

Hadi Tschüss

Kyra Mevert

Translated from the German by Didem Uca

Kyra Mevert is a writer, performer, and educator based in Braunschweig, Germany. Since 2010, she has been a performer, often of her own texts, at the LOT-Theater and a teacher at the Theater Pedagogy Center. Issues of inclusion play an important role in her performance-based teaching and artistic praxis.

Translator's note: "Hadi" is Turkish for "come on" or "alright" and often precedes "goodbye" on the phone or in person. "Tschüss" is German for goodbye. Together, the phrase is a common Turkish-German way of saying goodbye to someone. The Turkish included in the original text has been maintained using the author's intended orthography.

Heimat is really just the story of a place that doesn't exist.

Here's how it goes: One day you're young and you imagine your life. And you're not dumb, so you know what's what. You know that the man who lives with you isn't your real dad, that he has "step" before that title. And you also know that you have a real father, he just isn't here. And sometimes you might respond with a bit of pride when someone asks you, yet again, where you're from. As though you were Pippi Longstocking and your real father were the king of an island in the South Seas.

Istanbul is the only city in Turkey I've heard of. I'm eight or maybe twelve years old and tell anyone who will listen that my grandparents live in Istanbul. I must have either made that up or somehow overheard it, but in any case, I believe it. Believe that my father's parents live somewhere in the Turkish metropolis. Somewhere between the traffic and the shore, in a gray high-rise with a small garden out front and a satellite dish on the wall. And from there my grandma

called me every birthday. “I love you, little girl, when are you coming here, little girl?” I never came. One day when I was twelve, or fourteen, or sixteen, I began ignoring the ringing and the calls finally stopped. Strange, I remember thinking, how did my grandma even get my number? And if my grandma had my number, why didn’t my father ever call?

And one day you’re old and make up stories. And you always come up with a new one when someone asks you, yet again, where you’re from. You have buried the South Seas King deep in his casket, and you never let him out, not even on holidays.

Memories of my father:

My father gifts me with a striped Diddl mouse.

My father and I lie in the lofted bed together.

My father and I listen to “Bibi Blocksberg and the Flaming Red Rhino,” but only the A-side.

My father turns off the cassette player when it gets too gruesome for me.

My father puts Kellogg’s on the table for breakfast, those little 12-pack variety boxes.

And one day you feel like a stranger to yourself and can see it all in your mind: You know that you will go visit him when you’re old, like maybe 20. And you’re into sneakers at the time, so in your daydream, your real father is the head of Adidas Türkiye and he just doesn’t have the time right now.

And how everything would go well when you meet him and how handsome he would be: In a light blue button down, black patent leather shoes, and a thick head of hair.

January 2010. I'm turning nineteen, which is nice. Mama has one gift left for me. "Here you go," she says, and pushes a small red-and-white patterned box into my hands. "Your father was just here," she says. I think, "Huh?" I think, "My father is in Turkey." "We had some things to straighten out for the divorce," she says. "Oh," I say. "Now it seems he'll finally be going back for good," she says. I think, "Where to?" I think, "There's a box in my hands." It was once in Mama's hands and before that it was in the hands of a man who is my father, somehow. "There are still a few necklaces from Babbaanne inside," Mama says, as though that were something we did. As though it were normal to receive a present from my father, as though it were normal for my Turkish grandma to place some necklaces inside. As though we were a happy little Turkish-German family who drove to Turkey every summer to visit my grandparents. Only we don't do that. I am nineteen. It's been about eleven years since I've seen my father. I've often reflected on this rhythm: Parents' separation at age two, last time seeing my father at age eight. It's good when people ask. Firm dates placate them. But where are you from, but why do you look like that, but then why don't you speak any Turkish? Then I recite my numbers: two and eight. Then they can nod and say: I'm sorry about that. And I can say: Yes. Exactly.

And one day you're tired and going nowhere. You quite like it there, where you are. And what you hate most is this damn expectation to see the world. India, Australia, New Zealand. All sparkling. You don't sparkle, you leap. You've lost where it was you were trying to go, tear down all the tents, and one day this voice rings in your head: "I love you, little girl, when are you coming, little girl?"

May 2015, I'm at a newsstand. The newsstand is by the university, I go there often. This time I just want to buy a bag of Haribo, but then Musa comes out of the back room. Musa, who owns the newsstand, Musa, whom I know and like, Musa, who teaches me Turkish vocab words. Now he's standing behind the counter and says: "Merhaba. Hey, how's it going, kız?" and suddenly I think of something. So I say, "Musa, do you happen to know someone who's driving to

Turkey this summer and can take me along?” Musa doesn’t say anything. Instead, he puts two thumbs up and gestures to himself. A done deal.

And one day you’re brave and unwrap the small red-and-white patterned box. You see fifty Euros. Colorful plastic necklaces. A small card. On it, a cell phone number. You turn it over and read what’s written there: “Feel free to get in touch if you’d like.”

August 1, 2015, Kilometer 0

“To search means to show the world what a fool you are.”¹

August 1, 2015, Kilometer 0

A big blue VW van is parked in front of the kiosk. I brought almost all of the clothes I own, and I feel crazy when I see Skadi with her small backpack. She really is up for the adventure. “This is going to be the trip of our lives!” she says, grinning. I’m not so sure, so I check my hand luggage again: A Langenscheidt Turkish-German pocket dictionary, a(n, as it is later revealed, apparently broken) Polaroid camera, my high school diploma, and a photo album with pictures of me at different ages and life phases. Just the sorts of things you bring along when meeting your father.

August 1, 2015, Kilometer 0

Now I’d really like to leave already, please. “We’re not driving just yet, we’ve got to eat first,” says the man from the kiosk.

August 1, 2015, Kilometer 0

After loading in the TV and kiddie pool and unloading the car seats to make room for the lounge chairs, we finally hit the road. Musa’s family splashes a bucket of water behind us, and I learn: That’s what’s done, it brings good luck.

August 1, 2015, Kilometer 110

First realization after 1.5 hours of driving: Apparently the purpose of this trip is not arriving to the Turkish provinces, but instead accomplishing the following undertaking: consuming the entirety of our provisions whilst in transit.

August 1, 2015, Kilometer 325

Autobahn. Now we drive for an unbelievably long time on the autobahn.

August 1, 2015, Kilometer 635

Just before we get to Austria, we consider whether we should check into a hotel for the night. I want to. Without question. Would like to stop, please, to take a break, and lie down on warm, white Austrian sheets.

Skadi, on the other hand, wants to get there as soon as possible. She can hardly wait and convinces Musa to let her take the wheel: "Listen, I'll just drive us across Austria overnight! Easy-peasy."

Musa sleeps on the backseat as she drives, and I learn a new meaning of trust.

August 1, 2015, Kilometer 650

Hadi Tschüss Almany.

August 2, 2015, Kilometer 1040

Somewhere in Serbia. It's unbearably hot. Plus, I have to pee really bad. What am I even doing here? What am I looking for? What is it that I miss so badly?

August 2, 2015, Kilometer 1412

And where are those Greek cliffs when I need them, to stand at the edge, gaze out at the water, and feel free?

August 2, 2015, Kilometer 1826

And that's how it always is with the things you forget: First you think, "I shouldn't forget this," and then it's already too late. We're in Bulgaria, Skadi's toiletry bag is in Zagreb. "Long distance relationships, they're totally my thing!" she says, laughing. We proclaim that bathing is actually pretty bougie.

August 2, 2015, Kilometer 1690

At the Bulgarian border, we are made to wait endlessly. This gives me some time to study the license plates: Berlin, Osnabrück, Frankfurt am Main. "All Kanaks.² Like us," Musa says, furnishing the kid in the car next to us with a Vienna sausage.

August 2, 2015, Kilometer 2030

We stop at the Turkish border. FINALLY. Musa has to fetch the badge, and naturally a woman starts speaking to me in Turkish. I answer with, "Anlamadim. Ben coc alman," which means something like: "I don't understand. I am very German."

August 2, 2015, Kilometer 2335

I get in touch with my father over text. There's no going back now.

And how great would everything be when you met him; and how handsome would he be with his light blue button down, black patent-leather shoes, and thick head of hair.

August 3, 2015

My father drives us home. I sit behind the driver's seat and observe him intensely: his skin color, his hairline, the shape of his hands.

August 3, 2015

A very small and very old woman takes my hand. I am happy to see her. She looks like a friendly stranger. She has a very firm handshake and pulls me in so close. She kisses me on my cheeks, left then right, and whispers something in my ear: "I love you, little girl. There you are, little girl."

August 3, 2015

There are pictures of me hanging up everywhere. I recognize these pictures: Semi-professional snaps from preschool, photos with my older, Turkish cousins. My cousins. I used to be so proud of them and would tell everyone that they taught me how to sweet-talk.

August 3, 2015

We meet my grandpa in the garden. Unlike my grandma, he reacts quite nonchalantly to my arrival with a quick tip of the cap. We ask how he is doing, and he says in German: "Old man no good. Old man shitty." He has mischief in his eyes, as Mama would say.

August 3, 2015

Things that my grandpa says:

On the financial crisis: "German economy a bit şöyle böyle!"

On his wife: "Saw her first time, heart go boom boom boom!"

On Britney Spears on TV: "Americano, ne? Vay vay vay vay vay!"

On the weather: "Cok sicak!"

On the situation in general: "A bit don't feel like it."

On his situation specifically: "Old man no good, old man shitty."

On me: "Girl, girl, girl!"

August 4, 2015

Things that my father says:

"That's life."

August 5, 2015

I'm sick of standing out. It's hard for me to keep responding affably to the pleasant grown women's questions: No, I don't speak any Turkish, no, really. Okay, fine, maybe a little. Mama Alman, Babba Türk. "Aaaah!" they say then and nod as though they have understood everything. Maybe they have. Maybe this story isn't so rare after all.

August 6, 2015

As it turns out, an extended visit with your father for the first time in sixteen years is just that: an extended visit with your father for the first time in sixteen years.

August 7, 2015

Is this man just like me?

Or: Am I like him?

August 8, 2015

It also feels a bit like prison, so I practice forgiving my father. Listening, understanding, conceding, and forgiving are apparently actions that require more courage than their linguistic counterparts might suggest. "It's a bit much for 24," says Skadi. She's right. "Send a wish out into the universe." So I do just that: Send a wish out into the universe. Wish that my father would no longer call me darling, wish that he had never left. Wish that I could suddenly, as though by

some miracle, speak Turkish effortlessly, wish that I had traveled to this little village on the Aegean every summer. Wish for everything that isn't foreign.

August 9, 2015

Back in Istanbul, it feels as though I no longer have anything: No father, no mother, no pain. I know my way around, I feel good, I am totally calm. For the first time in my life, I feel like I am being addressed in the right language. I order our food in Turkish, we flirt with the waiters. Istanbul is an escape and a future all at once, it's clear to me that I don't have to go anywhere if I don't want to. I've seen my father and have gotten to know him a bit. I met my Turkish grandma and found her delightful, this woman who was once just a foreign voice on the other end of an unwelcome phone call. Now there's a charm dangling from my key chain with her name on it. And grandpa: this lovable old Turkish man on whom I had never wasted a moment's thought.

August 9, 2015

So this is how it feels when you complete your life's work.

August 10, 2015

Skadi's sitting on a plane to Germany, I'm sitting at a café on the Bosphorus. How will it work spending these next weeks here without her?

August 11, 2015

And it's a lie that ships sail. In actuality, it's the land that changes.

August 12, 2015

And one day you're young and you dream up your whole life. And you don't imagine that you will become a father in your mid-twenties and won't exactly nail it somehow, and then suddenly this person is standing in front of you and is your daughter, somehow, and you have no idea who she is.

August 12, 2015

Things my father says to me:

“We can take care of all of that, darling. Just say the word.”

August 14, 2015

I feel strangely foreign here. As though I have completely forgotten who I am.

August 14, 2015

While shopping, a neighbor accosts my father for never having taught me Turkish. Score one for me.

August 15, 2015

It's just perfectly normal shit driving to his parents. Or grandparents. When you realize that the crochet decoration that you had found super charming at the start will keep on hanging there forever, when you realize that the feelings that you do have are different from the ones that you should have, which are different still from the ones that you want to have. It's just normal shit when you can't stand your dad because you had expected more from him.

August 16, 2015

And please don't touch me and don't come close to me. And I'm not your kid, and you have no right to be proud of me.

August 17, 2015

“A law states: Don't turn around. Keep going, even when you don't understand. You'll understand tomorrow.”³

August 17, 2015

On the ferry to the neighboring island, everything was bugging me. Turkish remains for me a chaotic assemblage of sounds I cannot even form with my mouth. The Turks are loud, they have too many kids, and they throw their trash in

the water. And then a woman sits next to me, no, she gets seated, her husband points to the plastic chair next to me and she nods and sits down. She is in all black and I feel her warmth. In her left hand she holds a set of brown prayer beads, she worries at them with her fingers, I stifle an urge to scream at her, or at him.

August 17, 2015

On the upper deck, I sit down next to an old man. He has gray hair and is wearing light blue jean shorts and looks straight out at the sea. I want to see what has him so enthralled and follow suit. But I'm too short, blocked by a silver railing curving around the deck at precisely my eye level. Everything that my neighbor sees remains completely unreachable for me. When the ferry docks and everyone sprints to disembark, we keep sitting a short while longer.

August 17, 2015

My entire sense of self flew with Skadi to Germany.

August 17, 2015

"Italiano, ne?" a little boy shouts loudly at me from behind. Apparently not everything is quite so unequivocal.

August 17, 2015

On the return trip, the old man is there again. He comes out of nowhere and suddenly stands at the railing, in his hand a plastic bag with an orange imprint.

And crying on the ferry: normal.

August 18, 2015

Returning to my father's house is like a 7th-grade exchange trip to England.

August 19, 2015

On the day I drive with my “host family” to the city on the other side in order to visit the bazaar, we go past a cemetery. Or at least I think that I’m looking at a cemetery. Dry earth, olive trees. Burning sun that dips everything in gold and white stones that jut out from the ground erratically. Crooked, askew, none resembling another. Do Muslims even bury their dead? Spreading them in the sea, in this endless, glittering fluid seems much more sensible to me. As we’re driving as though we’re a real family, I think to myself: Bury me in Turkey. Throw my dead body into the sea so that it may dissipate into gold and glitter and darkness.

August 19, 2015

Things that my father asks me:

“And, by the way, I’ve been meaning to ask: What do you do for a living?”

August 19, 2015

His German is still better than his Turkish and he prefers sleeping on hard mattresses rather than soft ones. At least we have these two things in common. Apart from this, I look around and my lack of desire to stay here grows by the minute. Even still: I cannot possibly describe how much it means to learn that I wasn’t a shitty kid and am not a shitty adult, that I was not not enough.

August 20, 2015

My eyes are small and irritated from the air, the TV, and the abundance of artificial flowers. I really just can’t anymore. My grandparents are super sweet, but I can’t stand even two minutes with my father. He’s everything I never wanted in a father. I’m considering writing him a letter: Thanks for everything, but no thanks. Don’t call me “darling,” don’t be my father, don’t start trying now. I don’t think that you’re a successful person, you dumbass.

August 20, 2015

The final day turns out to be one of the worst. A fight flared up between me and the man about paying. Afterwards, just waiting for the day to pass, as always.

August 20, 2015

Memories of my father:

My father puts socks on his father.

My father helps his mother put on her clothes.

My father cuts up a watermelon.

My father barbeques.

My father sets the table.

My father goes shopping.

My father sends me a package with pistachio bars.

My father asks me what I like before he does this.

My father gifts me with a pink notebook and pen.

My father buys me a blue inflatable dolphin.

My father picks me up from the ferry.

My father drives with me to the beach.

August 20, 2015

I go to the sea by myself one more time. It's irascible and unsettling, just like me.

August 21, 2015

Heimat is really just the story of a place that doesn't exist.

August 23, 2015

The night before my flight I can't sleep. Instead, I photograph my mosquito bites.

There are 17. I take 17 photos of 17 mosquito bites.

August 23, 2015

And I don't quite know how this goes: finding your way in a world that constantly screams HERE and THIS IS YOUR HOME. So I try to scream back, YEAH, OKAY, I scream. FINE. IF YOU WANT IT THAT BAD, CITY, THEN THIS IS MY HOME! I'm standing at the Bosphorus, and there's no one here, the fast-food kiosks and the ferries' headlights and the sounds of the harbor and the canoodling lovers, all of that disappears behind me, it's just me and the sea and the moon, all alone tonight.

August 24, 2015

And then the sun, always the sun. Leading me home.

¹ Wolfgang Büscher, *Berlin – Moskau. Eine Reise zu Fuß*. Rowohlt: 2003, 39.

² Translator's note: This is a racist slur used against people of Muslim and Middle Eastern descent in Germany, particularly from Turkish and Arab backgrounds. Some people from these backgrounds have reclaimed it as a self-ascription to bolster personal and community identity, often tied to anti-discriminatory political beliefs and actions, while others find it too painful to reclaim. If reading this text aloud, please do not voice the term if you are not a member of the community.

³ Wolfgang Büscher, *Berlin – Moskau. Eine Reise zu Fuß*. Rowohlt: 2003, 77.