

SPEEDING TICKET

JESS'S apartment didn't have a shower or bathtub. They bathed in a basin in the kitchen, boiling pots of water as they washed. They performed their ablutions as quickly as possible and raced into the heated lounge room. Then they shivered by the coal heater.

"I would give almost anything for a bath," said Leigh one afternoon.

"I would give almost anything for Chinese food," said Jess.

"You could wash at the *hamam*," suggested Ahmet.

"I thought the *hamam* was closed for the winter," said Jess.

"*Hah*, the one in Urgup is closed, but I know another one. It is long drive."

"Yes, yes, yes," chanted Leigh. "I want to be warm and wet."

"*Tamam*," said Ahmet grandly. "I will take you now!"

They packed up their things and jumped into Ahmet's car. He roared out of Nevsehir, the occupants of his car talking and laughing wildly. Looking ahead down the road, Leigh saw several police cars. A policeman stepped out and waved them down.

"*Esulishek!*" Ahmet called the policeman a son of a donkey under his breath.

"I really don't think you were speeding," said Leigh. She'd been watching the speedometer. "Besides, he doesn't have a radar gun."

"They don't have those here," said Jess. "The police just eye it."

"You're kidding me!"

"Nope."

The policeman came over to the car. He carried on a loud conversation in Turkish with the men. The women were asked for their passports. Leigh pulled hers out, but Jess had left hers at home. This presented a problem. The policeman went back to his car, and Jess and Ismail went with him.

Ahmet was angry. "Girls! They had no reason to stop us. Look at all the other cars going by. They are not stopping them."

"What did they say?" asked Leigh.

"He says we were speeding, but there is never proof. I was not speeding! He stopped us because he saw a white woman in the front seat. Then, did you see? He asked me a lot of questions because he can see from my license plate I am Kurdish. He looked at your passport. Now Jess must go to police station because she doesn't have hers. But did you see him look at Ismail's identity card? No. Because Ismail is Turkish."

The policeman came back to Ahmet's car and said something.

"*Siktirgit!*" Ahmet swore and squealed the tires as he turned and gunned up behind the police car. "Now we must go to station to get the ticket."

"Can't they do that here?"

"They can't do anything, these girls."

The police station was a white crumbling building. They filed up the wide front steps inside and followed two officers to a plain room. It contained two desks facing each other. An ancient typewriter sat on each desk, separated by a row of chairs. They sat down. One officer sat at one of the typewriters. Ahmet's anger was not apparent as he chatted easily with the police. Tea was served by a teenaged boy, and the men lit *sigaras*. The women were not offered a smoke.

The officer took two pieces of carbon and three pieces of paper out of the desk. He sorted them deliberately, and then slowly rolled them into the typewriter. He asked for Ahmet's identification and with one finger began to peck at the typewriter.

Jess raised her eyebrow at Leigh. She bit her tongue in reply. She hadn't seen carbon paper in years.

"He is doing report," explained Ahmet.

The officer required thirty minutes to write the half page report. Then he sent Ismail and Jess with an escort to pick up Jess's passport and marriage license at the house.

Ismail took Ahmet's car, and the policeman got into the passenger seat. Ismail didn't have his driver's license yet, but he didn't mention it to the policeman. He turned the key and thanked *Allah* that it started. Ahmet's Renault sometimes required a push to get going.

Ismail turned onto the main street and immediately wanted out of the busy traffic. He hadn't had much practice driving. Impulsively, he turned onto the next side street and found himself going the wrong way down a one-way street.

The policeman spoke rapidly to Ismail, but he was unable to get off the one-way immediately.

“Here, you can turn up here,” said Jess.

Ismail turned the stiff steering wheel. The road went up a hill, and his inexperience showed. The car stalled.

“No problem,” coached Jess in English. “Clutch in, brake on.”

The car wouldn’t start.

“Oh my God,” said Jess. “It needs a push!”

Embarrassed, Ismail explained the car’s idiosyncrasies. The officer sighed. He got out to push the car.

“Jess!” Ismail was sweating. “Help me.”

“I am going to die not laughing!”

“Jess! Talk me.”

She held her laughter in long enough to guide him. They had to avoid the hill and go farther down the one-way street. The policeman hopped back in the car as it started.

Jess giggled. “I am never going to forget the Turkish police pushing our car the wrong way down a one-way street!”

They returned to the police station in good spirits, marriage certificate in hand.

“So what’s happening here?” asked Jess.

“Ahmet got a ticket.” Leigh was confident that no one else spoke English.

“That’s all?”

“They just finished. It took three of them.”

Ahmet frowned at them.

They each signed the admittance report. Leigh

reached for her jacket.

The officer got up and filed the report in a metal cabinet behind the desk. He lit a *sigara*. Then he walked to the desk on the other side of the room. It was exactly the same as the first desk. He reached into a drawer and pulled out two pieces of carbon and three pieces of paper. He sorted them and slowly rolled them into the typewriter.

“Not again!” Leigh whispered to Ahmet, putting her jacket down.

“One report to come in and one report to leave,” he explained.

“Oh my God.” She slumped in her chair and looked at the time. They’d been there over an hour.

Police entered and exited the room. Several read the report as it was being typed, and at least five people thumbed through the marriage license. One officer called out each letter of the odd English names. He waited between each letter for the typist to find the letter on the keyboard. Other officers perched on the desk, sometimes pointing out a letter on the typewriter. They peered sideways at the white women with uncovered hair. A second round of tea was brought in.

“I guess there’s not much else going on today,” Leigh mouthed to Jess.

Jess mouthed back, “How many Turks does it take...”

“...to fill out a form,” finished Leigh with a tight grin.

It was two hours before they were back in the car. Ismail and Jess told the girl-pushing-the-car story to gales of laughter. Ahmet had to stop the car, he was laughing so hard.