

EMPTY SEAT ON A LONG BENCH

It has been a long day of touring Istanbul
Roman underground cisterns and ancient Turkmen fortresses and palaces
The sun for late September has been full and fair and I am colored
appropriately disproportionate on my lengthening forehead and hirsute
forearms

I need to sit

Benches populate the square, but most are in the sun

Its reach seemingly affecting only pale me

I spy an Opel, I spy a tram and I spy one long bench in the shade with a
woman wearing a burka sitting on it one corner of its ten-foot length

I move to it cautiously for reasons I am not quite sure

I sit down at the farthest end and she turns to her side away from me

Only now a back orthogonal to my view

I am afraid to move for I fear a police call, a public riot, an international
incident will ensue

It is a very tense moment and this only shade on the square is intensifying
the heat, not relieving it

Can she tell?

Okay I am American, I am certainly that with a baseball cap on my head
(I only wear it avoid the sunburn bearing in)

But can she tell?

From my nose, from my jowly fat and horned-rimmed glasses

Can she tell?

I think so

A face she has seen like so many faces on televisions screens in yarmulkes
and with rifles and fighting words

She knows.

She stands proudly, not thinking to even look my way and moves curtly to
two benches down, to an empty bench gleaming in the direct sunlight

What progress have we made?

What advance is ever going to be possible

If to avoid my presence entirely

A woman dressed all in black from head to toe

With only eyes slit open to penetrate

Moves down two benches into the late day's Istanbul sun