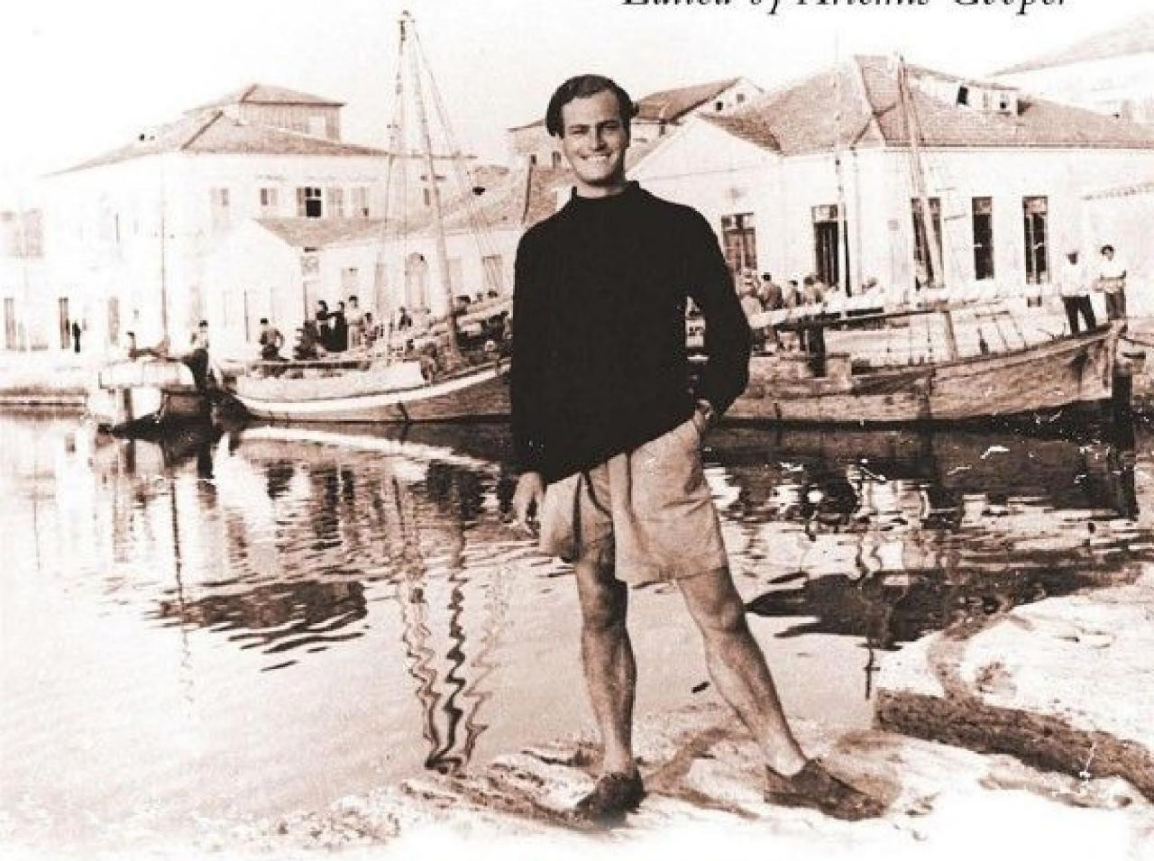
WORDS of MERCURY

PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR

Edited by Artemis Cooper



'ONE OF THE GREATEST TRAVEL WRITERS OF ALL TIME'

ANTHONY SATTIN, *SUNDAY TIMES*

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The young Patrick Leigh Fermor on the island of Ithaca in 1946.
Photo Joan Leigh Fermor

Introduction

> Soon the delighted cry of '*Delphinia!*' went up: a school of dolphins was gambolling about half a mile further out to sea. They seemed to have spotted us at the same moment, for in a second half a dozen of them were tearing their way towards us, all surfacing in the same parabola and plunging together as if they were in some invisible harness. Soon they were careering alongside and round the bows and under the bowsprit, glittering mussel-blue on top, fading at the sides through gun-metal dune-like markings to pure white, streamlined and gleaming from their elegant beaks to the clean-cut flukes of their tails. They were beautiful abstractions of speed, energy, power and ecstasy leaping out of the water and plunging and spiralling and vanishing like swift shadows, each soon to materialize again and sail into the air in another great loop so fast that they seemed to draw the sea after them and shake it off in mid air …

These are the opening lines of a passage from *Mani* on dolphins which readers of Patrick Leigh Fermor come back to again and again, for the sheer joy of it. There are other favourite passages too: the discovery of Byron's slippers at Missolonghi, the description of the Munich Hofbräuhaus, the crowning of the last Emperor of Byzantium – each one displaying the breadth of his learning, his extraordinary memory, and the dazzling quality of his prose.

The purpose of this volume is to put these passages alongside introductions, reviews, memoirs and articles that Paddy* has written over the years. The book covers the whole range of his writing. It will be welcomed by his legions of admirers, and forms a perfect introduction for those who are not yet familiar with his work.

Paddy's irrepressible exuberance made him a noisy and unruly school-boy, yet he did not dislike learning – in fact (with the exception of mathematics) he devoured it. An avid reader from an early age, he developed a passion for history, poetry, and languages both living and dead in the course of his rather disjointed school life.

His last school was King's, Canterbury, from which he was sacked for holding hands with the greengrocer's daughter. After this he was sent to a crammer in London, with the idea of preparing him for Sandhurst and a career in the army. This plan did not last long, for Paddy decided instead to walk from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople. It proved to be a turning point in his life, and the best education he could ever have had.

Starting in December 1933, at the age of eighteen, Paddy walked through the snowbound Netherlands, and spent his nineteenth birthday in Austria. Travelling as rough as possible, he slept in barns and hostels, with shepherds, bargemen or pedlars for company. However, a friend's letter in Munich brought him into contact with the landed gentry and country-house owners of central Europe. He must have been a popular guest, for those he stayed with never failed to send him on his way with letters of introduction to friends and relatives further along his route.

The aristocracy of Europe were still living the life that they had lived a hundred years before, sitting squarely in the middle of their estates which were still farmed by oxen and peasants. It was a pleasant life, but monotonous. The appearance of a charming young tramp in travel-stained clothes was a welcome distraction – all the more so when he appeared so delighted and intrigued with everything around him. One can imagine the pleasure of these kind grandees as Paddy listened eagerly to their stories, immersed himself in their family histories, quizzed them on the local dialects and customs of the region, and spent hours in their libraries reading everything he could lay his hands on. Yet one must not imagine that his journey was

spent simply swanning from one schloss to another. There were still plenty of nights spent in barns and monasteries, in inns and hostels, in caves and sheepfolds, on people's sofas and under the stars.

Although Paddy kept notebooks of his travels, he did not publish an account of his first journey until many years later. So when *A Time of Gifts* appeared in 1977 and *Between the Woods and the Water* in 1986, the life of the mid-thirties that he describes had been utterly destroyed, and much of the land he had walked over had been in the grip of communism for years. Yet his memory recreates this world with an astonishing freshness and immediacy, and recaptures the young man he was then: full of curiosity, optimism and joy in the vibrant diversity of the world.

Paddy finally reached Constantinople on New Year's Day, 1935, and then moved south into Greece. He spent his twentieth birthday in a monastery on Mount Athos. In Macedonia, a few months later, he took part in a royalist campaign against rebellious republican troops which ended in a dashing cavalry charge across a bridge over the river Struma. By now, Paddy had fallen in love with Greece. He learnt the language and, over the next few years, roamed the country.

It was in Athens that he met the first great love of his life, the Rumanian Balasha Cantacuzène. They both wanted to get away from the city – he to write, she to paint; and for many months they lived in an old water mill surrounded by lemon groves, looking out towards the island of Poros. They could not live at the mill for ever; and when the time came to go, Balasha suggested that they move to the house she shared with her sister Hélène in Moldavia, the northernmost province of Rumania, and the home of this branch of the Cantacuzène princes for generations.

The house was called Baleni, and it is lovingly described in this volume. Here Paddy spent the last years before the war, interspersed with visits to England and France. He was at Baleni when war was declared, and he immediately went back to London to join up. Paddy and Balasha did not meet again till long after the war.

Prompted by his dash of Irish blood, Paddy enlisted in the Irish Guards; but the War Office had marked him out as a fluent Greek speaker, and he was commissioned into the Intelligence Corps. In the winter of 1940 he served as British liaison officer to the Greek army fighting the Italians in Albania. After the fall of Greece his unit moved to the island of Crete, where Paddy took part in the battle against the German airborne invasion. After the Germans captured Crete, Paddy became one of the handful of SOE officers whose job it was to coordinate the various resistance units on the island.

Paddy spent a year and a half in Crete, dressed as a mountain shepherd. He returned to Cairo at the time of the Italian surrender, bringing the Italian divisional commander with him. A few months later he was parachuted back into the island, in command of the Anglo-Cretan team which planned and carried out the abduction of General Kreipe in April 1944. This meticulously planned operation, carried out under the noses of the Germans, earned Paddy the DSO. *Ill Met by Moonlight*, written by Paddy's friend and second in command Bill Stanley Moss and published in 1950, describes the abduction; it was later made into a film starring Dirk Bogarde. Paddy has never published his account of that time, but this volume contains an extract of a report he wrote many years later, which has not appeared before.

That same year, 1950, saw the publication of Paddy's first book *The Traveller's Tree*, about the travels he had made in the Caribbean in 1947–8. *The Traveller's Tree* won the Heinemann Foundation Prize for Literature, and established Paddy as a writer of remarkable talent. At the same time, *Ill Met by Moonlight* confirmed him as a war hero, at a time when men were very much judged by what sort of a war they had had. He embodied the Renaissance idea of a man of action who is also a scholar. It was a romantic image that his looks, charm and natural buoyancy made all the more engaging.

Paddy makes friends easily; and one of the joys of his company is that he talks just as he writes. Around a convivial table, he would at first be no more than one

voice among many. Then, sparked by a single idea, sometimes even a single word, he would be off, in pursuit of a trail only he could follow. Leaping up to find a reference in Shakespeare or Sir Thomas Browne he would plunge across, say, sixteenth-century Europe, raising the shades of princes and cardinals, creating fantastic castles in the air, pausing to admire a bend in the Danube before diving into a maze of linguistic analogies, which might end with a chunk of Browning recited from memory or his own translation of 'Widdecombe Fair' into Italian. These extraordinary monologues, verbal roller-coasters that leave his audience dazzled and exhilarated, are completely spontaneous and unrehearsed. He has what the Cretans call *leventeiá* – a charm and zest for life that other, duller folk can only envy.

To hear him talk one might think that his writing must come easily, but it does not. Writing for Paddy has always been a laborious process, every draft being rewritten and corrected over and over until it reaches his own high standard. In his youth he wrote in cheap hostelries, the houses of friends, ruined castles, anywhere where there was a room with a table and not too many distractions. It was the urge to find a quiet place to write that led him to stay in a number of monasteries, including the beautiful Benedictine monastery of Saint-Wandrille in Normandy. His experience of the monastic life was the subject of his next book *A Time to Keep Silence*. And four years later, in 1956, he published his only novel *The Violins of Saint-Jacques*, which was made into an opera by Malcolm Williamson.

His travels in Greece, begun when he was twenty-one, continued through the late 1940s and 50s. Often accompanied by the photographer Joan Rayner (née Eyres Monsell) whom he first met in Cairo during the war and was later to marry, Paddy explored the remotest parts of Greece: by bus, or mule, or on foot. Between journeys they lived in Greece for months at a time, usually on the island of Euboea, or on Hydra, in the house of the painter Nico Ghika.

Paddy's very personal view of Greece is described in two books which have become classics: *Mani*, published in 1958, and *Roumeli* in 1966. Mani is the southernmost part of Greece. When Paddy explored it, it was known as an inhospitable wilderness of parched rock and blinding sun where only the most back-breaking toil permitted a few hardy peasants to eke out a living. Through Paddy's eyes, the Mani comes vividly to life. The Maniots with their towered villages, their deadly vendettas (sons of the family were called 'guns'), their ancient customs and long history, their struggles against the Turks and their piratical past, become heroic figures in a landscape that, for all its harshness, is also wonderfully beautiful.

Paddy and Joan decided to settle in the Mani. After a long search they found the perfect place, on a little promontory overlooking a bay near Kardamyli. When they bought the land in 1964, there was no water or electricity in that part of Greece. The house, designed by Paddy and Joan who supervised every stage of its construction, was built with stone quarried by the local stonemason from the rock on which it stood. Not a single power tool was used to build it. On one level it is a simple, unpretentious house, its doors and windows usually open to the sea air; but every detail has been thought out, and every proportion is right.

It was here, in a study overlooking the olive trees and cypresses in their garden with the sea beyond, that Paddy wrote *A Time of Gifts* and *Between the Woods and the Water*, and where he is now working on the third volume which will take him through Rumania and Bulgaria to Constantinople and beyond. From Kardamyli he and Joan have set off on many of the travels described in this book, and it is here that their friends, many of whom he has portrayed with such affection, came to visit them year after year.

The present book is divided into five sections. *Travels* describes journeys to (among other places) India, Italy, Germany, Rumania and the Caribbean, while some of the more curious stories and customs he has encountered in his adopted country appear in *Greece*. The section called *People* includes portraits of friends, heroes and eccentrics; *Books* contains an account of his early reading, as well as

reviews and critical essays. The last section, *Flotsam*, shows Paddy at his most playful, and displays the never-ending delight that he takes in words.

ARTEMIS COOPER

* At the risk of sounding over-familiar, 'Paddy' – the name by which he is known to friends and fans alike – will be used rather than the over-formal 'Leigh Fermor'.

Travels

The Munich Hofbräuhaus

from *A Time of Gifts*

As he travelled up the Rhine in the winter of 1933–4, Paddy was uncomfortably aware of the Nazi presence; but he was more impressed by the warmth and generosity of ordinary Germans. Trudging through Munich in swirling snow, however, the huge boulevards contained alarming numbers of men in Storm Trooper and SS uniform, and 'everything struck chill to the heart'. He was in a strange and uneasy mood as he approached the Hofbräuhaus which was, and still is, one of the chief landmarks of the town.

I caught a glimpse down a lane of Gothic masonry and lancets and buttresses and further on copper domes hung in convolutions of baroque. A Virgin on a column presided over a slanting piazza, one side of which was formed by a tall, Victorian-Gothic building whose great arched undercroft led to a confusion of lesser streets. In the heart of them stood a massive building; my objective, the Hofbräuhaus. A heavy arched door was pouring a raucous and lurching party of Brownshirts on to the trampled snow.

I was back in beer-territory. Half-way up the vaulted stairs a groaning Brownshirt, propped against the wall on a swastika'd arm, was unloosing, in a staunchless gush down the steps, the intake of hours. Love's labour lost. Each new storey radiated great halls given over to ingestion. In one chamber a table of SA men were grinding out *Lore, Lore, Lore*, scanning the slow beat with the butts of their mugs, then running the syllables in double time, like the carriages of an express: '*UND–KOMMT–DER–FRÜHLingindastal! GRÜSS–MIR–DIE–LORenocheinmal*'. But it was certain civilian figures seated at meat that drew the glance and held it.

One must travel east for a hundred and eighty miles from the Upper Rhine and seventy north from the Alpine watershed to form an idea of the transformation that beer, in collusion with almost nonstop eating – meals within meals dovetailing so closely during the hours of waking that there is hardly an interprandial moment – can wreak on the human frame. Intestinal strife and the truceless clash of intake and digestion wrecks many German tempers, twists brows into scowls and breaks out in harsh words and deeds.

The trunks of these feasting burghers were as wide as casks. The spread of their buttocks over the oak benches was not far short of a yard. They branched at the loins into thighs as thick as the torsos of ten-year-olds and arms on the same scale strained like bolsters at the confining serge. Chin and chest formed a single column, and each close-packed nape was creased with its three deceptive smiles. Every bristle had been cropped and shaven from their knobbly scalps. Except when five o'clock veiled them with shadow, surfaces as polished as ostriches' eggs reflected the lamplight. The frizzy hair of their wives was wrenched up from scarlet necks and pinned under slides and then hatted with green Bavarian trilbies and round one pair of elephantine shoulders a little fox stole was clasped. The youngest of this group, resembling a matinée idol under some cruel spell, was the bulkiest. Under tumbling blond curls his china blue eyes protruded from cheeks that might have been blown up with a bicycle pump, and cherry lips laid bare the sort of teeth that make children squeal. There was nothing bleary or stunned about their eyes. The

setting may have reduced their size, but it keyed their glances to a sharper focus. Hands like bundles of sausages flew nimbly, packing in forkload on forkload of ham, salami, frankfurter, krenwurst and blutwurst and stone tankards were lifted for long swallows of liquid which sprang out again instantaneously on cheek and brow. They might have been competing with stop-watches, and their voices, only partly gagged by the cheekfuls of good things they were grinding down, grew louder while their unmodulated laughter jarred the air in frequent claps. Pumpernickel and aniseed rolls and pretzels bridged all the slack moments but supplies always came through before a true lull threatened. Huge oval dishes, laden with schweinebraten, potatoes, sauerkraut, red cabbage and dumplings, were laid in front of each diner. They were followed by colossal joints of meat – unclassifiable helpings which, when they were picked clean, shone on the scoured chargers like calves' pelvises or the bones of elephants. Waitresses with the build of weight-lifters and all-in wrestlers whirled this provender along and features dripped and glittered like faces at an ogre's banquet. But all too soon the table was an empty bone-yard once more, sound faltered, a look of bereavement clouded those small eyes and there was a brief hint of sorrow in the air. But succour was always at hand; beldames barged to the rescue at full gallop with new clutches of mugs and fresh plate-loads of consumer goods and the damp Laestrygonian brows unpuckered again in a happy renewal of clamour and intake.

I strayed by mistake into a room full of SS officers, Gruppen- and Sturmbannführers, black from their lightning-flash collars to the forest of tall boots underneath the table. The window embrasure was piled high with their skull-and-crossbones caps. I still hadn't found the part of this Bastille I was seeking, but at last a noise like the rush of a river guided me downstairs again to my journey's end.

The vaults of the great chamber faded into infinity through blue strata of smoke. Hobnails grated, mugs clashed and the combined smell of beer and bodies and old clothes and farmyards sprang at the newcomer. I squeezed in at a table full of peasants, and was soon lifting one of those masskrugs to my lips. It was heavier than a brace of iron dumb-bells, but the blond beer inside was cool and marvellous, a brooding, cylindrical litre of Teutonic myth. This was the fuel that had turned the berserk feeders upstairs into Zeppelins and floated them so far from heart's desire. The gunmetal-coloured cylinders were stamped with a blue HB conjoined under the Bavarian crown, like the foundry-mark on cannon. The tables, in my mind's eye, were becoming batteries where each gunner served a silent and recoil-less piece of ordnance which, trained on himself, pounded away in steady siege. *Mass*-gunfire! Here and there on the tables, with their heads in puddles of beer, isolated bombardiers had been mown down in their emplacements. The vaults reverberated with the thunder of a creeping barrage. There must have been over a thousand pieces engaged! – Big Berthas, Krupp's pale brood, battery on battery crashing at random or in salvoes as hands adjusted the elevation and traverse and then tightened on the stone trigger-guard. Supported by comrades, the walking wounded reeled through the battle smoke and a fresh gunner leaped into each place as it fell empty.

My own gun had fired its last shot, and I wanted to change to a darker-hued explosive. A new *Mass* was soon banged down on the board. In harmony with its colour, it struck a darker note at once, a long Wagnerian chord of black-letter semibreves: *Nacht und Nebel!* Rolling Bavarian acres formed in the inscape of the mind, fanning out in vistas of poles planted pyramidally with the hops gadding over them heavy with poppy-sombre flowers.

The peasants and farmers and the Munich artisans that filled the tables were much nicer than the civic swallowers overhead. Compared to the trim, drilled figures of the few soldiers there, the Storm Troopers looked like brown-paper parcels badly tied with string. There was even a sailor with two black silk streamers falling over his collar from the back of his cap, round the front of which, in gold letters, was written *Unterseeboot*. What was this Hanseatic submariner doing here,

so far inland from Kiel and the Baltic? My tablemates were from the country, big, horny-handed men, with a wife or two among them. Some of the older men wore green and grey loden jackets with bone buttons and badgers' brushes or blackcocks' feathers in the back of their hatbands. The bone mouthpieces of long cherry-wood pipes were lost in their whiskers and on their glazed china bowls, painted castles and pine-glades and chamois glowed cheerfully while shag-smoke poured through the perforations of their metal lids. Some of them, gnarled and mummified, puffed at cheroots through which straws were threaded to make them draw better. They gave me one and I added a choking tribute to the enveloping cloud. The accent had changed again, and I could only grasp the meaning of the simplest sentences. Many words were docked of their final consonants; '*Bursch*' – 'a chap' – for instance, became 'bua'; 'A' was rolled over into 'O', 'Ö' became 'E', and every O and U seemed to have a final A appended, turning it into a disyllable. All this set up a universal moo-ing note, wildly distorted by resonance and echo, for these millions of vowels, prolonged and bent into boomerangs, sailed rico-chetting up through the fog to swell the tidal thunder. This echoing and fluid feeling, the bouncing of sounds and syllables and the hogs-heads of pungent liquid that sloshed about the tables and blotted the sawdust underfoot, must have been responsible for the name of this enormous hall. It was called the *Schwemme*, or horse-pond. The hollowness of those tall mugs augmented the volume of noise like the amphorae which the Greeks embedded in masonry to add resonance to their chants. My own note, as the mug emptied, was sliding down to middle C.

Mammoth columns were rooted in the flagstones and the sawdust. Arches flew in broad hoops from capital to capital; crossing in diagonals, they groined the barrel-vaults that hung dimly above the smoke. The place should have been lit by pine-torches in stanchions. It was beginning to change, turning now, under my clouding glance, into the scenery for some terrible Germanic saga, where snow vanished under the breath of dragons whose red-hot blood thawed sword-blades like icicles. It was a place for battleaxes and bloodshed and the last pages of the *Nibelungenlied* when the capital of Hunland is in flames and everybody in the castle is hacked to bits. Things grew quickly darker and more fluid; the echo, the splash, the boom and the roar of fast currents sank this beer-hall under the Rhine-bed; it became a cavern full of more dragons, misshapen guardians of gross treasure; or the fearful abode, perhaps, where Beowulf, after tearing the Grendel's arm out of its socket, tracked him over the snow by the bloodstains and, reaching the mere's edge, dived in to swim many fathoms down and slay his loathsome water-hag of a mother in darkening spirals of gore.

Or so it seemed, when the third mug arrived.

Surely I had never seen that oleograph before? Haloed with stars, the Blessed Virgin was sailing skywards through hoops of pink cloud and cherubim, and at the bottom, in gold lettering, ran the words: *Mariä Himmelfahrt*. And those trusses of chair-legs, the tabby cat in a nest of shavings and the bench fitted with clamps? Planes, mallets, chisels and braces-and-bits littered the room. There was a smell of glue, and sawdust lay thick on the cobwebs in the mid-morning light. A tall man was sand-papering chair-spokes and a woman was tiptoeing through the shavings with bread and butter and a coffee pot and, as she placed them beside the sofa where I lay blanketed, she asked me with a smile how my Katzenjammer was. Both were utter strangers.

A *Katzenjammer* is a hangover. I had learnt the word from those girls in Stuttgart.

As I drank the coffee and listened, their features slowly came back to me. At some point, unwillingly emulous of the casualties I had noticed with scorn, I had slumped forward over the Hofbräuhaus table in unwakeable stupor. There had been no vomiting, thank God; nothing worse than total insensibility; and the hefty Samaritan on the bench beside me had simply scooped me up and put me in his handcart, which was full of turned chair legs, and then, wrapping me in my

greatcoat against the snow, wheeled it clean across Munich and laid me out mute as a flounder. The calamity must have been brought on by the mixture of the beer with the schnapps I had drunk in Schwabing; I had forgotten to eat anything but an apple since breakfast. Don't worry, the carpenter said: why, in Prague, the beer-halls kept horses that they harnessed to wickerwork coffins on wheels, just to carry the casualties home at the brewery's expense … What I needed, he said, opening a cupboard, was a 'schluck' of schnapps to put me on my feet. I made a dash for the yard and stuck my head under the pump. Then, combed and outwardly respectable, I thanked my saviours and was soon striding guiltily and at high speed through these outlying streets.

I felt terrible. I had often been drunk, and high spirits had led to rash doings; but never to this hoggish catalepsy.

Bicycle Polo

from *Between the Woods and the Water*

When in Budapest in the spring of 1934, Paddy had been invited to stay with Count and Countess Józsi Wenckheim at their house, O'Kygos, near the city of Békéscsaba on the Great Hungarian Plain.

I was halted next day by the Körös. There was no bridge in sight, so I followed a bank teeming with rabbits until an old fisherman, pale as a ghost and dressed all in white, sculled me to the other side. The people in the inn looked different and I pricked my ears at the sound of a Slav language. They were Slovaks who had come here centuries ago, hundreds of miles from their old abode, to settle in the empty region when the Turks were driven out, devout Lutherans of the Augsburg Confession, unlike the Protestants of Debrecen who were Calvinists to a man.

The distance was getting longer than I had reckoned. For once, I sighed for a lift; I didn't want to be late, and just as the wish took shape, a cloud of dust appeared on the path and then a governess-cart with a fleece-capped driver and two nuns. One of the sisters made room with a smile and a clatter of beads. We drove several miles and the town of Békéscsaba hovered far away to the right, with the twin steeples of the Catholic cathedral and the great tea-cosy of the Protestants' green copper dome glimmering beyond the tall maize-stalks. Both had vanished again when they put me down at my turning. The nuns were rather impressed when I told them my destination, and so was I.

László's elder brother Józsi (Joseph), head of that numerous family, and his wife Denise were the only two of all my benefactors on the Great Plain I had met before. It had been at a large, rather grand luncheon at their house on the slopes of Buda and when they had heard I was heading for the south-east, they had asked me to stay. Another brother, Pál, a diplomatist with the urbane and polished air of a Hungarian Norpois, said, 'Do go! Józsi's a great swell in those parts. It's a strange house, but we're very fond of it.'

Once through the great gates, I was lost for a moment. A forest of huge exotic trees mingled with the oaks and the limes and the chestnuts. Magnolias and tulip trees were on the point of breaking open, the branches of biblical cedars swept in low fans, all of them ringing with the songs of thrushes and blackbirds and positively slumbrous with the cooing of a thousand doves, and the house in the middle, when the trees fell back, looked more extraordinary with every step. It was a vast ochre-coloured pile, built, on the site of an older building perhaps, in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Blois, Amboise and Azay-le-Rideau (which I only knew from photographs) immediately floated into mind. There were pinnacles, pediments, baroque gables, ogees, lancets, mullions, steep slate roofs, towers with flags flying and flights of covered stairs ending in colonnades of flattened arches.

Great wings formed a courtyard and, from a terrace leading to a ceremonial door, branching and balustraded steps descended in a sweep. As I was crossing this *place d'armes*, several people were coming down the steps, and one of them was Count Józsi. Forewarned by László, he spotted me at once. He waved a greeting and cried, 'You are just what we need! Come along!' I followed him and the others across the yard to a shed. 'Have you ever played bike-polo?' he asked, catching me by the elbow. I had played a version of it at school with walking sticks and a tennis-ball on the hard tennis-courts; it was thought rather disreputable. But here they had real

polo-sticks cut down to the right size and a proper polo ball and the shed was full of battered but sturdy machines. Józsi was my captain, and a famous player of the real game called Bethlen had the rival team; two other guests and two footmen and a groom were the rest of the players. The game was quick, reckless and full of collisions, but there was nothing to match the joy of hitting the ball properly: it made a loud smack and gave one a tempting glimmer of what the real thing might be like. I couldn't make out why all shins weren't barked to the bone; nor why, as one of the goals backed on the house, none of the windows were broken. The other side won but we scored four goals, and when the iron Maltese Cats were back in their stands, we limped back to the steps, where Countess Denise and her sister Cecile and some others had been leaning on the balustrade like ladies gazing down into the lists.

What luck those nuns turning up, I thought a bit later, lapping down whisky and soda out of a heavy glass! Someone took me along a tall passage to my room and I found one of the young polo-playing footmen there, spick and span once more, but looking puzzled as he tried in vain to lay out the stuff from my rucksack in a convincing array. We were reciprocally tongue-tied, but I laughed and so did he: knocking one another off bicycles breaks down barriers. I got into a huge bath.

Countess Denise and Count Józsi were first cousins and earlier generations had been similarly related. 'We are more intermarried than the Ptolemies,' she told me at dinner. 'We all ought to be insane.' She and Cecile had dark hair and beautiful features and shared the rather sad expression of the rest of the family; but it likewise dissolved in friendly warmth when they smiled. Her husband's distinguished face, under brushed-back greying hair, had the same characteristic. (In a fit of melancholy when he was very young he had fired a bullet through his breast, just missing his heart.) He looked very handsome in an old claret-coloured smoking jacket. Dürer's family came from the neighbouring town of Gyula, the Countess said; the Hungarian Ajtós – 'doorkeeper' – was translated into the old German Thürer – then into Dürer when the family migrated and set up as gold- and silversmiths in Nuremberg. Afterwards in the drawing room, my footman friend approached Count Józsi carrying an amazing pipe with a cherry-wood stem over a yard long and an amber mouthpiece. The meerschaum bowl at the end was already alight, and, resting this comfortably on the crook of his ankle, the Count was soon embowered in smoke. Seeing that another guest and I were fascinated by it, he called for two more of these calumets and a few minutes later in they came, already glowing; before they were offered, the mouthpieces were dipped in water. The delicious smoke seemed the acme of oriental luxury, for these pipes were the direct and unique descendants of those long chibooks that all Levant travellers describe and all the old prints depict; the Turks of the Ottoman Empire used them as an alternative to the narghileh. (That sinuous affair, the Turkish hookah, still survived all over the Balkans and before summer was out I was puffing away at them, half-pasha and half-caterpillar, in many a Bulgarian khan. But Hungary was the only country in the world where the chibook still lingered. In Turkey itself, as I discovered that winter, it had vanished completely, like the khan-jar and the yataghan.)

Ybl, the architect of the castle, had given himself free rein with armorial detail. Heraldic beasts abounded, casques, crowns and man-telling ran riot and the family's emblazoned swords and eagles' wings were echoed on flags and bed-curtains and counterpanes. The spirits of Sir Walter Scott and Dante Gabriel Rossetti seemed to preside over the place and as I had been steeped in both of them from my earliest years, anything to do with castles, sieges, scutcheons, tournaments and crusades still quickened the pulse, so the corroborative detail of the castle was close to heart's desire.

Wheatfields scattered with poppies enclosed the wooded gardens and the castle, and when we got back from a ride through them next morning, my hostess's sister Cecile looked at her watch and cried out, 'I'll be late for Budapest!' We accompanied her to a field where a small aeroplane was waiting; she climbed in and

waved, the pilot swung the propeller, the grass flattened like hair under a drier and they were gone. Then Szigi, the son of the house, took me up the tower and we looked out over an infinity of crops with shadows of clouds floating serenely across them. He was going to Ampleforth in a few terms, he said: what was it like? I told him I thought it was a very good school and that the monks umpired matches with white coats over their habits, and he seemed satisfied with these scant items. Exploring the library, I was fascinated by a remote shelf full of volumes of early nineteenth-century debates in the Hungarian Diet; not by the contents – humdrum stuff about land-tenure, irrigation, the extension or limitation of the franchise and so on – but because they were all in Latin, and I was amazed to learn that in Parliament until 1839, and even in the county courts, no other language was either spoken or written.

The bicycle polo after tea was even rougher than the day before. One chukka ended in a complete pile-up and as we were extricating ourselves, our hostess called from the balustrade.

A carriage with two horses and a coachman in a feathered and ribboned hat was drawing up at the foot of the steps. Dropping his stick, our host went over to help the single passenger out, and when he had alighted, bowed. This tall, slightly stooping newcomer, with white hair and beard of an Elizabethan or Edwardian cut, a green Alpine hat and a loden cape, was Archduke Joseph. Living on a nearby estate, he belonged to a branch of the Habsburgs which had become Hungarian and during the troubled period after Hungary's defeat and revolution, he had briefly been Palatine of the kingdom – a sort of regent, that is – until the victorious Allies dislodged him. Our hostess had been coming down the stairs as the Archduke was slowly climbing them, calling in a quavering voice, 'Kezeit csókólóm kedves Denise grófnö!' – 'I kiss your hand, dear Countess Denise'; – and when he stooped to do so, she curtseyed, and, diagonally and simultaneously, they both sank about nine inches on the wide steps and recovered again as though in slow motion. When we had been led up steaming and dishevelled and presented, we leaped back into the saddle and pedalled and slashed away till it was too dark to see.

I was lent something more presentable than my canvas trousers and gym shoes for dinner. The Archduke joined in the chibook smoking afterwards and the memory of those aromatic fumes still enclouds the last night and the last house on the Great Plain.

Carpathian Uplands

from *Between the Woods and the Water*

I got to Tomeşti at nightfall, where I found another pre-arranged haven under the roof of Herr Robert v. Winckler; he was a tall, thin, scholarly man, living alone with his books and his guns on the steep edge of the forest. He and his library were a treasure-house of relevant knowledge, and the stairs, on the way to bed, were forested with horns, antlers, fowling-pieces and wolf-traps. There were the skins of two enormous wolves on the landing, a stuffed lynx on the wall, a row of boars' tushes and a bear's skin on my bedroom floor; and the last thing I remember before blowing out the candle is the double reflection of the wick in its glass eyes. The depth of the flared embrasures showed the thickness of the walls, and the logs stacked to the ceiling beside the massive tiled stove told how cold it must have been in winter. It was hard, in the summer moonlight, to imagine the onslaught of the wind along the canyons, the icicle-portcullises and the silent obliterating flakes that would place all these buildings under siege.

Transylvania, the Banat of Temesvár, the Great Plain, the Tatra mountains, Bukovina, Galicia, Podolia, Lodomeria, Moravia, Bohemia, Wallachia, Moldavia, Bessarabia and, above all, the Carpathians themselves – how closely the geography of Austria-Hungary and its neighbours approximated to the fictional world of earlier generations! Graustark, Ruritania, Borduria, Syldavia and a score of imaginary kingdoms, usurped by tyrants and sundered by fights for the throne, leap into mind: plots, treachery, imprisoned heirs and palace factions abound and, along with them, fiendish monocled swordsmen, queens in lonely towers, toppling ranges, deep forests, plains full of half-wild horses, wandering tribes of gypsies who steal children out of castles and dye them with walnut-juice or lurk under the battlements and melt the chatelaines' hearts with their strings. There are mad noblemen and rioting jacqueries; robbers too, half-marauder and half-Robin Hood, straddling quite across the way with their grievous crab-tree cudgels. I had read about betyárs on the Alföld; now haidouks and pandours had begun to impinge. Fur-hatted and looped with pearls, the great boyars of the Rumanian principalities surged up the other side of the watershed, ghostly hospodars with their nearly mythical princesses trooped in tall branched crowns round the walls of fortress-monasteries in frescoed processions; and beyond them to the north stretched icebound rivers and steppes and bogs where herds of elk moved at a shambling trot, and, once upon a time, the great aurochs, extinct now except on heraldic shields; wastes unfolded north-east to which unstable troops of Cossacks laid claim, or destructive settlements of Tatars; further still, a kingdom of sledded Polacks retreated into the shadows, and then a region of snowfalls where the Teutonic Knights cut the pagans of Lithuania to bits on the frozen Baltic, surviving still in the East Prussian world of scars and spikes; and beyond them, all the Russias … But to the south, closer than these and getting closer with every step, the valleys and woods of the Danube had been the theatre for momentous battles between Christendom and Islam: the armies of the Sultan moving upstream under green banners and preposterous turbans, while kings, voivodes and cardinals (the contusion of whose maces absolved them from bloodshed) and all the paladins of the West – their greyhounds curvetting beside them, sunbeams catching gold-inlay under their ostrich-plumes and spirals and stripes on their lances like Uccello's in the *Battle of San Romano* – cantered light-heartedly downstream to their doom.

An old addict, I had been re-reading Saki just before setting out. Many pages are

haunted by ‘those mysterious regions between Vienna Woods and the Black Sea’, and here I was, as deep in that maze of forests and canyons as it was possible to get. The timbered slopes outside the windows, and thoughts of the snow and the winter solstice, brought these stories to mind, especially the ones about wolves, the villains and the presiding daemons of East European winter. The terrible arrival of *The Interlopers*, in the last monosyllabic paragraph of the story, might have taken place a few miles away; and another, *The Wolves of Czernogratz*, with the howling crescendo of the same dread monsters, conjured up a thousand castles to the north and the west; and I had always been struck by the broken traveller in *The Unbearable Bassington*, ‘a man whom wolves had sniffed at’. István was one, my host another, Gróf K a third; Transylvania was full of them. All the castles were haunted, and earthly packs of wolves were reinforced after dark by solitary werewolves; vampires were on the move; witches stirred and soared; the legends and fairy stories of a dozen nations piled up and the region teemed with everything that Goethe told the New World it was better without: ‘Useless memories and vain strifes … knights, robbers and ghost stories … Ritter und Räuber und Gespenstergeschichten …’ In the end, I stayed three nights, listening to stories of wolves and forests and reading in the library, and some of it must have found its way into the bloodstream. M. Herriot has left a consoling message for cases like this: ‘La culture, c’est ce qui reste quand on a tout oublié.’

A scramble through valleys and foothills, bearing south-west to avoid the Lugoj road, and a night’s sleep under an oak tree, brought me dog-tired and long after dark on the second day to a brick-kiln on the Caransebeș road, where I curled up and fell asleep just as the moon was coming up.

Ada Kaleh

from *Between the Woods and the Water*

Paddy reached the island of Ada Kaleh, which lay in a bend in the Danube near the Hungarian, Rumanian and Yugoslav borders a few miles downstream from Orşova, in August 1934. The island no longer exists. It was flooded by the building of the Iron Gates dam in 1971, and now lies fathoms deep below the waters of an artificial lake.

After the bridge at Turnu-Severin, the doctor travelled on to Craiova and I caught a bus back to Orşova, picked up my stuff, bought a ticket for the next day's boat, then walked a couple of miles downstream again and found a fisherman to scull me out to the little wooded island I had had my eye on ever since rejoining the Danube.

I had heard much talk of Ada Kaleh in recent weeks, and read all I could find. The name means 'island fortress' in Turkish. It was about a mile long, shaped like a shuttle, bending slightly with the curve of the current and lying a little closer to the Carpathian than the Balkan shore. It has been called Erythia, Rushafa and then Continusa, and, according to Apollonius Rhodius, the Argonauts dropped anchor here on their way back from Colchis. How did Jason steer the *Argo* through the Iron Gates? And then the Kazan? Medea probably lifted the vessel clear of the spikes by magic. Some say the *Argo* reached the Adriatic by overland portage, others that she crossed it and continued up the Po, mysteriously ending in North Africa. Writers have tentatively suggested that the first wild olive to be planted in Attica might have come from here. But it was later history that had invested the little island with fame.

The inhabitants were Turkish, probably descendants of the soldiers of one of the earlier Sultans who invaded the Balkans, Murad I, or Bayazid I, perhaps. Left behind by the retreating Turks, the island lingered on as an outlying fragment of the Ottoman Empire until the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. The Austrians held some vague suzerainty over it, but the island seems to have been forgotten until it was granted to Rumania at the Treaty of Versailles; and the Rumanians had left the inhabitants undisturbed. The first thing I saw after landing was a rustic coffee-shop under a vine-trellis where old men sat cross-legged in a circle with sickles and adzes and pruning hooks scattered about them. I was as elated when bidden to join them as if I had suddenly been seated on a magic carpet. Bulky scarlet sashes a foot wide gathered in the many pleats of their black and dark blue baggy trousers. Some wore ordinary jackets, others navy-blue boleros with convoluted black embroidery and faded plum-coloured fezzes with ragged turbans loosely knotted about them; all except the hodja's. Here, snow-white folds were neatly arranged round a lower and less tapering fez with a short stalk in the middle. Something about the line of brow, the swoop of nose and the jut of the ears made them indefinably different from any of the people I had seen on my journey so far. The four or five hundred islanders belonged to a few families which had intermarried for centuries, and one or two had the vague and absent look, the wandering glance and the erratic levity that sometimes come with ancient and inbred stock. In spite of their patched and threadbare clothes, their style and their manners were full of dignity. On encountering a stranger, they touched heart, lips and brow with the right hand, then laid it on their breast with an inclination of the head and a murmured formula of welcome. It was a gesture of extreme grace, like the punctilio of broken-down

grandees. An atmosphere of prehistoric survival hung in the air as though the island were the refuge of an otherwise extinct species long ago swept away.

Several of my neighbours fingered strings of beads, but not in prayer; they spilt them between their fingers at random intervals, as though to scan their boundless leisure; and to my delight, one old man, embowered in a private cloud, was smoking a narghileh. Six feet of red tubing were cunningly coiled, and when he pulled on the amber mouthpiece, charcoal glowed on a damped wad of tobacco leaves from Isfahan and the bubbles, fighting their way through the water with the sound of a mating bull-frog, filled the glass vessel with smoke. A boy with small tongs arranged fresh charcoal. While he did so, the old man pointed towards me and whispered; and the boy came back in a few minutes with a laden tray on a circular table six inches from the ground. Seeing my quandary, a neighbour told me how to begin: first, to drink the small glass of raki; then eat the mouthful of delicious rose-petal jam lying ready spooned on a glass saucer, followed by half a tumbler of water; finally to sip at a dense and scalding thimbleful of coffee slotted in a filigree holder. The ritual should be completed by emptying the tumbler and accepting tobacco, in this case, an aromatic cigarette made by hand on the island. Meanwhile the old men sat in smiling silence, sighing occasionally, with a friendly word to me now and then in what sounded like very broken Rumanian; the doctor had said that their accent and style caused amusement on the shore. Among themselves they spoke Turkish, which I had never heard: astonishing strings of agglutinated syllables with a follow-through of identical vowels and dimly reminiscent of Magyar; all the words are different, but the two tongues are Ugro-Finnic cousins in the Ural-Altaic group of languages. According to the doctor it had either drifted far from the metropolitan vernacular of Constantinople or remained immovably lodged in its ancient mould, like a long-marooned English community still talking the language of Chaucer.

I didn't know what to do when leaving; an attempt at payment was stopped by a smile and an enigmatic backward tilt of the head. Like everything else, this was the first time I came across the universal negative of the Levant; and, once more, there was that charming inclination, hand on breast.

So these were the last descendants of those victorious nomads from the borders of China! They had conquered most of Asia, and North Africa to the Pillars of Hercules, enslaved half Christendom and battered on the gates of Vienna; victories long eclipsed, but commemorated here and there by a minaret left in their lost possessions like a spear stuck in the ground.

Balconied houses gathered about the mosque and small workshops for Turkish delight and cigarettes, and all round these crumbled the remains of a massive fortress. Vine-trellises or an occasional awning shaded the cobbled lanes. There were hollyhocks and climbing roses and carnations in whitewashed petrol tins, and the heads and shoulders of the wives who flickered about among them were hidden by a dark *feredjé* – a veil pinned in a straight line above the brow and joining under the nose; and they wore tapering white trousers, an outfit which gave them the look of black-and-white ninepins. Children were identically clad miniatures of the grown-ups and, except for their unveiled faces, the little girls might each have been the innermost of a set of Russian dolls. Tobacco leaves were hung to dry in the sun like strings of small kippers. Women carried bundles of sticks on their heads, scattered grain to poultry and returned from the shore with their sickles and armfuls of rushes. Lop-eared rabbits basked or hopped sluggishly about the little gardens and nibbled the leaves of ripening melons. Flotillas of ducks cruised among the nets and the canoes, and multitudes of frogs had summoned all the storks from the roofs.

Hunyadi had put up the first defensive walls, but the ramparts all round belonged to the interregnum after Prince Eugene had taken Belgrade and driven the Turks downstream, and the eastern end of the island looked as though it might sink under the weight of his fortifications. The vaults of the gun-galleries and the dank tremendous magazines had fallen in. Fissures split the ramparts and great blocks of


image
not
available

concealed the interior. Trees sank to the sea's edge and the path curled across tilted glades full of white and red anemones. The smell of herbs filled the air. Myrtle, bay and arbutus – dark green leaves crowded with berries as big and scarlet as strawberries – sank seaward. Blueblack ilexes jutted among them, their roots looped in plaited arches like the roots of trees in Japanese paintings.

Downhill, at the end of plunging tunnels of evergreen, the European continent disintegrated in tufted spikes and islets standing in green water as translucent as glass, darkened, as it receded, to the blue of a peacock's neck as it fled away to the skyline. Creases slight as a breath on silk stirred the almost still water just enough to ring these spikes with a bracelet of white. Headlands followed each other in a south-westerly recession of plumed capes dwindling at last to dim threads that could belong equally to the sea or the sky.

In the late afternoon, sunbeams filled the tilted clearings and struck the tree boles and the leaves with layers of wintry gold. Rafts of light hung in the leaves, fell through the woods in spokes and broke up the loop of shadow over the water with windows of radiance. The solitude and the hush were complete. A promise of the Aegean and the Greek islands roved the cold Bulgarian air, sending a hint of their spell across the Propontis and the Bosporus to the shores of this huge barbarian sea.

A trio of cormorants had flown across the Tartar's cove and I had seen their craned necks, beaks swivelling like periscopes, sticking out of the water farther south. On the rocks a dozen were standing now with wings heraldically half-open, as though hung out to dry. I followed a path downhill towards them, but they took flight in an urgent wedge over the water, which was now patterned with streaks of zinc and lilac. The track grew thinner; by dusk all trace of it had vanished and I found myself climbing through undergrowth and rocks: leaping from slab to slab, dodging pools, bestriding fissures and ledges, hoping for a gap that might lead uphill again. When it was dark I went on by torchlight, negotiating the water and the steeper confusion of boulders, determined to turn back if it grew worse.

Then I lost my footing on a ledge and skidded, with a screech of hobnails, down a slant like a barn roof. A drop and a jolt threw me waist-deep into a pool. Jarred and shaken, with a gash on my forehead and a torn thumb, I climbed out, shuddering with cold. At the bottom of the other end of the pool, about two fathoms down, the torch was sending a yellow shaft through sea anemones and weed and a flickering concourse of fish. I wondered what would have happened if in my rucksack and overcoat and heavy boots, I had followed the torch into the depths. Should I take off my heavy stuff and dive for the drowned light? I was shaking and my teeth were chattering. The sun had only just set: waiting till dawn meant twelve or thirteen hours in the freezing dark.

In case there were someone on this empty-seeming coast, I decided to shout. But what? I had forgotten, if I ever knew it, the Bulgarian for *Help*. All I could think of was the formal cry of 'Good evening' – '*Dobar vecher!*' I shouted for a few minutes but with no reply. My stick was floating on the shallower part of the pool, so I retrieved it. With a reluctant look at the lost torch and the glittering mob of fish now going mad round that fallen portent, I began to fumble my way forward, tapping and feeling a way along the rocks: sliding, crawling on all fours, climbing ledges slippery with bladder-wrack, wading up to my armpits and sounding ahead with the stick for fear of a sudden drop. Now and again I sent up my cry of inappropriate affability. Stars dimly indicated distant masses in silhouette. After a long slithering advance, a few constellations, appearing in front where all had been black before, indicated that I was reaching the cape.

I crept on, preferring to wade now; the water was less cold than the night air. When I crawled on the rocks, the air embedded me in icy plate-armour. Within a few minutes of each other, as though by collusion, both my bootlaces broke; the boots became loose, dragging anchors under water and heavy fetters up and down the blades of rock. Breathless and exhausted, I lay on a ledge until spurred on by the cold. At last, lowering my half-shod foot on to what I thought was the surface of a

pool, I felt the solidity of sand and the grate of pebbles. Another pace confirmed it; I was on the shore of an inlet. Round a buttress of cliff a little way up the beach, a faint rectangle of light, surrounded by scattered chinks, leaked astonishingly into the darkness. I crossed the pebbles and I pulled open an improvised door, uttering a last *dobar vecher* into the measureless cavern beyond. A dozen firelit faces looked up in surprise and consternation from their cross-legged supper, as though a sea monster or a drowned man's ghost had come in.

Ten minutes later, in gym shoes, canvas trousers, two shirts, several layers of jersey and a shepherd's hirsute cloak, with three or four slugs of *slivovitz* burning inside me, sipping a second glass of tea brewed from mountain herbs and two inches deep in sugar, I was crouched in front of a blaze of thorns stacked as high as a bonfire. I was still shuddering. One of the inhabitants of the place had washed the blood off my face and feet, another had plied a towel. Recovered from their surprise at the apparition of this sodden and bleeding spectre, they had leaped to my help like Bernardine monks.

It took some time to focus and segregate the figures moving about in the firelight and the smoky shadows. They were wild-looking men. Six were dressed in the customary earth-brown or dark blue homespun; patched, tattered, cross-gartered with thongs over their felt-swaddled shanks and shod in canoe-tipped cowhide moccasins. Knives were stuck in their wide red sashes and, like me, they were hatted in flat-topped sheepskin kalpaks that had moulted most of their fur. An old man with a tangled white beard seemed to be the leader of this group. Four others, equally torn and tattered, wore blue jerseys and seamen's peaked caps set askew. Shepherds and seamen, in fact. The oldest of the sailors had only one hand, with a star tattooed on the back of it.

Gradually the surrounding firelit hollow resolved itself into a long cave, arching high overhead but not burrowing very deep. Blades of rock formed much of the outer wall, unmortared masonry filled the gaps, and branches and planks and flattened petrol tins stamped with *Sokony-Vacuum* in Cyrillic characters, completed it. The flames picked out fans of shrub springing from the rock and a high cluster of stalactites; they also summoned from the shadows a scattering of gear which told of the cave's double function: a boat tilted on its side, oars, rudders, huge carbide lamps, long-shafted fishing spears, tall multi-pronged tridents with barbed spikes like eight-toothed combs, anchors, geometric fishing traps, creels, bait baskets, corks, gourd floats, wedges, coils, drooping russet festoons of net and links of rusty chain. A small anvil topped an embedded tree stump.

The other side of the fire displayed a set of conflicting clues: wicker cheese baskets on planks, a leaning sheaf of crooks and a grove of white, hanging globes – cheese that had been poured liquid into dripping goatskin bags, hairy side innermost. A cauldron of whey simmered over a second fire, and the stooping Cyclopean greybeard stirred and skimmed. Across the dark reaches at the far end ran a breast-high wall of bleached stones and furze, and the mystery of an abrupt and derisive cachinnation beyond.

The old man took a brand from beneath the cauldron and flourished it with a possessive smile. The lasso of radiance that his flame looped into the murk lit up a thicket of spiralling and bladed horns and the imperial beards and matted black-and-white pelts of fifty goats; a wave of the torch kindled a hundred oblong-pupilled eyes, provoking another falsetto jeer, a click of horns and the notes of a few heavy bells. A patina of smoke and soot polished the walls of the cave. Jags of mineral were tables or sideboards for these troglodytes. Half a dozen dogs slept or foraged around; a reclining white mongrel with hanging tongue and forepaws crossed observed the scene through close-set eyes, the left one of which was surrounded by a black ring. The sand and the pebbles underlay a trodden crust of goats' pellets and fish scales, and the cavern reeked of fish, goats, curds, cheese, tar, brine, sweat and wood-smoke. It was an abode harmoniously shared by Polyphemus and Sinbad.

Supper was finished but they ladled me out the last of the lentils while one of the fishermen poured oil in the frying pan, laid a couple of mackerel across it and, in due course, whisked them out sizzling by their tails and put them in the tin plate the lentils had that instant vacated. I must have been coming to; these delicious fish were demolished at speed. What were they called? *Skoumbri*, one fisherman said; no, no, cried the others: *skumria*. There was some friendly teasing about this, for the shepherds were Bulgars and the fishermen were Greeks, members of the Greek community scattered all over southern Bulgaria. I was surprised to see these irreconcilables in each other's company. One of them apologized, saying they had finished the *slivo* and wine. I dug a contribution out of my rucksack: two bottles of raki from Tirnovo, one safe in a wooden flask, the other mercifully intact. In spite of an occasional shudder and a rattle of teeth, my spirits, as the food and drink piled up, began to rise. The circulating raki ignited a mood of nautico-pastoral wassail and by the time the second bottle was broached the wind-battered and weather-chipped faces were wide-mouthed in song.

A goatskin, which I had taken to be a vessel for milking the ewes, turned out to be a bagpipe. But when the old man puffed it full, the drone through the horn trumpet died in a wail that called forth an answering howl from the white dog, briskly silenced by a back-handed cuff. A crease in the cracked parchment had split. I patched it up, to everyone's applause, with a criss-cross of adhesive tape. As the sound swelled again one of the fishermen began a burlesque Turkish belly dance, called the *kütchek*. He had learned it, he said, in Tzarigrad, the Bulgarian for Constantinople, the town of the Emperors. It was very convincing, even to the loud crack that accompanied each spasmodic wrench of the haunch and the midriff, produced by the abrupt parting of the stiff interlocked forefingers of both hands as they were held, palms joined, above his head.

The comic effect was enhanced by the fierce and piratical looks of Dimitri the dancer. 'He needs a *charchaff*,' one of the shepherds cried. He wrapped a cheesecloth round the lower part of Dimitri's face. The rolling of his smoke-reddened eyes above this yashmak turned him into a mixture of houri and virago. Meanwhile Costa, another sailor, advanced into the firelight with the same rotating motion as Dimitri. Uninhibited laughter broke out. A third fisherman tied a two-foot length of rope into a ring, made Costa step into it, then lifted it to the level of his thighs and made him stretch his legs apart. When the rope was taut he inserted a heavy log which he turned over several times, till the log in the twisted rope could be made to lift or drop like the beam of a siege engine. The comic impropriety of this vision brought the house down. (I wonder whether Aristophanes knew of this device? It would have been handy for the Lysistrata ...) A mock pursuit of the veiled Dimitri began, with Costa moving by leaps: the ithyphallic gait of a pasha-like grasshopper bent on rape. To drive this fierce aspect home, he pulled out one of the shepherds' knives and held it between his teeth.

The bagpipe howled with growing stridency and the spectators jovially clapped out the time. Dimitri oscillated with lumbering skittishness; the uncouth chase brought the sweat to Costa's brow, while monstrously enlarged shadows of their evolutions loomed about the cave. Finally a long scream of the pipe propelled him, with his legs splayed and knees bent, round and round his partner in mock-lecherous leaps. Cheerfully goaded by the onlookers the bagpiper blew faster and faster until the panting pibroch mercifully ended at last with the diminishing wail of an ox under the knife: my running repair had come unstuck. Laughing and out of breath, Costa collapsed with mock melodrama. The raki travelled round the cave in a hubbub of laughter, and the flames threw a beltane chiaroscuro over hilarious masks.

Another bottle was miraculously discovered. Panayi, the fourth of the fishermen, lifted a long object from the boat. When he rejoined us on the floor, the unwinding of the cloth revealed an instrument halfway between a lute and a mandolin. Ivory and mother-of-pearl inlaid the sounding board, and ivory and ebony ribbed its