

Some Advice to Those Who Will Serve Time in Prison

by Nâzım Hikmet Ran

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

to eat every last piece of bread-
also, don't forget to laugh heartily.
And who knows,
the woman you love may stop loving you.
Don't say it's no big thing:
it's like the snapping of a green branch
to the man inside.
To think of roses and gardens inside is bad,
to think of seas and mountains is good.
Read and write without rest,
and I also advise weaving
and making mirrors.
I mean, it's not that you can't pass
ten or fifteen years inside
and more -
you can,
as long as the jewel
on the left side of your chest doesn't lose its luster!

May 1949