military High School—is at the front of the line. Another student, unable to stop in time, crashes into the window. The glass shatters, and a shard pierces Cemal’s neck. Seeing him like that, Aziz thinks the shard has struck the knot of life. Cemal is rushed to the infirmary and walks around for weeks with his neck wrapped in bandages.

Forty years later, when they meet again, Cemal—now a retired colonel—shares a memory he never forgot. One day, while Cemal is causing a ruckus in class, Aziz turns around and says, “If you’ve decided to drop out, go ahead—but I want to be an officer, and I have to study.” That moment fuels Cemal’s ambition. He starts studying seriously and eventually becomes an officer.

#### *Davut Şükrü*

Their physics teacher, Davut Şükrü Bey, is tall, blond, blue-eyed, with bright white teeth. Though he rarely smiles, he doesn’t seem stern. For Aziz, he symbolizes the hope that flourished right after the War of Independence.

Davut Şükrü Bey wears a Medal of Independence and lives with shrapnel fragments lodged in his body from the war—fragments that move constantly under his skin, opening new wounds. They could clog a vein leading to his heart or another organ at any time. He lives in constant proximity to death, yet he never once complains.

Aziz, seeing the wounds that never leave his teacher’s body, imagines death blooming like flowers across his skin. Yet Davut Şükrü doesn’t turn this pain into a political career or withdraw into bitterness. He becomes a teacher and devotes himself to teaching physics, no matter what. Even during holidays, he comes to school to help struggling students.

Looking back, Aziz Nesin feels lucky to have been taught by the best. Despite the poverty of the postwar years, they are full of hope. Everyone believes in Mustafa Kemal Paşa’s vision of reaching contemporary civilization. Especially teachers like Davut Şükrü. That hope, Aziz says, is what allows him to keep hoping—no matter how much hardship he later endures.

Years later, in 1946, when he is arrested for publishing a pamphlet against American imperialism—smuggled in under the Truman Doctrine—the judge asks which foreign powers helped him write it. Aziz Nesin freezes. In that moment, he remembers Davut Şükrü Bey and other idealist teachers like him. He reflects on how, in those early years after the war, many believed their true enemy was Greece. Some even hated the colors blue and white just because of the Greek flag. But he eventually realizes that both Turkey and Greece share a common enemy: imperialist powers. To show he’s not exaggerating about the hatred for colors, he recalls a poem Davut Şükrü once read aloud—one that refuses even the blue sky because it resembles the enemy flag.

#### *Teachers*

To emphasize the importance of teachers like Davut Şükrü, he quotes from a newspaper clipping he had kept. The article was published in *Milliyet* newspaper on February 15, 1972, signed by Hıfzırahman Raşit Öymen. It recounts a speech by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924 at the Independence Commercial School in Samsun, in which Atatürk speaks about a middle school teacher who deeply inspired him. The article notes that the identity of this teacher has not been sufficiently researched. The teacher in question was Naki Yücekök. Years later, he served as a member of parliament, first representing Elazığ and then Muş, and later became part of the Free Republican Party’s cadre during the transition to a multi-party system.

#### *The Questioning Student*

Their geography teacher, retired Staff Colonel Adil Bey, is an exceptionally stern man, even by military school standards. Because of his demeanor, geography becomes one of the most unpleasant subjects. Nonetheless, Aziz Nesin continues to take notes diligently. When they learn that the Earth is round, he starts to wonder if that might not be the case. He doesn't actually doubt it, but as a questioning student, he wants to explore other possibilities. One day, he writes down his thoughts in a 24-page document and places it on Adil Bey's desk before class begins.

When Adil Bey enters and sees the document, he asks sharply, "What is this?" In that moment, Aziz Nesin regrets handing it over. Adil Bey, maintaining the same stern tone, tells him to take it back. Without saying a word, Aziz retrieves the papers and returns to his seat.

#### *The New Teacher*

After Adil Bey leaves the school, he is replaced by Major Hakkı Raif Ayyıldız. Hakkı Raif, who never married due to his mother's wishes, can afford fine clothes and is always impeccably dressed. He fought in both the World War and the War of Independence. During the Sinai and Palestine Campaign, while fighting the British, a shell landed nearby and buried him in the sand. He was discovered later when others came to search for the dead. Since that day, he has suffered from partial hearing loss.

Aziz Nesin greatly admires the expensive leather satchel he always carries, puffed up with importance. Hakkı Raif Bey also teaches geography at the high school level, and in one exam, he is so impressed by Aziz Nesin's essay on how living things adapt to their environment that he reads it aloud to the class.

One day, while Aziz Nesin is walking with his friend Hilmi in Beyoğlu, they stop by a newspaper stand to get some water. At that moment, Hakkı Raif Bey quietly approaches him and whispers that the armpit of his jacket is torn. Then he walks away. Aziz Nesin is overcome with embarrassment, especially because the school always emphasizes the importance of maintaining neat clothing while wearing uniforms. He immediately rushes home to have it mended.

#### *The End of Memorization*

A year later, in the first geography lesson, Hakkı Raif Bey talks about the etymological origin of the word "geography." Aziz Nesin writes down every sentence he hears from him, word for word, in his notebook. M. from Kadıköy, who failed four subjects and knew he wouldn't pass the class, wants to save his geography grade. He takes Aziz Nesin's notebook and starts memorizing everything in it. Aziz Nesin sees him pacing up and down in the corridor, muttering to himself while holding his own notebook.

When Hakkı Raif Bey asks who wants to answer questions from the weaker students, M. from Kadıköy raises his hand. When he gets to the board, Hakkı Raif Bey asks him a question. But M. from Kadıköy starts talking about the etymological root mentioned at the beginning of Aziz Nesin's notebook. Hakkı Raif Bey thinks there's been a misunderstanding and repeats his question. M. repeats the same sentences again. He continues reading from the notebook, reciting everything he had memorized, until he reaches the part that answers the question.

#### *Years Later*

Years later, in 1946, Aziz Nesin finds himself sitting in a room of the First Department of the Istanbul Police Headquarters, facing the deputy known as Parmaksız Hamdi. Sitting at a desk, he sees Hakkı Raif Ayyıldız and is too stunned to know what to do. Later, he learns that the man is actually Hakkı Raif Bey's brother, but it still feels as if he has seen him. Therefore, when he later sees him on the street, he can't bring himself to approach and talk to him.

Many years later, when Aziz Nesin goes to the dinner for the 1935 graduates of Kuleli Military High School, he stands in line for the minibus in Üsküdar. Soon, Hakkı Raif Bey joins the line. However, Hakkı Raif Bey has changed drastically. Due to a stroke, he drags his leg while walking. Aziz Nesin wonders whether he is married, thinking that his mother must have passed away by then. He approaches him to kiss his hand. They take the same minibus. Aziz Nesin tries to remind him who he is, but Hakkı Raif Bey doesn't seem to recognize him.

Aziz Nesin feels great sorrow for his teacher's condition and says that no matter what, he will always remember Hakkı Raif Bey as a young lieutenant—slender, well-dressed, and with sparkling eyes that indicated how much he enjoyed teaching.

#### *Vitamin*

Ismail Hakkı Bey, who teaches physiology, expects students to memorize not only the French and Latin terms for every concept but also the Arabic equivalents. When a student uses the Turkish terms, he gets angry. According to him, the correct terms are in Arabic. Aziz Nesin, being a successful student, memorizes all of these terms—Arabic, French, and Latin. Because of this, Ismail Hakkı Bey likes him even more.

Sometimes, during exams, the teachers ask Aziz Nesin just one question, but when foreign teachers from other schools are present, they tend to ask longer and more elaborate questions to show off. This is why, on one occasion, Aziz stays for more than an hour during an exam. One day, for such an exam, he goes to Ismail Hakkı Bey's office. There are foreign teachers from other schools in the room. Ismail Hakkı Bey asks, "What's the new thing that's come out? What is it?" Aziz Nesin immediately answers, "Vitamin." This allows him to pass the exam.

In the 1930s, vitamin was a relatively new concept in Turkey. Aziz Nesin had read in a newspaper that vitamins helped with height growth, and since he was only 1.58 meters tall, he was especially interested in the topic. That's why he was able to answer so quickly.

#### *Painting and Music*

Their art teacher is the famous painter Sami Yetik. Aziz Nesin learns many years later that he is a famous artist. His music teacher is Saim Bey. Years later, while crossing from Karaköy to Kadıköy by ferry, he sees a man who resembles Saim Bey and wonders if it's him. He knows it can't be, as his teachers would have aged by the time he became an adult. However, he still wants to remember him as energetic and well-dressed.

#### *Street Dog*

The teacher of the Hygiene class is Dr. Fikri Servet, whose brother is a member of parliament. One winter morning, Fikri Bey notices a street dog howling in front of his house. When he goes downstairs, he sees that the dog's leg is broken. He takes the dog in and treats it. After a while, the dog runs away. The next winter, while reading his newspaper, Fikri Bey hears another dog howling. When he goes outside, he sees that the dog he had treated has brought another larger dog with a broken leg. He realizes that the one howling is the new dog.

Aziz Nesin mentions this story in his book *Hayvan Deyip de Geçme* (Don't Call It an Animal). However, a sentence from Fikri Bey greatly upsets him. Fikri Bey says that he doesn't teach for money, that his teaching salary is only enough for his daughters' grooming expenses.

#### *Bahri Bey*

Turkish teacher Bahri Bey comes to school in Çengelköy every morning from his house in Cerrahpaşa. Since there are no buses or minibuses in Cerrahpaşa at that time, he walks most of the way. Bahri Bey is both feared and loved as a teacher. When someone talks to the person next to them in class, he shouts, "Which garden's rose are you?" He warns those who misbehave, saying, "I'll say you're the child of a ..!" No one ever takes offense to what he says because it sounds like a fatherly reminder.

When teaching about theater, Aziz Nesin listens so attentively that Bahri Bey points him out to his friends, saying that he will be a playwright in the future. Aziz Nesin feels like he's caught in a trap by this comment, thinking his teacher has implied that despite his military school background, he could still become a playwright.

#### *The Photo Scam*

Photography at school is one way to earn money and pass classes easily. The photographers demand high fees for the photos they take, and they use the excuse of taking pictures to get close to teachers and officers. The students call them "Foto Kazık." (In Turkish "kazık" is used to mean something like a



“rip-off,” “scam,” or “fraud.” In the context of “Foto Kazık,” it implies students who take advantage of photography to profit).

Although teachers may make things easier for these students during exams, they are so lazy that they don’t even realize the help being given to them. Many stories about this are passed down over the years. In one story, a teacher calls a “Foto Kazık” to the board and asks what should be done to raise a balloon further. When there’s no answer, the teacher says there’s weight in the balloon to make it easier. A friend of the “Foto Kazık” enters the room and whispers, “at,” which means both “throw” and “horse” in Turkish. The “Foto Kazık” silently waits. When the teacher asks what’s inside the balloon, the “Foto Kazık” responds, “A horse, sir.”

In another class, the chemistry teacher writes the formula for water on the board and asks a “Foto Kazık” what it is. The “Foto Kazık” can’t answer. His friend, unable to give a whispering hint, points to the jug on the table with gestures. Eventually, the teacher shouts, “What’s this, tell me!” and the “Foto Kazık” responds, “A jug, sir.”

In another class, the teacher asks a “Foto Kazık” how he can tell if an egg is fresh. He should check if it sinks when placed in water, but the student says he checks it by holding it up to the light and feeling it with his hand. When he realizes this is not the correct answer, he responds, “I break it open, sir.”

#### *A Harsh Joke*

Students joke with each other in a rough manner. Complaining or avoiding these jokes is not well received. One day, when they are out in the fields, Aziz Nesin begins to joke with Avni. Avni speaks in his hometown’s unique dialect, is taller but not heavier than Aziz Nesin, and knows how to wrestle. Aziz Nesin enjoys teasing him. When he annoys Avni, the latter starts chasing him, and eventually, they grapple. For a moment, Avni squeezes his head between his arms. Aziz Nesin can’t breathe but refuses to give up. He keeps resisting, trying not to let his back touch the ground, but feels his teeth breaking. Finally, their friends separate them, but Aziz Nesin still tastes the broken teeth in his mouth. He doesn’t tell anyone that Avni broke his teeth until he writes about it in his memoirs. Since white dental crowns weren’t common back then, Hilmi gets two gold crowns made for his broken front teeth. At that time, getting gold dental crowns is a trend, and people assume he follows this trend.

#### *Love in Dreams*

Since students love getting their photos taken, they go to a photo studio run by an Armenian, called New World Photo Studio. The photos taken there, with a picture of a beautiful house with a garden in the background, are more popular because they are touched up. Some students pose while sitting and reading a bound French book. Since students pick up their photos a week later, they call them “weekly.”

Aziz Nesin also has several “weeklies” taken here. One day, while waiting for his turn, he studies the framed photographs on the wall and becomes infatuated with the picture of a girl. At the time, even in Istanbul, it is rare for men and women to have ordinary relationships. After marriage, they may become partners, but never friends. Aziz Nesin notes that no one finds it odd when folk poets claim they fell in love with a girl they saw in a dream. In a society so deeply divided by gender, such stories are considered normal. He himself has had few meaningful interactions with girls. And just like those folk poets who fall for dream-girls, he falls for the girl in the photo.

#### *Scolding the Colonel*

Hilmi’s father, Haydar Bey, just like Aziz Nesin’s own father, wears a robe at home and sits on the daybed in the bay window of the large upstairs room, watching the street. At the corner of the street leading to Tramway Avenue, there’s a teahouse called “Diyarbakır Coffeehouse.” Every day, a man steps out of this teahouse, urinates on the wall, and goes back inside.

Haydar Bey, frustrated by this man’s behavior, asks Aziz Nesin one day to catch him in the act and scold him while wearing his uniform—because even students in uniform are feared. Aziz rushes outside and stands behind the man as he urinates. When the man turns around, Aziz questions him: why would he do such a thing on a residential street, and doesn’t he feel ashamed as an adult? The man shows his ID, explains he’s a retired colonel with diabetes, and has to urinate frequently. The teahouse toilet is always occupied.

After that day, the man never urinates on the wall again. They assume he stopped coming to the teahouse. Hilmi later reveals that the man wasn't just a colonel, but retired brigadier general Şakir Pasha.

#### *Looking or Kissing?*

In Şehzadebaşı, two rival theaters operate: Millet Theatre and Ferah Theatre. Millet is run by Naşit Özcan, and Ferah by İsmail Dümbüllü. A fierce competition exists between the two. Ferah draws larger crowds since it also hosts other stage acts, while Millet screens a film first, then stages a play. After watching Naşit Özcan, Aziz finds İsmail Dümbüllü's acting bland. While Naşit Özcan transforms in each role, İsmail Dümbüllü remains the same.

When Aziz and Hilmi go to a play, Hilmi often buys box seats. On Friday nights, Aziz notices a young woman in a group of three women and a little girl consistently gazing at him. He looks back. But when he learns her name is Şaziment—at a time when names like Mine, Oya, Aysel, Ayla, and Ece are fashionable—he's disappointed. To him, Şaziment sounds like a name for an old woman. He sees her twice more at the cinema in Samatya.

He's so unfamiliar with girls that he sees men as the real humans and women as their feminine counterparts. He believes Şaziment's interest is tied to his uniform—since for girls, dating a military student and marrying a soldier is seen as prestigious. There's even a saying: "A soldier alive is money, a soldier dead is money."

Years later, a young, beautiful woman tells Aziz Nesin, in a critical tone, that if he were to kiss a woman, he would feel obligated to marry her. He's stunned by how well she understands him. And he's relieved that he never got close to Şaziment, that he only looked. Otherwise, he would've felt bound to marry her and would've done everything he could to maintain the marriage—no matter what.

#### *Footballer Friends*

Football matches in Beylerbeyi are intense. While matches between military schools stay calm, games against civilian teams often turn into fights. When the civilian team starts winning, Aziz Nesin's schoolmates—unable to believe that a team of soldiers can lose—attack them.

Two of the most notorious players are T., nicknamed "the Bear," and İ., nicknamed "the Hafız" for his beautiful voice. T. plays so aggressively that no one wants to get near him. Eventually, he doesn't make officer rank. İ. does, but after the 1960 coup, he's asked to retire early.

Years later, while Aziz Nesin is publishing the humor magazine *Zübük*, İ. shows up, saying his daughter is getting married and asks him to write a speech for the wedding. Aziz Nesin says he can't write a speech for people he doesn't know, but İ. insists. Aziz Nesin writes one and gives it to him. İ. takes the speech and disappears.

#### *A Sense of Superiority*

As Aziz Nesin gradually frees himself from the inferiority complex born of poverty, he starts inviting his friends over. He can't host them inside the house, but he welcomes them in the garden. One day, they notice a swarm of bees settling in a pear tree. Following a friend's advice, they place a basket filled with sugar syrup to attract the bees and make it their new hive. But the swarm disperses. Another day, they're forced to wash a friend's clothes after their donkey urinates on him.

What gives Aziz Nesin the confidence to appear as he truly is before his friends is his success and diligence as a student. This sense of self-assurance makes him reject the fifty cents weekly allowance his father gives him. He believes his pocket money should be proportional to his achievements at school. He argues with his father three times over this. Though his father is strict with everyone, he tries to reason with him gently. Aziz Nesin only realizes how unfair he has been once his father raises the allowance to two lira.

#### *Hairy*

At the time, autograph books and questionnaire notebooks are all the rage among students. Kids either pass around autograph books for their friends to write personal notes in, or circulate questionnaire notebooks with written questions for others to answer. Aziz Nesin's friends often bring him questionnaire notebooks from girls' schools and ask him to help

answer the questions. Aziz Nesin imagines himself as the boy the girl is flirting with and writes the answers accordingly. Over time, he hears that the answers—and even the quirky nicknames he uses like “ballıbaba” (deadnettle), “katırtırnağı” (restharrow), “ısırgan” (nettle), “keçiboynuzu” (carob)—become popular among the girls. Because respondents don’t use their real names; they choose such nicknames instead.

He tends to imagine young girls as angelic beings. But one day, the assistant principal Suat Bey scoffs at students who try to flirt with girls, telling them those girls are not as innocent as they think. This shatters his idealized image.

One day, he receives a questionnaire filled with inappropriate questions and responds with equally inappropriate answers. When the girl realizes the answers aren’t from the boy she’s seeing, she sends the notebook back, asking him to rewrite the answers honestly. This time, he signs as “kıllıbaba” (Hairy Grandpa). That nickname later shortens to just “Kıllı” (Hairy).

### *Communist*

Aziz Nesin recalls how, in 1955, the ruling Democrat Party organized a rally in Istanbul for Cyprus. But the crowd, instead of protesting colonialism, attacks non-Muslim neighborhoods. The events spiral into the 6–7 September pogrom. In the aftermath, the government, knowing that no one would defend them, targets communists. Aziz Nesin is among those arrested.

While being held at the Harbiye Military Prison, the general in charge of the military district visits the detainees. He looks at each one as if examining a strange new species. Aziz Nesin sees a mix of amazement and confusion in his eyes—the look of someone studying an unknown creature.

He recalls other absurd moments: like a university student in Ankara who gets arrested for whistling a Western melody on campus—accused of being a communist. Or a teacher whose house is searched. When he says, “I’m anti-communist,” the officer replies, “I didn’t ask what kind of communist you are.” By recounting these, he wants to show how easily one could be labeled a communist in Turkey—and how harsh the consequences were.

Back in 1931, when Aziz Nesin is ten years old, Hilmi’s father, Haydar Bey, asks him to deliver a bowl of Noah’s pudding and a letter to a man’s house. That man is the uncle of Hilmi’s mother, Ahsen Hanım. He is from the Besney clan of Circassians who migrated from the Caucasus to Turkey, along with Isa Agha’s tribe. One of their descendants is Harun Reşit Pasha. Ahsen Hanım is his niece, and some of her valuables were left with her uncle.

Haydar Bey tells Aziz Nesin that the son of Harun Reşit Pasha is studying in France and is a communist. Aziz Nesin is thrilled—he’s about to see a communist for the first time in his life. He goes to the address and meets the young man. He can’t tell if the man is truly tall or just appears that way because he expects communists to be tall. The young man has a pipe in his mouth, wears a short-sleeved, open-collar shirt, and looks like no one Aziz Nesin has ever seen—or so he wants to believe.

The young man takes him to his studio inside the house, puts on a long white work coat. He’s a sculptor. Aziz Nesin is mesmerized by the items in the studio. He wonders to himself why someone so gifted would waste his life by being a communist.

Years later, while writing his memoirs, he calls Hilmi and asks who that man was. He learns his name was Ömer Faruk. He had taught painting at the Commercial High School, then sculpture at the academy. Reflecting on the political climate of those days, he says maybe the man wasn’t a communist after all—maybe he was anti-communist.

### *Artistic Activities*

As a result of the Turkish-Greek friendship that Mustafa Kemal Pasha and Eleftherios Kyriakou Venizelos try to foster after the war, the songs of a Greek singer named Zozo Dalmaz play frequently in Istanbul’s nightclubs. Rumors even circulate that Mustafa Kemal has a romantic relationship with her. Aziz Nesin and Hilmi go to listen to her at Maksim one night.

On another evening, they watch a performance by a foreign troupe. In the act, two men—one thin and the other plump—wrestle on stage. As the plump one tries to drag the thin one backstage, the thin

man resists. Just as he is trying to remove the hand from his throat, he suddenly breaks free and leaps to the center of the stage. At that moment, the audience realizes that the hand choking him is actually his own.

There is a cinema called Asri Cinema in Tepebaşı. One night, a German illusionist performs there. As he stretches his hands into the air, coins appear where he reaches, and he collects them. Aziz Nesin is deeply impressed by this scene. He likens writing to an illusion performed with words, and every time he earns money from writing, he remembers this illusionist who collects money from thin air.

#### *An Idealized Woman*

His friend, Vecdi paints roses in oil on silk fabric meant for cushions, and Aziz Nesin joins him in this work. They copy the roses from postcards, all of which bear the signature "Klein." After the painter Klein dies, his wife, who has watched him for years, continues the work in his place and paints roses just like he did. When Aziz and Vecdi hear this story, they are charmed by it. They both dream of marrying such a devoted woman who continues her husband's work.

#### *Unable to Say No*

One of the performers at Ferah Theater is a man named Anastas. In women's clothing, he behaves more femininely than the three women on stage. Rumor has it that he hosts group sex parties at his home. Aziz Nesin and Hilmi keep going to the theater and become friends with a few other young men, including a student from military school. One evening after the show, they all go to Beyoğlu. Aziz actually doesn't want to go, but since he can't say no, he follows the others. When one of them suggests going to Anastas's house, he can't refuse that either. They aren't sure if Anastas is home or if he would even let them in, but Aziz feels scared both by the possibility that he is home and that he might welcome them.

When they arrive at Anastas's three-story stone house, they see no lights inside. While they loiter around the building, two military police sailors approach and warn them that wandering around the area in uniform so late at night could cause gossip. The group disperses but returns a short while later. When the officers see them again, they scatter once more. Aziz heads to Galata Bridge, sneaks onto one of the docked ferries, and sleeps there.

#### *Eagerness to Speak English*

On the way back from a one-week vacation, in Sultanahmet, he sees two foreigners—one short and fat, the other tall and thin—speaking English, trying to explain something to a few passersby. Driven by his eagerness to speak English, he approaches them and offers help. It's the first time in his life he speaks English with foreigners, and he is thrilled. Together, they head to Galata Bridge. When he asks where they want to go, they say, "Keyvikalar." Aziz Nesin doesn't understand a word. After they repeat it a few more times, someone working at the pier realizes they mean "Kavaklar."

They board the ferry together. When Aziz Nesin asks whether they like the music—since the ferry is playing Turkish classical songs—they cover their ears to show their dislike. He feels genuinely offended by this. During the conversation, he learns that they are two British Air Force majors and engineers who have worked on the construction of the Karabük Iron and Steel Factory. The men keep photographing the Bosphorus shoreline throughout the ride. Eventually, they reach Kavaklar. The ferry turns back from Anadolu Kavağı. While they are waiting at the Beykoz pier, two policemen approach and say they want to take the Englishmen to the station. Aziz Nesin doesn't want to leave them alone and joins them.

At the police station, they find out that someone from the same ferry has reported two British spies taking photos. Since they have taken pictures in a restricted area, their camera films are confiscated. By the time they leave the station, it's already dark. The British thank him for his help, and he heads off to school.

#### *America*

Until the end of World War II, America is known in Turkey as a pure, spotless country, the embodiment of goodness and beauty. Sometimes, when Aziz Nesin boards a ferry, he spots an American cargo ship docked in the harbor. Every time he sees it, he dreams of sneaking aboard and going to America. He believes that only a big country like the United States can fulfill his great ambitions. After all, he

graduates from the eighth grade with perfect scores in every subject, and he sees himself as superior to everyone else.

Deep down, he knows he can't actually carry out this plan. But he wants to tell a trusted friend about it—hoping that the friend will talk him out of it. One May night, while lying on the grass in the schoolyard, he tells his friend Atif, whose father is a retired staff colonel. Atif convinces him that it's impossible.

#### *Old Friend Atif*

Aziz Nesin remembers Atif as someone who always finds something to laugh about in every situation. But later, that same Atif becomes a person remembered with disfavor—Lieutenant General Atif Erçikan, one of the figures involved in the 1971 military memorandum. Years later, Aziz Nesin goes with his wife to Caddebostan Nightclub for a business meeting. When the owner of the nightclub mentions that Lieutenant General Atif Erçikan is there too, Aziz Nesin wants to greet him and reminisce about the past. But his wife reminds him that Atif is a soldier who supported the memorandum—and that Aziz himself was imprisoned for opposing it. So he changes his mind.

While writing his memoirs, he hears that Atif has undergone a serious surgery. He considers calling to wish him well. The voice on the phone belongs to Atif, but to Aziz Nesin, it sounds changed. Atif coldly reproaches him for not calling even once in fifty years. He replies that it's a mutual silence. Deep down, he wishes Atif would understand—after all that has happened, he no longer contacts any of his military acquaintances, nor does he intend to.

#### *A Debt That Cannot Be Repaid*

As a young man preparing to attend Kuleli Military High School, he comes across a news article that deeply unsettles him. It states that, under the January 19, 1925 Highway Obligation Law, peasants must either pay six lira or, if they cannot afford it, work up to twelve days building roads. When he asks his father whether city dwellers are subject to this rule, his father replies that it only applies to peasants. Though peasants are called “masters of the nation,” they are dragged far from their villages to perform forced labor for days on end.

Later, he reads that peasants, exempt from the tax if they have six or more children, begin to have more children—because raising a child costs less than paying for the road.

Up to that point, Aziz Nesin has gratefully accepted everything provided by the military school—uniforms, food, the best of everything—and has felt a deep sense of indebtedness to the state for all its expenses. On days when dessert is served, he tells his friends he must work harder. On days he feels he hasn't worked hard enough, he skips dessert altogether. All of it stems from a sense of duty and repayment.

But after reading those news stories, something shifts. He decides that his debt is not to the state, but to the people. The injustice done to the peasants takes hold of him; it becomes something of an obsession. When he finally begins his education at Kuleli, he is no longer a boy who feels indebted to the state—but to the people.

#### THEMES

#### QUEST

**Introspection** Aziz Nesin's reaction to the students and teacher eating figs from the garden belonging to Zeynep Hanım's Albanian husband shows that for him, being a student is not just about being part of the system, but also a process of individual awareness and societal critique, where he thinks about identity and values. Therefore, being a student for him is not just an educational process but also a personal journey and a means of societal transformation.

Whether going to school or running away from home to find a job, he always lies to his father. But these lies, beyond typical childhood mischief, point to a process of ethical development shaped by trust. His father's unquestioning belief in him embarrasses him, and deep inside, triggers a desire to be truly reliable. While dreaming of success to gain his father's love, he also begins to develop a

sense of moral responsibility through his father's unconditional trust. This allows Aziz Nesin to experience the conflict between "appearing successful" and "being honest."

## SOCIETY

**Class** Aziz Nesin's father is so poor that even when he has to build a grave for his wife, he can only afford a used tombstone and an old iron fence removed from another grave. Consequently, Aziz Nesin cannot be given enough pocket money. He is glad to receive pocket money from Salim Bey, who adopted his mother, but he does not want to be seen as visiting just for the money. However, sometimes, because he needs the money, he visits just for that reason. When he commutes from the island to Vefa Middle School, he spends about six hours on the road, wrapping his books and notebooks in newspaper instead of carrying a bag, and carrying his meals in his hands. All of this not only shows a physical but also a symbolic class difference. His teachers expel him from class for not being able to buy books on time, leading him to skip school, showing how poverty interrupts his right to education. Wearing the Darüşşafaka jacket to board the ferry for free creates both an economic strategy and a humiliating identity conflict. The most striking aspect is his reflection on the children with neatly combed hair and new clothes, wondering how and why they have such comforts, as he compares it to his own worn clothes. This inquiry shows that Aziz Nesin understands class injustice not only as an external issue but also as a moral and existential matter. His encounters with Ibrahim the Head-Seller, who takes him to the world of even poorer children, introduce him to the darker sides of humanity. The violence-entrenched commercial life of Ibrahim, his transgressive sexual experiences, and the women and children who have discovered how to commodify sexuality introduce him to the darker aspects of human nature.

**Gender** One of the love stories that Aziz Nesin witnesses as a child is the story of Marusa and Recep, neighbors on the island. Recep ends up killing Marusa out of jealousy. Mother Fatma, a beloved neighbor, becomes despondent when she learns she has been betrayed. His uncle Şaban always encourages his younger son to curse like him and break things as he pleases. Aziz Nesin's father, however, is not like that. But neither is he a man who can set an example by building human relationships with the opposite sex. Since few can do that in those days, Aziz Nesin cannot form such relationships. The first person he feels sexually attracted to is Hayret, Naci Bey's daughter. Hayret shows him how a woman can enjoy being desired and evoking sexual pleasure. However, Nimet, the woman working at the mansion next to the military school, does not show any interest in the male students who admire her, serving as an example of the ideal woman for Aziz Nesin. As a young boy, he is open to discovering his own body and how to evoke emotions in the opposite sex. However, all the discussions he has heard about masturbation discourage him. Exploring one's own body is described as sinful, harmful, and even potentially deadly. Under these conditions, relationships with the opposite sex are formed only from a distance. In fact, the love he feels for the young girl in the photograph he sees at the photo studio and his interest in Şaziment, whom he observes from afar, are within these limits. He thinks that if he crosses these boundaries, he will be taking on a great responsibility as a man. This leads him to believe that sexuality is a field dependent on the man's agency.

## RELATIONSHIP

**Fatherhood** Aziz Nesin's father is a person who possesses faith, is fatalistic, and is also stubborn. During the fire on the island, while everyone panics, he remains calm. When he says, "Our house is insured—it won't burn!" he demonstrates not only strong belief but also a unique sense of humor. However, rejecting others' offers of help and refusing to change his mind points to his authoritarian side, which carries a daring quality that risks his family. For Aziz Nesin, his father is a character who sometimes deserves to be pleased by his son's great achievements, sometimes causes shame, and sometimes evokes gratitude. As a father, he is nearly absent in Aziz Nesin's life. The reason for his absence seems to lie in his unshakable trust in his son. This trust almost becomes the justification for his absence as a father. As a man who has earned the respect of his community through piety, he believes that wherever Aziz Nesin goes, he will be protected simply because he is his son—he even clearly expresses this when they come across at one of the houses where Aziz Nesin stays, refusing to go to school. For him, much of fatherhood revolves around being a respected figure in society and believing that his son will live up to this reputation and that this reputation will shield his son.

**Friendship** Aziz Nesin's friends play a significant role in his memories. He makes important life decisions based on observing them. In particular, his decision to enroll in military school is influenced by his friends Mehmet and Ş. When Mehmet calls him "mama's boy" it creates an identity crisis for Aziz Nesin. Under the influence of this expression, he decides to enroll in military school to meet his friend's expectations.

## PSYCHOLOGY

**Shame** Aziz Nesin experiences shame over various things in his life. For example, after his mother's death, he feels ashamed for not paying the money for the waterman that his father had given him. While living on the island, he feels embarrassed when other children ask their mothers or servants for water, but he has to carry water in a churn himself. He also feels shame for being a student at Darüşşafaka, a school only for fatherless children, and for wearing his Darüşşafaka jacket to get on the ferry for free, since he is no longer a student there. Living in the makeshift house his father built brings him shame. He feels ashamed of his father's job and even feels ashamed of himself for feeling ashamed of his father. He lies about who his father is, and when the lie is revealed, he feels ashamed. Despite many sources of shame in his life, the most painful ones are rooted in his class background. To overcome this shame, he feels he must work hard his entire life. Even after earning respect and a decent position, he still has to perform jobs below his age and rank, leading him to feel that his children are ashamed of him. Thus, he can never escape this cycle of shame.

**Indebtedness** Aziz Nesin feels grateful to people like Mehmet Efendi, who buys him new clothes, and Zeybekzade Mehmet Efendi, who hosts him when they meet on the way to visit Uncle Galip. However, he feels he can never repay them properly. Since he feels he hasn't thanked them enough, he tries to pay off his debt by doing good deeds for others, just like they did for him. This sense of indebtedness is so strong in him that when he enrolls in military school, he perceives the state's regular provisions as a personal debt to be repaid. Unlike the classical understanding of citizenship, he feels a kind of gratitude, which leads him to act as if he must prove himself to the state every day. However, when he realizes that the "1925 Highway Obligation Law" only applies to peasants, he rebels against the deep class injustice between urban and rural people. This rebellious attitude becomes one of the cornerstones of his political stance.

**Disciplinarity** While attending military school, Aziz Nesin constantly tries to prove himself in the face of the opportunities offered to him. When he thinks he doesn't deserve the dessert served at meals, he refuses to eat it. He even engages in exercises to discipline himself, including staying silent for two weeks, during which he doesn't speak to anyone. All of this shows that he embraces not only mental discipline but also physical discipline.

**Self-devaluation** Aziz Nesin reflects on how certain memories involuntarily remind him of his own self-devaluation—like the time he spends the money meant for the waterman, or when he meets his old friend Mustafa years later in Ankara and fails to recognize him. He notes that whenever he finds himself in a situation where he is supposed to feel proud or rewarded, he often recalls such memories to deliberately embarrass himself.

**Skepticism** Aziz Nesin does not believe the story told by Hafız the Waterman about German soldiers at the front drinking mule urine. Even though he doesn't know what beer tastes like, he assumes the Germans would be able to tell the difference between beer and urine. After that, he approaches everything Hafız says with skepticism. Later, in military school, when he learns in geography class that the Earth is round, he doesn't doubt the information, but thinks it wouldn't hurt to remain skeptical. He even writes a 24-page paper proposing alternative possibilities.

**Responsibility** The lack of a stable job for his father forces Aziz Nesin and his sister to take on responsibilities at an early age. To feed themselves without spending money, they look for solutions in nature, such as gathering mushrooms from the forest. Every day, they carry water in a jug from the well to the house.

**Desire for Recognition** Even as a very young child, Aziz Nesin feels the desire to impress others in small moments. For instance, when sunbathing, he jumps into the sea to impress the neighbor woman and her daughter, but he hits his head on a rock. When the same woman and her

daughter see him carrying water, he doesn't want them to notice, but when he realizes they are not even aware of him, he feels hurt.

One evening, when his summer neighbor drops his wallet while entering the house, he immediately knocks on his door to warn him. He knows he's doing the right thing, but at the same time, he wants this act to be seen, noticed, and rewarded. In his child's mind, the reward might be a small allowance or simply a warm thank you. But when the appreciation he hopes for doesn't come, he feels disappointed.

Aziz Nesin's admires Ismail Efendi, Ismail the crane operator, and the blacksmith who is the brother of the man he stays with in Kemerburgaz. His admiration is intertwined with a desire to do what they do, to leave a similar impression through their kind of skillfulness. These figures appear to him almost like heroes—strong, knowledgeable, and people who draw others' attention. Observing them carefully fuels his own longing to one day attract attention, to be noticed, and to have an impact like they do.

Eventually, when he becomes a military school student, he tries to satisfy this longing by wearing his uniform. Going back and forth between home and school, he even borrows a tailor-made coat from a friend to stand out in his uniform. On a rainy day, he simply doesn't go outside thinking not enough people will see him.

**Honor** During his time in Izmit, two young men standing at the entrance of a lumber store pose a personal threat to his sense of honor. Aziz Nesin feels humiliated by their clothing and attitude, and afraid because of their catcalls. His reaction is a strategic silence and patience aimed at preserving his dignity. Although he appears passive, his choice not to change his path and to keep walking without showing emotion is, in fact, an active defense of his honor. He also recalls being mocked at Darüşşafaka with the nickname "Kart," which means "Old Man," and in this new situation, his quiet yet determined stance becomes a way to reclaim that lost dignity.

**Humor** In military school, he fears being excluded because successful students are often mocked. He searches for a way to be both liked by his peers and succeed academically. He begins helping others cheat and even forces some to study. Thanks to his writing skills, he finds a way to express his humorous side and uses humor as a shield. By mocking himself before others can, he disarms them.

**Alienation** When he is stuck on an island ferry during a storm in his Vefa Middle School years, the home of Mustafa Efendi's relative—who takes him in—represents a vastly different world. The cheerful debates between the daughters and their father about football teams, the warmth and closeness between father and daughters, reflect a type of family life unfamiliar to him. The father's affectionate relationship with his daughters feels foreign, since he never experiences such ease within his own family. The joyful atmosphere of that home feels like a world he cannot belong to, one that he struggles to understand.

In military school, the neglect and abuse he witnesses bring him together with other children who have become alienated from their own bodies. These children, instead of being part of the institution, are treated as outsiders subject to its pressure. The fact that victims are punished alongside perpetrators shatters his sense of justice. Children become estranged not only from their bodies but also from the institution itself. Bullying makes belonging impossible from the start; while forced to grow up quickly, they are neither allowed to remain children nor recognized as adults. The institution's injustice and silence destroy trust in the state it represents. Eventually, the child becomes alienated not only from the present moment but also from historical figures like Kâzım Karabekir, whose well-meaning efforts helped establish the school. This form of alienation is not only a personal rupture but also a social, historical, and existential break.

## FLAWS

**Arrogance** During football matches between military and civilian schools, when military students sense they might lose, they start fights instead of accepting defeat—because they believe themselves to be superior. Aziz Nesin shares this belief. As the top student in school, he begins to see himself as superior to others. When Haydar Bey asks who his father is, he lies, claiming to be the nephew of Naci Bey, whom his father worked for. He argues with his father about allowance, trying to make the



amount match his academic success. As his dreams about himself grow with his achievements, he feels not only too good for his father but even for Turkey. He believes he deserves a life in a great country like America. All this stems from his effort to overcome a deep shame tied to his class background.

## ETHICS

**Conscience** While memories of the War of Independence are still fresh, he joins the other children in their hateful acts against Greeks—but only on the surface. Deep down, he dislikes these actions and resists the collective hatred. When the other children throw stones at Greek kids, he doesn't participate. Here, he tries to balance his conscience against nationalist sentiment. Similarly, when he intervenes in a cockfight to protect his uncle Şaban's rooster, he finds himself navigating a tension between masculinity and conscience. His uncle's home embodies a showy, aggressive masculinity, symbolized by the cockfight. Aziz Nesin only wants to protect his uncle's rooster. But when his rooster fights, he realizes that violence is a normal spectacle among men—and one rooster always dies. Thus, in a system he joins with good intentions, he ends up both a perpetrator and a victim.

**Idealism** Throughout his education, Aziz Nesin encounters teachers who, in truth, are qualified enough to lecture at the university level. Hulusi Öktem is a renowned musician; Sami Yetik, a celebrated painter. His physical education teacher, Nazmi, is a forward-thinking man who reflects on the relationship between traffic and the human body—long before urbanization takes full hold. Davut Şükrü, a war veteran, carries death within his body. Each of these teachers belongs to a generation shaped by the hope that follows war, united by the ideal of reaching a "contemporary civilization." Even amid deprivation and pain, they devote themselves to modernization and scientific education. For Aziz Nesin, these teachers become lasting symbols of self-sacrifice and unwavering commitment to the ideals of teaching.

## TRANSFORMATION

**Personal Change** During his school years, Aziz Nesin frequently attends movies, theatres, and other entertainment venues, where he is introduced to new art forms. Among these, the most transformative experience comes when his music teacher, Hulusi Öktem, invites him to a concert. There, for the first time, he witnesses a secular audience listening to music with reverence and awe. This moment signifies both a transformation in the values of a segment of society and a turning point in his own personal journey.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Aziz Nesin's childhood memoirs, poverty is not merely a material deprivation, but a condition that directly affects education, belonging, and self-respect. How does the educational life and personality development of a child growing up in poverty take shape? Based on his narrative, what can we say about the moral and existential effects of class injustice on the individual?
2. In Aziz Nesin's recollections, we find traces of both traditional masculinity models (such as the one embodied by his uncle Şaban) and contradictory social norms concerning female sexuality. How do these norms shape young Aziz Nesin's perceptions of his own body and the opposite sex? How do religious, moral, and cultural pressures surrounding gender roles and sexuality influence the individual's subjective world?
3. Aziz Nesin encounters people from different social strata at a very early age—summer residents on the island, wealthy families, Naci Bey who used to be a sheikh but became a civil servant after the closure of dervish lodges, Ibrahim the Head-Seller who clings to Istanbul's dark side and lives outside sexual norms, idealist military teachers wounded in war, idealist civilian teachers, children who are victims of sexual abuse, young people who defy sexual conventions, and so on. By spending time with all these social groups, he actually gains the ability to navigate among different discourses. Which of the social classes and discourses these individuals represent influence Aziz Nesin the most? Which ones does he allow to shape his sense of self? Which ones leave a lasting mark on him—and in what ways?