

Heaven; the severed heads, noses, and ears sent to Istanbul by Ali Bey, the Governor-General of Georgia, who suppressed the rebels in the fortress of Gori; and my beautiful, dear Shekure, who separated herself from the neighborhood women mourning over me in the house and stared into the flames of the brick stove in our courtyard.

As is recorded in books and confirmed by scholars, the soul dwells in four realms: 1. the womb; 2. the terrestrial world; 3. Berzah, or divine limbo, where I now await Judgment Day; and 4. Heaven or Hell, where I will arrive after the Judgment.

From the intermediate state of Berzah, past and present time appear at once, and as long as the soul remains within its memories, limitations of place do not obtain. Only when one escapes the dungeons of time and space does it become evident that life is a straitjacket. However blissful it is being a soul without a body in the realm of the dead, so too is being a body without a soul among the living; what a pity nobody realizes this before dying. Therefore, during my lovely funeral, as I grievously watched my dear Shekure wear herself out weeping in vain, I begged of Exalted Allah to grant us souls-without-bodies in Heaven and bodies-without-souls in life.

CHAPTER 38

IT IS I, MASTER OSMAN

You know about those ornery old men who've charitably devoted their lives to art. They'll attack anyone who gets in their way. They're usually gaunt, bony and tall. They'll want the dwindling number of days before them to be just like the long period they've left behind. They're short-tempered, and they complain about everything. They'll try to grab the reins in all situations, causing everyone around them to throw up their hands in frustration; they don't like anyone or anything. I know, because I'm one of them.

The master of masters Nurullah Selim Chelebi, with whom I had the honor of making illustrations knee to knee in the same workshop, was this way in his eighties, when I was but a sixteen-year-old apprentice (though he wasn't as peevish as I am now). Blond Ali, the last of the great masters, laid to rest thirty years ago, was also this way (though he wasn't as thin and tall as I am). Since the arrows of criticism aimed at these legendary masters, who directed the workshops of their day now frequently

