

*Keeping
the
House*

TICE CIN



SHEFFIELD – LONDON – NEW YORK

a cabbage next to a cabbage next to a cabbage
rolls left in the back on a crate with hay
chicken kaka stuck to the bottom third of the leaf

eroïn inside

they've been through a lot
looking out at him
this man gingerly
letting a burp escape
out past his shepherd staff
out the truck

he has one more border stop

payment is about three months away
if the plan works – if the money comes

WHO'S IN:

Damla – Daughter of Ayla. Born in 1991.

Ayla – Washes up in high heels. Doesn't like people who think too much.

Zade – OG Tottenham resident. Has a son Erhan's age, named Warren.

İpek – Damla's little sister. Good at hiding before school.

Makbule – Mother of Ayla. Green-fingered. Varicose veins.

Topuz Paşa/Alı – Drives cabbages. Loves bright suits. Has hopes for Ayla.

Sadi – Looks after Nehir supermarket. Always gets pickle juice in his moustache.

Erhan – Son of Ayla, brother of Damla. Has a spiritual connection to Nehir.

Mehmet – Loves coke, relies on Agata too much. Mainlander.

Agata – Crucial side character. Works in Moruk cafe.

Angela – Gives hot tupperware. Eyes beyond house. Has a little brother, Kwame.

Ufuk – Has two daughters, Filiz and Cemile. Hustles with Mehmet and Alı.

Filiz – Thinks her dad Ufuk sells fruit on Lordship Lane as a job.

Cemile – Cycles too fast. Better behaved than her sister Filiz.

Tulay – Cemile's mum. Strict cleaner. Peacekeeper.

Yusuf – Eighty years old. Key player in Moruk. Shuffles in slippers.

Arjîn – Reports to Babo. Lover of the wrong man's daughter.

Babo/Bekir – Top boss from Mêrdîn. Loves birds.

Panny and his wife Andrea – Greek Cypriot friends of Makbule from Cyprus.

Rohan and Andrej – They love snooker and efficiency.

William – Daydreams on buses. Idolises his mum Sandra.

KEEPING THE HOUSE, 1999

Careful, when you turn your eyes towards someone, you allow them the chance to turn theirs on you. The first time I spoke to my neighbour, I tried to memorise his salt-cracked lips while I had the chance to stare. He called me sweet child, and tucked his thumb under my chin. I asked him why he played his music so loudly. Didn't it hurt his ears? He leant forward, and told me that it feels best when your ears ring sick.

I watched his nails dig into the brick that boxed off his home from mine. His veins jumped and moved in his hands and he gripped the border between us to still himself. Following these veins, from the curves of his triceps to the brick wall, I thought to myself: they are pointed at me.

Whenever I got back home and Anne^{Mum} wasn't there, my brother and sister would float around me.

Have something cooking by six, she'll be proud.

We would sit with her while she sipped from a glass of rosé. Her hands shook with plans. At the hairdresser's before work, they'd told her she should move out of the area. Business would be better, if her clients were more upmarket – we'd grow up better. When she mentioned it to us, I thumbed my

*Turkish.
All further
translations
are from
Turkish unless
otherwise
stated.*

feet and hoped she wouldn't notice that we'd burnt what was in the oven.

Inevitable. She tucked her hair behind her ears and put down her emptied glass. Asking me to come over to her in the kitchen, she showed me that I hadn't cut the chicken properly: it still had its bum and we don't cook a chicken like that – we are clean people. You can't serve a chicken bum. She sliced greasy, hairy skin from the half-roasted carcass and chucked it in the bin, never dirtying her nails. They were filed down, painted chicken pink and she refused to let them chip. Her feet were hard from standing all day, still she kept them pretty painted for clients.

The half-cooked chicken bum warmed the bin. Our dinner seemed to taste of its smell. She asked if we had homework to do and we lied so we could stay with her. Grease never touched her lips when she ate. Like her, I tried to eat slowly but the chicken went cold.

She fussed over us on those evenings, washing the dishes and checking we were watching TV in peace. Before bed, when she came to collect us from the sitting room, I asked her what time she'd be coming home tomorrow. She said she's not like those other mums, able to do house stuff all day.

When she came home late, she would walk in smelling of cigarettes. The hard leather of her heels clunked in the hallway before she put her shoes away and put on slippers. As I got older, her late nights gave me time to stay out after school.

THE LITTLE DETAILS OF OUR INTIMACY, 2006

By fifteen I'd make the dishes she taught me. Sweated onions and potatoes. Sulu yemek. Yahnı. These were the meals that slid oil into you, that kept you full when you wanted to eat more but couldn't. They heated our skin as the three of us ate on trays, flicking channels until I had to go out. While they waited outside, my friends could see me through the gaps in our curtains. I watched them from the mirror and styled my parting with a rat-tail comb, the skin on my scalp stinging under the pressure. I didn't stop until I had the perfect zigzag part. And then I left.

We wore puffer jackets that covered our shapes, and walked in protective clusters until we found benches shrouded by bushes in the estate. Rainwater had gathered on the bench I sat on. It began to soak into my jacket, the nylon holding the cold in. To warm ourselves we took sips of Lambrini until my eyes drooped and everything was peripheral vision and faces meshing together. Sliding off the benches, we were packs of hyenas, ready to make a move. Ambling over to the nearby playground, we sat at the swings with our trainers brushing the ground. I stood on the small paddle seat with my hands wrapped around the rusting chains, watching footwork.

Grime played on a tinny phone. Someone had found a football on the roof of the climbing frame and was kicking it. The ball needed a pump that we didn't have. My friend Angela's dad taught me about *The physics of deflategate*. De-flate-gate. If you put a balloon outside on a cold day, the balloon deflates with the colder temperature. I imagined the softness of the football on their feet, the inflation escaping from pressure and time left out in the elements. The ball in the air – its brief motion of flight – mesmerised me, my face bobbing left to right as a captivated spectator. One of my friends thought to exploit this moment of absorption and pushed the swing from behind. I ended up slung through the air in an arc that matched that of the football. My hands on the tarmac were dotted with mud and ash tipped from the tapping fingers of those too relaxed to move.

The laughter that followed didn't match up with the cracks of blood on my palms. Through embarrassment and dizziness, I managed to make eye contact with my friend Cemile. She grabbed my hand to steady me and suggested I walk home with her. Her hand felt clammy. It didn't occur to me that she was stress sweating. As we walked away from the playground we could hear voices from behind us, telling us we were part-timers. It was the last thing on Cemile's mind.

She told me she was nauseous and needed to book a doctor's appointment or something. Her tongue pushed against her bottom lip as she became increasingly out of breath. We had barely reached the edge of the estate when she asked if she could come and stay at my house. Looking up at Farm looming above us, I felt watched. Even the Peace Mural, with Bob Marley, Ghandi and John Lennon

staring benevolently at us, felt like surveillance. So many aunts and olders in these flats, yes. But also, there are the living sounds. Laughter out of context. A man humming somewhere. A door slamming shut. Someone here was upset with Cemile and it felt like they were the source of every sound.

Her house was not far from mine, but my house had no parents inside it. Until midnight, it would just be children. No questions. Just a bed and some rest. She had been avoiding home for a week now, in and out of cousins' houses. They would eventually have to drive her back to her house. Emerging from the car she would see curtains moving, as seated and angered relatives waited inside to see to her. By the end of our short walk home, she'd gone quiet. When we got in she slipped off her shoes and trudged straight upstairs. Out of her puffer jacket and into my pyjamas, she looked her age. In these moments I treasured the little details of our intimacy, even how her big toe had an ingrown nail after being cooped up in too-small trainers. I brought her over to sleep beside me as my little sister İpek peered at her from the ladder of our bunk bed.

When my front door started to thunder I guessed it wasn't for me. Strangled notes came through the letterbox muffler, olive hands pushing through the fringe of hair keeping out the elements. They spoke about how they would break her legs. How Cemile would get the biggest slap around her stupid whore face.

Threats bounced about casually like pins on a map. Exactly how far up they would shove each foot. Her hair? That would be pulled free in chunks of curl. Worst of all, they knew

something about her, something that I found out through those choked voices. The street spoke for us before we had to, threatening police and shouting them away – that was the note that we fell asleep on.