Golden Threads

Preamble

My Family in Greece

John Augustus Toole

Who can tell which Angel of Good Fortune must have smiled upon the young loyalist Irishman, John Augustus Toole, when he joined the British Navy as a midshipman and sailed out to the Mediterranean sometime in the first decade of the 19th Century? He was landed on the enchanted island of Zante where he met the great love of his life, the Contessina Barbara Querini. In this book I will tell the story of their love, the disapproval of Barbara's family and how it came about that the young British officer prevailed.

It was his good fortune and hers that resulted in my family on the Ionian Islands in Greece. My life, four generations later, was succoured in the cradle of luxury and privilege that he, his children and grandchildren had created. Before I tell you the story of my remarkable life on these islands, a story resonant with living memory and fondness for the people who touched my life, I will describe in this preamble the times, places and people who came before me: the tales told to me as a child.

Most of Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire at the time of John Augustus Toole's arrival. The seven Ionian Islands, located on the west coast of Greece, had escaped Ottoman occupation as part of the Venetian Empire. In 1796 Venice fell to the French under Napoléon Bonaparte. In 1809, British forces liberated the island of Zante and soon after Cephalonia, Kythria and Lefkada. In 1815, after Napoléon had met his Waterloo, Corfu and the remaining Ionian Islands passed into British hands. Britain established the Union of the Ionian Islands and made it a protectorate administered by Lord High Commissioners appointed from Britain.

British colonial administration may have been high handed at times but *Pax Britannia* brought stability and protection from Ottoman ambitions, the rule of law, independent courts and free trade. Considerable public works were undertaken. Schools and a university were founded. British administration was strikingly free of corruption.

John Augustus Toole was seconded from the marines to the British administration in 1810. He must have performed well, for in 1813 he was appointed Deputy Assistant Commissioner General of the Ionian Islands. Later John Augustus joined Governor Sir Charles Napier on the island of Cephalonia. Argostoli, the capital of the island, became the family home where he and the Contessina, now titled *La Nobile Signora Barbara Querini Toole*, raised their five children: Anne, George, Mary, Antonio and Ernest. We always referred to her as the Contessa Barbara.

Around that time, Lord Byron arrived on the island of Cephalonia to orchestrate the liberation of the Greek mainland from Ottoman occupation. Lord Byron obtained a house in Metaxata but he was often in Argostoli and occasionally a guest at the Toole family home. Before leaving the island in 1824, he gave Contessa Barbara a lock of his hair, a romantic gesture in keeping with his flamboyant style. I saw this lock. It was kept in my grandmother's bureau, in the study.

John Augustus Toole was given the task of providing transport and arranging supplies for Lord Byron and his expeditionary force of Sulioti warriors. Lord Byron left for Messolonghi to re-ignite the fires of the Greek War of Independence that had been sputtering somewhat as the Greeks had taken to fighting each other instead of the Ottomans. John Augustus went with him. In Messolonghi Lord Byron contracted malaria or perhaps some other disease. His doctors finished the job by draining his blood and inducing septicaemia by using dirty instruments. Lord Byron died. John Augustus returned to Argostoli.

John Augustus Toole died in 1829 from Blackwater Fever, a complication of malaria contracted on a trip to Italy. His death at the age of 37 left Contessa Barbara alone with four children. Their fourth child, Antonio, had died as an infant. Their youngest child, Ernest Augustus, was only five at the time.

Ernest Augustus Toole

My great grandfather, Ernest Augustus Toole, was the baby of the family. He was loved by everyone. However he grew up to be a terrible disappointment. His indiscretions were so offensive that the family disowned him.

What did he do? What became of him?

Ernest Augustus had died long before I was born. His indiscretions were not discussed in my presence, although I seemed to know that there was a dark secret of some kind hidden there. I was quite a lot older before I was told the whole story; I shall get to that later.

His daughter, Barbara Toole, named after her grandmother, was my grandmother.

John Saunders

My other great grandfather on my mother's side, John Saunders, had been a banker in Aberdeen, Scotland, when he was appointed manager of the British Ionian Bank. The British Ionian Bank had first been proposed by the Islands' High Lord Commissioner, Lieutenant General Sir Howard Douglas. In part, at least, the purpose of the bank was to bring and end to usurious money lending practices that had been employed by the Venetian landed gentry, the traditional ruling class, to keep the Greek speaking peasants in effective indentured servitude. The bank was funded by private investors in London and greatly promoted the growth of the merchant and professional classes on the Islands.

John Saunders arrived on Cephalonia in May, 1841. He spoke Latin to the Venetian Italians, and Ancient Greek to the Greeks, in a Scottish brogue and with a cadence quite foreign to the music of the Mediterranean. They were puzzled and thought he

was speaking English. He married my great grandmother, Mary Toole, the third child of John Augustus Toole and Contessa Barbara. He was a good man: honest, reliable and loyal. He retired in 1860 and was succeeded as manager of the bank by his brother-in-law, George Augustus Toole.

Shortly after John Saunders' retirement, a major change was to come over the Ionian Islands. Greece had been liberated from the Ottomans. For a while Greece was embroiled in conflict, coups and chaos as the Greeks took once again to fighting among themselves. The European powers had an interest in stabilising the country and bringing it into the Western sphere. Greece, the cradle of Western Civilisation, obtained the benefit of romantic European idealism. In 1864, Prince William of Denmark was made George I, King of the Hellenes. A new Greek constitution was enacted, the first in the world to incorporate universal male suffrage from the start, giving the Greeks both ancient and modern reasons to regard themselves as the founders of democracy. In that year the Ionian Islanders were given the choice by plebiscite to remain an independent nation under British protection or to become part of Greece. The people elected for union with Greece.

These islands, that had been Venetian for hundreds of years, on which Venetian Italian had been the language of the ruling class, and that had been a British Protectorate for almost half a century during which time English had become the language of government and commerce, now became part of Greece and Greek the language of the islands' affairs.

James Saunders

John's son, James Saunders, was my grandfather. He was born in Argostoli and was registered at Somerset House, London, to ensure British citizenship. Boarding school was a right of passage for the sons of British expatriate families. John attended Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, England, the Jesuit school for boys. He won a prize for giving a sermon in Latin and prizes in other subjects, at least one each year that he attended. In that time, when prizes were given only for truly outstanding achievement, this was quite something. He was selected for the school's cricket first eleven, and was a member of the rowing team. On one occasion when boys from Eton and Stonyhurst met, an Eton boy enquired smugly, "What is Stonyhurst?" James replied, "Stonyhurst is what Eaton was, a school for Catholic gentlemen." James was popular and graduated *cum laude*.

James Saunders returned to Cephalonia and started working for Mr Veyias, a successful Greek entrepreneur who exported currants to Europe. James' contacts in England and Holland opened doors to new export markets, and his acumen helped the business to thrive. Mr Veyias made him a partner.

Mr Veyias had no wife or children. He was a benefactor on the island; for example, his contribution had financed the first wing of the hospital in Argostoli. When he died he left the business and its premises to James, including the stately family home.

James Saunders fell in love with the beautiful Barbara Toole. Barbara's family was set against the match because the young couple were first cousins. Barbara took aspirins

in protest, and had to be treated by a doctor. It was said that she had to have her stomach pumped, but that might not be true.

After that she was sent to a finishing school in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, where she learned to cook German Christmas biscuits, and to sing German lieder. She had a pleasing voice and was reputed to have had perfect pitch. She married a Swiss gentlemen named Jacob Wartmann, and they had two children: Lily and Jimmy. Jimmy was named after James Saunders, who had remained a close family friend. Mr Wartmann died young, and left Barbara with two small children.

After Barbara had been sent to Germany, James Saunders wrote often to her. He thought of her every day. He clipped articles from the newspapers for her. He was an honourable man and decided that sending these letters would not be the proper thing to do; if Barbara were to marry someone else she should be free of entanglements. He kept the letters in a box. When Barbara married Jacob Wartmann he stopped writing. Now, he decided to show them to her. Together they spent an afternoon reading the letters, laughing and recalling past times. They were married soon after.

James Saunders was an astute businessman. He grew the currant business into a major enterprise. Currants were exported to England, Holland and Germany. He was held in high esteem and became the consul for Britain and The Netherlands in Argostoli. He was knighted by Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands for his services to Dutch Traders in the Levantine: *Ridder in de Orde van Oranje Nassau*.

James Saunders spoke fluent modern Greek. He travelled to many parts of the island, talking to the peasants and encouraging them to plant and tend the vines that would supply his business with currants. He introduced new techniques of viticulture from Europe. In good years he paid well for the currants. He was also a philanthropist on the island. He sent the sons of widows to school in England, which he considered the ultimate opportunity in life; it would make great men of them. Many of these hot-blooded Mediterranean boys suffered terribly in that cold and rainy climate, eating porridge without honey. In those days the majority of people on the island were illiterate. The Cephalonians knew a good opportunity when it was offered. They returned with valuable British educations and began the process of elevating their positions in society.

On James' daily constitutionals he would pick up bits of broken glass so that barefoot children would not cut themselves. He also picked up discarded papers. At that time, concern for the environment and upkeep of public spaces was not prevalent, and the Greeks considered him to be an eccentric but admirable Englishman. They could not understand why he refused to take bribes. His kindness to those who worked for him was seen as odd. He was much loved.

Barbara and James were happy together, although they were quite different kinds of people. Barbara Saunders was a Victorian lady; upright, straight-laced and quite proper. She entertained high society at home. Trips to the theatre in Paris and the opera in Milan were regular pilgrimages.

James Saunders was content to stay in Greece. He kept a canoe in Argostoli in which he travelled around the island and from one island to another as far as Zante. This was very daring; occasional storms in the Ionian seas are sudden and terrible.

He was interested in science, and built a man's room in the attic where he installed a large brass telescope in one of the dormer windows. He would inspect the ships in the harbour during the day; at night he would search the heavens for comets and new stars. Just outside one of the dormer windows he constructed a platform on which he set a rain-gauge. A spinning anemometer above the turret was connected to a brass dial inside, showing wind speed and direction. James methodically collected meteorological data for the offices in Athens and in London. He subscribed to The Tablet and Punch magazines, which kept him in contact with the world. He played chess with friends in England by correspondence. His billiard table was located in the attic; he and visiting friends would vanish upstairs for a game or two, while the ladies chatted below.

James Saunders was an avid reader, and his library occupied a room on the third floor. The beautiful leather-bound books with gold embossed letters filled the shelves on three walls, from floor to ceiling. Comfortable leather chairs, thickly padded, provided for evenings of quiet reading.

He was an elegant and well-dressed man to the end. His little white beard, and tropical suits were admired in Argostoli.

James Saunders was 95 when he died. We were told that his teeth were still as good as new. I remember thinking that this must have been a reward for good living, and very meritorious. Aunty Lily and Jimmy Wartmann remembered James Saunders as a kind and benevolent stepfather. Aunty Lily told me that she had loved him more than her own mother. Still today local people take care of his grave, clearing the weeds and placing fresh flowers in the vases. Some believe him to be a saint.

Alice Saunders

On the spring morning of 5 April, 1894, my mother, Alice Elizabeth Anne Saunders, was born. She was James Saunders' only child and he was delighted. If she cried at night he was the first at her cot to comfort her. He called her his little princess, and peeled grapes and feed them to her one by one.

Jimmy Wartmann was away in Europe, studying, but Lily was at home. She became more like a second mother to Alice than a sister. Lily was a gifted musician. When Alice was old enough to sit on a piano stool Lily tried to teach her to play. But Alice lacked her ability and preferred listening to Lily.

Some years later, when the King of Greece visited the island, a choir was assembled for him. The choirmaster auditioned the young ladies of Argostoli. Many were left out. The choirmaster decided that Alice was too beautiful to be omitted; she had long dark eyelashes and eyebrows like the wings of a blackbird. He required her to open and shut her mouth but not to sing a note. Aunty Lily sang in full voice, delivering volume for two. The comic poet, Andreas Laskaratos, known for his political satires later wrote a poem about this incident.

One of Alice's playmates was Marino Kosmetatos, son of Philip Kosmetatos, the mayor of Argostoli. Philip had been a playmate of Barbara Toole when she was a child; she called him Pippi. The Kosmetatos family were an old Cephalonian aristocratic family. Their house that stood in the centre of town was palatial by Cephalonian standards. It featured a Greek Neoclassical façade and indoor floors of polished marble. The walls were hung with precious golden icons and grand family portraits. Family income was derived from extensive country properties in various parts of the island. A portion of the house that survived the earthquake of 1953 still stands in Argostoli today, and can be visited.

Marino was good looking and tall for his age. Alice was small and two years younger. But she was a leader. In their games of prince and princess they spoke German to each other and Alice told him what to do. I have a picture of Alice and Marino in fancy dress showing them looking sternly at the camera. In the picture he is dressed in a *Pierrot* clown outfit and Alice is wearing the Alsace-Lorraine national costume. Fancy dress parties were fashionable in those days. The children had been to a party where they were taught to dance the minuet.

Alice was expected to learn the usual things required of young ladies; tedious hours were spent listening to adult conversations and embroidering daisies on tablecloths and napkins. But she was an independent child. She would spend her free time reading in her father's library or creeping out of bed at night to look at the stars through his telescope. She loved swimming, rowing and sailing. Alice took to her father's canoe, and made it her own.

Alice was ambidextrous and would amaze her friends at tennis by swapping her racquet from hand to hand. Left-handed children were forced to use their right hands in those days, which resulted in Alice having a terrible handwriting, but may have contributed to her winning tennis.

A finishing school for English girls in Lausanne, Switzerland, was chosen. Alice was popular there. Her nickname was Sal Bet Anne: Alice Elizabeth Anne transposed by the girls, which she considered quite a joke even though the meaning in French is 'dirty foolish donkey'. Years later, when I was small, she told us tales of midnight feasts and of the occasion she and her companions stayed up to watch Haley's comet. It was strictly against the rules and most exciting. Some believed the comet would bring the end of the world.

After Lausanne, Alice was sent to stay with her brother in Paris. She attended the Sorbonne University where she studied French literature and the classics. Her father had instructed her to enjoy her stay there but not take the examinations, as she would never be called upon to earn a living. It was unusual for ladies to take examinations in those days.

Alice had a grand time in Paris, rolling a medicine ball in the park with her friends and going to parties and dances where she was in great demand. She was often surrounded by eligible young men but became attracted to an older man, Army Captain Felix Jacques Bontemps. He was a member of the French elite and a relative

of Napoléon Joseph Louis Bontemps, the eminent Governor General of the French Indochina.

The French Captain

Alice married the French Captain with the approval of her family, the envy of her friends and the disappointment of several young suitors. The Captain had been commissioned to take up a post in the French administration of Indochina. Soon after the wedding, they set off for the Far East.

Alice, an avid reader of travel books and thrilled by the adventure, was a good correspondent. She described the trip and exotic ports along the way. After she had settled, she wrote of her beautiful house, the elegant French colonial lifestyle, new friends, the inscrutable Chinese and their fascinating culture, the cook who was caught washing his feet in the silver soup tureen, and her delight with the white horse and carriage that the Captain had given her on her birthday.

At home her letters were read and re-read and passed to friends and relatives. One day a letter from Alice addressed to Lily bore the words, ‘Private & Confidential.’ The maid brought the letter on a small silver tray to the drawing room where the ladies were assembled. Lily excused herself and withdrew.

In the letter, Alice told of her husband’s kindness and how he cared for her like a father. However, they slept in separate rooms and nothing had happened between them. She asked for her sister’s advice.

Lily consulted her mother. In Barbara’s opinion it was a private matter between Alice and her husband; Alice would have to put up with this neglect in a discreet manner and neither Lily nor she had any business interfering. But Lily went to Alice’s father, James Saunders. He was of a different mind. He wasted no time. A meeting was arranged.

The Captain confessed that, although he was fond of Alice, he had never been physically attracted to women. If this were to become known it would mean the end of his career and reputation.

An agreement was reached with Alice’s consent. The couple would divorce as soon as possible. The official reason would be cited as adultery on the Captain's part. Alice and the family promised not to divulge the truth. Alice honoured this commitment. As a Roman Catholic she could have had the marriage annulled on grounds of non-consummation and been free to marry again. She did not, and was later looked on askance and barred from a Catholic Church wedding.

Alice never saw the Captain again but she remembered him with affection. I recall her talking of Oscar Wilde, whose works she savoured. She said that Wilde was different in a way that made him special, and for that he had been shamefully treated. More than that she did not say. The facts of her first marriage were not told in her lifetime.

Known as Madam Bontemps and barely twenty years old, Alice came home to Cephalonia. Surrounded by family and friends and the cobalt blue sea, her joy of living blossomed and people called her Happy Days.

During her absence Lily had married Philip Lavrano, a Greek landowner from the Island of Corfu. Lily had moved to Corfu to live on the Lavrano family estate in Chlomos. Alice was sought after, whether at home in Argostoli, or visiting her sister in Corfu. She had a talent for making people feel at ease.

Alice had a derring-do confident attitude. She was a good sailor, strong rower and an excellent swimmer. She was said to have been the first woman in Greece to fly solo. I have a photograph of her in an aviator's uniform, goggles in hand and standing proudly next to a small biplane. She had many adventures.

Marino Kosmetatos

While Alice was away, Marino continued his schooling in Athens. He was not cut out for an academic career. When he returned he was groomed to take over the management of the family properties. In contrast, his younger brother, Petros, had done well at school and was sent to university in Athens where he studied industrial chemistry. Petros remained in Athens where, we were told, he excelled in his profession.

The family had one daughter, Ioanna. She was an elegant young lady, groomed to be the wife of some suitable person. Despite her excellent background and good looks a suitable spouse was not found for many years. Eventually she married Charles Saunders, Alice's cousin, and so became part of our family.

Later when Alice returned to Cephalonia, Marino was still there and nothing much had changed. The Kosmetatos family properties thrived under his management. Much to everyone's amazement, he bought a German motorcycle with a sidecar for his country visits; it was a BMW with two large cylinder blocks. Many people admired it but considered it a dangerous object. Not so Alice, who loved to feel the wind in her hair as they drove over the bumpy island roads. Once again Marino became a regular visitor to Alice's house. Some people thought that they would have made a good couple but they had been close friends since early childhood and the thought never crossed their minds.

A Cephalonian who had made his name and fortune in England, Gerasimos Kambitsis, returned to the island to find a husband of good family for his daughter, Helen. It was said, somewhat disparagingly, that he had invented a cocktail drink. He approached the Kosmetatos family and Marino was proposed. The necessary arrangements were made, and the two young people were introduced.

Helen was a strapping good-looking girl, educated at one of the best schools in England. She was a talented musician and had been awarded a place at the Royal College of Music in London. She spoke very little Greek, and that with an English accent. Marino could hardly speak English. Under these circumstances, the two had nothing to say to each other. They both could speak fluent French but neither had realised that of the other at the time. Furthermore, neither of them had anything to say in the matter anyway; the marriage was contracted between the parents. Helen, who had to surrender her place at the Royal College and give up her familiar life in London for the marriage, found herself standing as bride at a fabulous noisy Greek

Orthodox ritual presided over by three marvellously dressed Orthodox bishops, and wondering what on earth she was doing there. It must have been quite a shock.

Alice immediately took the bride from England under her wing and introduced her to family and friends, making her feel welcome in the strange little world of Argostoli.

The marriage turned out very well. Helen discovered that her husband, like herself, was a talented violinist. They began to build their life together on the music they made. Helen, like Alice, was a strong woman. She quickly learned fluent Greek. With Helen's encouragement, Marino became the mayor of Argostoli when his father retired.

Helen knew how to turn life to her advantage. She installed a number of smart modern bathrooms in the Argostoli house, and replaced the old wooden stove in the kitchen in favour of a modern streamlined model. Later people came to admire the kitchen but found it too daring and progressive, and did not copy it in their homes. Marino and Helen became the centre of high society life in Argostoli.

George Raymond

George Raymond, my grandfather on my father's side, was the son of Captain George Raymond RN, and the grandson of Commander George Raymond RN. He was the British Consul in Corfu.

George Raymond was an electrician with knowledge of telegraphy, which was somewhat equivalent to being a computer wizard today. The telegraph service had become an essential tool of the British Empire. The Royal Navy was a successful global force due, at least in part, to the telegraph speedily sending news and orders around the world. George Raymond later became involved in intelligence gathering. A report of submarine activity prior to WWI from him that was shown to the Prime Minister can still be found in the war archives. During the Balkan Wars, the Serbians were expelled from their country and many, including most of the remnants of their army, ended up in Corfu. George found himself in the thick of it and had a busy time indeed.

George Raymond was typical of the officer class of his time, citizen of the only super power that mattered. He was technically educated but was not a cultivated man. He was not receptive to the people or the culture of the country. He spoke no Greek and had no inclination to learn it. His butler, Vasili, was a hard working and loyal house servant. George talked down to him, mispronouncing his name.

"Baaah-Silly, you've put the salt in the soup with your foot again! Take it away!"

"Yes sir," Vasili would say, pretending not to understand the depth of the insult.

George Raymond was very much in love with his wife, Ellen, mother of their three children.

One day, Ellen was sitting with a number of her British women friends, watching the annual procession of Saint Spiridon. Saint Spiridon is the patron saint of Corfu. The church of Saint Spiridon is located in the centre of town and is pivotal in the life of

the island. The Saint's desiccated body is venerated in this church and is carried out on his feast day in a colourful procession. Sick people are laid on the road for the saint's glass reliquary to pass over them. Many instant cures and miracles have been claimed. Most Corfiots have a son, brother or father named Spiros after the Saint. If you called out 'Spiro' in a crowded place many people would turn to answer you.

Ellen made some disparaging remarks about the primitive superstitions of the peasants. Townspeople, however, are not peasants and her remarks were understood by an old crone standing nearby. The woman, dressed in black, raised a knobbled finger and cursed Ellen in a voice that crackled with righteous indignation, "May you die of the plague." Ellen had not understood but the curse was translated for her by one of her bilingual friends.

The next day Ellen became ill. It was said that she had contracted the plague. But there is no record of a plague at that time in Corfu. Perhaps she had succumbed to suggestion. We cannot tell. We know that it took several days for her to die.

George, in despair, prayed for her every day. He lay with her in bed, against the advice of others who thought he would catch her disease. He held her in his arms every night and was holding her when she died.

Later George Raymond married Mary Lowson. But this was a marriage of convenience. It was, by all accounts, a tepid and indifferent arrangement. When George Raymond died, his will told that he wished to be buried alongside his first wife. The gravedigger, however, refused to dig up her grave.

Eric Raymond

Eric Raymond, the son of George Raymond and Mary Lowson, was about Alice's age. They had known each other, briefly, as children. After boarding school in England, and propelled by the momentum of great events, Eric had joined the Royal Scots Greys and fought as a Lieutenant in the Great War in France. He partially lost his hearing in the trenches, which ended his military career. He was decorated with a DSO bar and retired a Captain. He then stood unsuccessfully for Parliament in England and invented a rat poison that did not sell. After that, he seems not to have done another day's work in his life, a condition arising from the anticipation of a great inheritance for which he stood first in line. He played polo rather well.

Eric Raymond was a tall handsome man. He and Alice made a good-looking pair. They swam, sailed, had lots of fun and inevitably got married. Eric was a nominal Anglican, as respectable Englishmen were, and their nuptials were celebrated in the Anglican tradition.

Trip to Scotland

After their wedding, Alice and Eric went to visit the Lowson relatives in Scotland. The family had made a fortune in jute mills by hard work and business acumen. The grandfather, Andrew Lowson, had branched out from his family business in linen mills, and started on his own in Arbroath. He had a reputation for fairness. He set up a school for the children of his workers, and a junior college for the apprentices who

worked in his mill. His son, Alexander Lowson, had inherited the business and the family home when the grand old man passed away.

Eric knew the place well but Alice had never been to Scotland. Her grandfather, John Saunders, was a Scotsman. James Saunders, although born on the Ionian Islands, regarded himself as a Scotsman. Eric Raymond had told her stories of his time in the Royal Scots Greys. He was proud of his regiment that, with the aid of The Black Watch, had defeated Napoléon at Waterloo and had stolen the Golden Eagle of the French 45th regiment, which they bore as their own. Alice was making a trip to the Scotland of her dreams.

The Lowsons had a magnificent house known as the Elm Bank just outside of St Vigeans, a very beautiful and ancient Scottish town. It was situated in its own park, with a private golf course. A Rolls Royce was housed in an appropriate garage. It had not been used to pick up Alice and Eric as no one in the big house knew how to drive it. The Chauffeur was on his day off. Besides, it was costly to run, and the Lowsons were Scots. The two young people arrived in a taxi that they paid for themselves. There was no one at the front door to greet them.

Alice noticed the flag at half-mast above the entry. She asked the butler whom it was that had died.

“No one has died, madam,” the butler assured her. “The household is in mourning because their son has married a foreign woman.” It seemed he was about to continue, but he hesitated then changed his mind and said nothing more.

After dinner that evening, the family retired early. In the morning when it was still dark outside, the maid brought Alice and Eric cups of tea in bed. Eric was tired and refused to wake up. Alice spoke to the maid and asked her about the weather, and the appropriate time to get dressed for breakfast and other matters. The maid answered her only with curt 'yes madam' and 'no madam' and then left the room in great haste, never having been spoken to in this way before. Alice was amazed. She was accustomed to her household servants in Argostoli, Greeks who were keen to answer questions including those that had not been asked.

Breakfast was a grand affair in the formal dining room. A long sideboard complemented the magnificent table in the centre of the room. Glazed French doors, on the opposite side opened onto a lush green landscape and grey skies. On the sideboard were many breakfast treats, including a small bowl of grapes. Alice took the bowl of grapes. It was a beautiful bunch and Alice, who had grown up with grapes in cornucopious abundance, ate it with relish. After she had finished, she noticed the family looking at her in astonishment. Later she was told that the little bunch had been grown in the hot house with great investment of care and prayer, and was intended to be shared by all. There would be no more grapes until the following year, and then only if the vine could be coaxed once again to perform under the grey Scottish skies.

When breakfast was over Eric's uncle, Alexander Lowson, a man of about 60 and the head of the household, announced that he was going to the village. Alice and Eric

offered to go with him. The first stop for the threesome was the garage, where an old bicycle was taken down from the wall. It had a frayed and worn saddle on which the uncle fitted a cloth cover made of the family tartan. It was not a long walk to the village of Arbroath. The old uncle pushed his bicycle. Later Alice said that the old uncle was a delightful gentleman.

The sun was shining by the time they returned, and even the big house with the half-mast flag looked good in this light.

Cephalonia and its friendly people looked better than ever after that trip.

Consular Duties

After visits to Raymond relatives in Scotland the couple took up residence in Cephalonia, in my grandfather's house. Eric took on the position of Honorary British Vice Consul in Argostoli.

When the British Mediterranean fleet visited the deepwater harbour of Argostoli, parties and dances were held in the house. On one of these occasions the Prince of Wales, Edward VIII, came to the island and embarrassed everyone by his excessive drinking. Eric picked him up from the street and took him home to sober up before returning him to his ship. Edward later abdicated, much to everyone's relief.

Alice introduced young ladies of the town to dashing naval officers who visited. One of these introductions resulted in the marriage of Vana Marchetto and Captain Herbert Vaughan-Hughes. After a son, Disney, was born Alice and Vana would daydream that their children might one day marry each other.

Eric spoke good English and was the right man to meet and entertain visiting British VIPs. His family were relatively recent arrivals on the islands, so he was less comfortable dealing with the local dignitaries. He had been born in Corfu but had learned the Greek of the streets and tavernas, including the swearing and blasphemy that make up a large part of the language of the dockworkers. His father, who regarded the Greeks as dirty dagos, had made no effort to educate his son in the Hellenic language or culture. Eric did not speak and could not read the *Katharevousa*, the formal language of literature and official documents. Nor could he be relied upon to use the demotic Greek correctly. He once greeted the Greek Orthodox Archbishop at a formal occasion with "*Yásou moré vláka!*" a familiar expression better fitted to fishermen calling to each other across the water, meaning something like, 'Hi there, you idiot.' He had done so innocently, not understanding that his familiarity was offensive.

Alice and Eric had some interests in common: sailing, swimming and playing tennis. Eric was the only child in a British military family. The lives of his parents followed the rhythm of British imperial administration. He had been raised by a succession of nannies, tutors and boarding schools. He had never enjoyed a close family life.

Eric resented the time Alice spent with her books and intellectual companions. Her Mediterranean style, the noisy intimacy of her large extended family and circle of multi-lingual friends, her wide ranging intellectual interests were all alien to him.

When she spoke Greek, Italian, French or German with her friends he would storm out of the room, fuming. She was a strong woman who, while accommodating him as far as possible, was unwilling to surrender her freedom.

My Name

In those days, there was no Church of England chancery on the island and no pastor for the small British community. Visiting naval clergymen were called upon to perform services and christenings. My sister was christened on board Captain Cecil Vivian Usborne's ship. He had been a school friend of my father and he became her godfather. She received the name of Vivian, written with an 'a' in the masculine gender. Her second name was Iris after the wild irises of the Cephalonian countryside.

When Vivian Iris Raymond was eight months old, she died. I was born the following year, on 9 May, 1928, and inherited her name. I am called by my second name, Iris, which was correct in those days and in those British circles. Later, when I was told this story, the Captain had become an Admiral: Admiral Cecil Vivian Usborne. I was proud of my name.

My Brother

On 13 February, 1931, George James Neville Raymond was born. He was named after Neville Chamberlain, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, whom my father greatly admired. One of my earliest memories is of seeing my little brother just after his birth. It is with him at my side that my life began.

Golden Threads

Chapter One: At Home

The light and the sea

When I was small we lived in Greece. There the light is sharp, the air is clean and the water is clear in its shallows and its depths. And in breezes the leaves of olive trees whisper of ancient things, and the poplars' springy foliage flutters as if tickled and laughing. On hot summer days the cicadas chirp until spoken to, and then fall silent, listening. And all about are faint echoes of great odysseys and heroes, and myriad sacred mysteries.

The Ionian Sea is deep blue, serene and royal in summer, troubled and wine dark in winter. From here the Cephalonian Island rises in sudden cliffs, broken here and there by turquoise crescent bays and shining pebbled beaches. On the rugged and rocky foothills, as if tumbled from the mountains and sliding seaward, are ancient olive groves holding on with gnarled knuckles, and vineyards pinned to the land with stakes and trellises, and occasional villages dug in and buttressed by retaining walls and long stone stairways. Behind them, sharp edged crags of up-thrust limestone scratch the sky, and the mountain cloaked in uniforms of dark coniferous forest looms. Mount Enos, tipped with a tiara of snow in winter, peers out across the water.

When I was young, I thought Mount Enos was Mount Olympus. It stood there like an Elysian fortress, connecting us to a time before the gods. There was a sense that things had always been as they were, and always would be. The peasants lived as they had for thousands of years, drawing water from the same well that Saint Gerasimos had visited hundreds of years ago and Homer hundreds before him. They and their goats and their sheep seemed to have sprung from the very stones. In the villages, untamed trees and vines and creepers took possession of walls and the edges of roofs, and fixed them to the floor of land. Footsteps of generations had worn concavities in the stairs and stones of familiar paths. All these parts were connected in a permanent necessary way. The land, the sky, the light and the sea were the ancient elements of earth, air, fire and water. Enduring. Inevitable.

Venetian Lamps

We lived in a large house with walls as thick as doors are wide. It had been built with iron bars in the masonry and the floors, to keep the earthquakes out. The outside walls were stucco, dusty pink and flaking here and there; the windows and French doors were framed in white. Balconies on the north side looked out over the town square. The windows, modest and well proportioned in the Venetian style, seemed to emphasise the strength of the thing. Brown shutters with adjustable wooden louvers, the original Venetian blinds, controlled the temperature and cast inverted patterns of outside's lights and shades on the opposite walls inside; they were closed at noon on

hot summer days and at night. Glazed windows were closed only on cold and windy winter days.

On stormy winter nights the town electricity would sometimes fail. When that happened I would sit as still as I could, touching the edge of the table to know that it was still there, and listening to the rain beating on the shutters like wild bees drumming to get in. Then a glow would flicker in the hall. The shadows would seem to move and our servants would enter bearing antique Venetian lamps, primed with new cotton wicks and fresh olive oil. Several of these would be placed about the room. Wavering shadows would fan out across the floor and quiver on the walls. We would move closer together and, for reasons I still do not understand, we would whisper, and Mummy would tell stories of heroes and epic deeds. The warm smell of the hot olive oil would fill the hollows of our imaginations and soften the contours of the storm. The dull thudding of the wind and the waves and the rain would recede. We were safe in our fortress home, which remained unmoved and steady as the whole world rushed past outside in a raging fury that had nothing to do with us.

Parties and Balls

Our house was not the grandest in Argostoli but, with the terrace and the warehouses of my grandfather's trading company, it was the biggest. It was a landmark in the Venetian style. Because of its position on the northern corner of the town at the edge of the water, it was used by ships to get their bearings as they entered the harbour.

Once a year the British Mediterranean Fleet came for exercises and to register its presence in that part of the world. Argostoli provided a deep water harbour that suited the navy. As the fleet drew into the bay, the crews on the bridges would see the town of Lixouri to the starboard. The first they would see of Argostoli to the port side across the gentle slope of the headlands that fell away as they drew in, was the northern aspect of our house. At each end of the first floor balcony they would see a flagpole, leaning at an angle towards the square. From one flew the Dutch flag and from the other the Union Jack.

There were no tugs in Argostoli. Ships nudged their way into the harbour under their own power. They wheeled gradually to port and aligned themselves with the seaward face of our house. Anchors would be dropped and the clattering of giant chains could be heard from our house. Sometimes the ship's foghorn would be sounded. Deep resonant echoes from the edges of Mount Enos would return the greeting. After a while a longboat would be lowered. The admiral, the captain, the first mate and the gunnery officers would climb down. Sailors in smart white uniforms would row them to the shore. Tsirelia, our boatman on the mole, would catch the tossed line and lay it on the bollard. Then, while the sailors held the longboat steady against the wall, the officers would step up and, placing their caps under their left arms, would greet my father standing on the steps of our house. There would be much shaking of hands and "Good to see you, old chap." They would be ushered into the house through the large double doors that faced the bay, and into the hall where the wide staircases spiralled up to the first floor and then around again to the second.

From the day nursery window I watched each year as the fleet came in, searching the officers on the deck to catch a glimpse of the admiral. I was too young to be invited to the parties and balls.

I stood at the window with my elbows on the sill and my chin in my hands. From this place and time I could not have imagined the decline and destruction of my world. Nor could I have supposed that my life would soon be irretrievably altered by events quite beyond our control. Nor could I have predicted that I would be tested as few are in their lives. These events were to overtake us, at first by stealth and then by the outbreak of naked violence. As I rested on that broad and solid casement of stone, viewing the grand spectacle of the British Mediterranean Fleet at anchor, I was happy and curious; I was still the innocent child that took things to be as they seemed. The admiral, I was sure, was tall and handsome. Life was good.

Upstairs

My grandmother lived upstairs. Her name was Barbara.

In Greece, grandmother is *yaya*. But not so on the Ionian Islands where the Venetian title was used; my brother and I called her Nona. People in town called her Siora Barbara, a title of respect. Mummy called her Mamma.

In the early days Barbara Saunders had made regular trips to Europe to keep up with the fashions and see the latest ideas in home decoration. As a result the second floor was much grander than our part of the house, below. Crystal chandeliers hung in the main rooms. Polished timber floors throughout were adorned in every room with fine Persian rugs. According to Mummy's count there were thirty-six of these.

In the front of the house was the ballroom, with plum-coloured settings of Boule furniture. It looked out on Maitland Square to the north and the harbour to the east. You could see your reflection in the highly polished red-wood tables. A concert grand piano, gold-framed mirrors on the walls and the chandeliers gave monumental majesty to this room, which would come to life on every important occasion. One of these was my grandmother's eightieth birthday when she danced the night away. Six-step Vienna waltzes were not beyond her.

My grandfather, James Saunders, had died two years before I was born. My grandmother was devastated. For two years she received no visitors. The pillar upon which her life rested had been swept away, she said. When I was born a new light entered her life and she paid special attention to me. She was stern, severe even. To me she was rather as I imagined Queen Victoria to have been, a source of strength and a link to things greater than ourselves. When the occasion required that we sing God Save the King we could distinctly hear her sing "God Save the Queen," although Queen Victoria was long gone.

The Attic

The attic, large and bright with broad dormer windows on both sides, had been my grandfather's room while he lived. It had been left unchanged after his death. Silence

hung there, in this room, high above the noise of the street and the household below. The first time I went to the attic I was searching for magazines with illustrations.

Mummy had a subscription to the French magazine, *L'Illustration* with sparse ink line drawings, masterfully done. She would sometimes show me one; set it in front of me and say "Just look at that. That is wonderful. Now get out your sketch book and copy it." Mummy was a commander.

I did. And gradually got the idea that drawing was not just about making pictures of things but about mastering lines that represented objects in an imagined visual space. The lines could be made to thicken and thin again, showing aspects of shape, position or lighting in a minimalist manner. I wondered if it were possible to draw a person with a single line. Or a face.

I went up to the attic to find some of the old *L'Illustration* magazines, which I had hoped were stored there. Instead I found piles of my grandfather's magazines. *Punch* was a big magazine, like *L'Illustration*, with many drawings.

I blew away the dust and spent hours paging through the *Punch* magazines, breathing in the spirit of James Saunders. I knew him from my grandmother's stories as if he were alive, and I imagined that he might have pointed to the pages and said, "Now just look at that."

I looked over my shoulder. But the attic was deserted. Only his things stood about, watching silently. The large brass telescope, like a sentinel on the bay, seemed to be ignoring me. I looked back at the *Punch* magazine. When I turned the page the paper made a very loud sound.

I went up there many times after that to look through his magazines. I made a habit of leaving the door to the stairs open. The stairs led to the sewing room below; the muffled small talk of the household staff was comforting.

I once squinted through his telescope and saw people on the other side of the bay. But I did not touch it.

The Sewing Room

Maria was our regular seamstress. She came to mend bed linen, shorten or lengthen dresses, and replace missing buttons. I would see her sometimes with Káte, our housemaid, sorting out the sheets that needed mending, the two of them chatting. Maria would sometimes lean backwards slightly and hold the sheets to her chest as she digressed. She was skilled on the Singer Sewing machine. She would pump the large iron foot pedal and feed yards of cloth expertly through the machine where a rapidly jumping needle fixed the edges of things into neat seams. And all the while she would carry on her conversation with Káte.

Their conversation fell silent and the Singer Sewing machine slowed to a more sedate pace when Niki entered the room. Niki was not a seamstress. She was a dressmaker. To be certain that everyone knew the difference, she never arrived alone. She would stride into the room, creating a presence. Her assistant followed, bearing a large

embroidered pincushion sporting a forest of pins and needles, as if she were presenting the gift of kings.

“Now look at this one,” said Mummy, flipping open a catalogue that she had brought back from Paris. “I like this one.” She tapped the illustration. “But I prefer this collar.” She tapped an illustration on another page. “Could you make something like that, with this collar?”

“But of course, Mrs Alice.” Niki replied. Then she opened a bolt of the new cloth, threw an expanse of fabric across the cutting table and rapidly sketched the outlines with chalk. Niki had a huge scissors, and very sharp it was. With precise but confident motions she cut sections from the bolt, half slicing with a sweeping motion, ending each sweep with a clapping snap of the scissors into the air. Then, with an unconscious gesture, she drew the sections about her dressmaker’s dummy while she reached towards the pincushion with her other hand. Within minutes she had pinned the rough outlines of the dress in place. So she worked, pulling pins from the cushion and returning them as needed. Her silent heavy-lidded apprentice made sure to keep the pincushion at the most convenient height and distance. Every now and again Niki would stand up and view the work in progress from a few metres away, then return to adjust a line here or to re-pin a fold there.

Were she alive today, Niki would undoubtedly be hailed a great designer. She would run an atelier of apprentices and sell under her own label. But Niki had never heard of such things. She was content to make her versions of fashionable French and English designs for her distinguished clients.

She did not speak to the servants. They kept their distance.

One day, when I was watching from the bottom of the stairs that went up to my grandfather’s attic, I saw Niki fitting Mummy with a corset. It had whale bones and laces at the back to adjust its fit. Niki and Káte were tugging on the laces at the back, jerking Mummy. This was an undergarment to complement a ball dress. Mummy knew that it would not be used much. Niki turned to me with a thin smile. “One day, when you have grown into a beautiful lady like your mother, God willing, I will make you a corset like this one,” she said.

“I would rather be dead than wear one of those,” I replied, without pause.

Mummy made me apologise to Niki.

The Terrace

Each floor of our house had its own entrance. The offices of the Trading Company were on the ground floor, where children were never permitted. We lived on the first floor, where things were always lively.

On our level, a wide white terrace, about the size of a tennis court and with a view of the bay to the east, ran between the house and the warehouse of the Saunders Trading Company. The double-storey warehouse bounded the terrace at the south. We could look down through barred windows and make out large dark heavy looking things in the gloom.

Stairs from the terrace led down to a walled-in courtyard on the western side but we did not go there often. It led to the servants' quarters and to the washroom beneath the kitchen. Here, large irons in racks on a wood stove were heated before use. Some of the irons had hollows for hot coals. In winter steam billowed from the windows on wash days and we could hear the drubbing sound of work going on inside. We called this room Hades.

The walled-in courtyard was an oasis of greenery. The walls were covered with Morning Glory vines, more like rambling bushes, and when in season they provided a spectacle of blue trumpet-shaped flowers.

Dr Theodore Stephanides, a family friend who was visiting from Corfu, once went down from the terrace to examine these flowers. He was a most upright man, in the literal and figurative sense, and sported a trim ginger beard. He had studied under Madam Curie in Paris and had come to advise the hospital in Argostoli on the use of X-Ray machines, which were wonders of modern science at the time. He was a man of a great many parts; he and Mummy would have long discussions on philosophy, archaeology, history, literature and – a hobby of Theodore's – folk herbal remedies.

"*Convolvulus*… hmm, *sabatius*, I think," he said, tugging his beard. "*Convolvulare* means to writhe and entwine together, which describes these vines rather well, wouldn't you say?" Although he spoke perfect English, he was Greek and accustomed to addressing children and adults on the same terms. Theodore continued, as if speaking to a fellow scholar, "The flowers contain ergot alkaloids that were used in ancient times for obstetrical purposes. I suppose the physiological action describes another kind of writhing."

I had no idea what obstetrical purposes might be but gathered it was something important. For ergot I imagined yoghurt and wondered how that was possible. I once broke off a flower and saw the white sticky sap well up. It was terribly bitter and I never tried it again. It had set my tongue writhing.

The Drawing Room

The north end of the terrace was altogether brighter. The grown-ups' sitting room, known as the blue drawing room, opened through French doors onto the terrace. Plush floor to ceiling curtains were deep blue velvet with a thin golden stripe. The upholstery matched. A large blue divan with many cushions, embroidered in the Greek traditional style, took up one corner of the room. On the floor was a complete tiger skin with claws and head and teeth and all. Once our family friend, Marino Kosmetatos, put the skin on his back and, on all fours, approached my brother and me, growling. We were terrified. But we did our best to look amused.

In addition to the divan and various armchairs, the room contained books, a ladies writing bureau and small tables with exquisite items that Mummy had collected. There was a mandarin from China sculpted in red wood, sitting and writing. There were Greek things too: belts with filigreed silver ornaments and decorated bells.

Mummy had brought a radio back from England and placed it in the drawing room. The radio was almost never used, perhaps because nothing was being broadcast most

of the time. Once, in anticipation of a special broadcast, a group of friends had come to hear Marconi speak over the air for the first time. There was a long suspense as the dial was turned and the radio produced squealing and hissing sounds. People who knew little of radios gave advice. When Marconi's voice was finally heard everyone in the room clapped and cheered and finished their drinks, and the conversation turned to the wonders of the modern world and the grand extent of the British Empire.

The Dining Room

Grown-ups took their meals in the formal dining room next to the kitchen. On special occasions, such as birthdays, Christmas and Easter, Neville and I joined the adults there. The family silver service was used in that room. We had been taught to help ourselves to modest portions.

On all other days our meals were served in the day nursery, after which our nanny, Erminia, would take us to the dining room to say goodnight. The adults would be having pre-dinner drinks; fashionable drinks like Cinzano and 'gin-sling'.

Once, we had eaten rather late; the men were drinking after-dinner port and Mummy, who was terribly modern and not shy of her independence even at the cost of shocking some of her friends, was smoking a cigarette. "All within measure" she often quoted, in Greek. I supposed the smoking, like her drinking, to be a vice taken in moderation. I saw that she did not inhale. She puffed, rather, in order to be seen puffing. And then, catching my eyes on her, she smiled and leaned forward.

"Would you like to try a puff, Iris?" she asked.

The room fell silent.

"No thank you." I replied, quite so. "I see no purpose in it."

Everyone laughed but I stuck to my guns and never smoked.

The Study

The study, with books and a big desk, was near the dining room. It was a serious room where letters were written and children were mostly not invited. A painting of the battle of the Shannon and the Chesapeake took up the wall above the desk. My great-great grandfather, Commander George Raymond, had been a young midshipman on the Shannon. Although he had been wounded in his arm during the battle he continued to perform his duties and after the battle sailed on the Chesapeake that had been taken as a prize back to the British harbour of Halifax. He was commended for this. We were all very proud.

Once, when I visited the study, my father was sitting at the desk. The wooden front had been rolled back and he appeared to be writing a letter. I watched in silence. His full name was Eric Noel Lowson Raymond. When he noticed me standing there, he turned and put his big hands around my waist. Then he put his hands around his neck and told me that both were the same size. After that he had nothing more to say.

We called our father Papsy.

Papsy was more fun when we all went to Platis Gialos, the main sandy beach of the island. He was tall and good-looking and when he ran at the water's edge I watched him with pride. Sometimes he would go down on all fours and let me ride on his back.

The Contessina

On one of the walls of the study hung a full-length life-size portrait of a young girl in a blue velvet dress with a lace collar and lace cuffs about her wrists. She wore blue satin slippers with gold buckles studded with amethysts. She sat on a carved wooden chair covered with gold leaf, her hands clasped in her lap. Her feet just reached the floor. An unfinished embroidery of blue Forget-Me-Nots was on an oval side-table. A miniature dog slept at her feet.

The painting had been done in the Italian Renaissance style with soft chiaroscuro and rich glazing. Her skin and clothing were luminous, as if reflecting a diffuse light from the room in front. Her auburn hair was coiled on her head and lit from behind by a window to give a soft halo effect.

Erminia had told me that she was my great-great grandmother, the Contessa Querini. That was all she knew. My grandmother often told stories of our ancestors. When I became curious one day, I asked her to tell me about the Contessa.

"Ah, it is a most romantic story," she started. "One of the great love stories of our family," she added. And then she told me at length, enjoying the opportunity to share with her granddaughter an intimate moment that linked us both to our roots.

John Augustus Toole was a commissioned officer in the British Navy. In the course of his work he came into contact with many of the leading families, including the Venetian family of the Count Querini.

John Augustus was received by the Count and Countess and their eldest son Antonio. The Contessina Barbara, their only daughter, was thirteen years old at the time and not called upon to meet the new arrival. It was not proper in those days for young ladies to be introduced to men outside the family. But John Augustus Toole caught a glimpse of her at the far end of a long room, framed by a tall window, her head bent over her embroidery, a shaft of sunshine caught in her hair. He stepped into the room and bowed to her. She looked up with a shy smile. John Augustus fell instantly in love. That sort of thing happened in those days.

John Augustus asked the Count and Countess to permit a meeting. At that time, he could not speak Greek or Italian. The Contessina spoke no English. The parents agreed. John Augustus was invited to dine with the whole family. His face shone and his eyes sparkled. She looked at the handsome Irishman in his smart uniform, and smiled again. He could not keep his eyes off her, and everyone noticed.

When John Augustus proposed marriage the family strenuously objected, especially Antonio, the Contessina's brother. He considered anyone not from a Venetian aristocratic family to be a barbarian. John Augustus Toole did not consider himself a barbarian in the least. His family, originally known as O'Toole, came from Leinster in Ireland. From very early times they had been rulers in the Kildare and Wicklow

regions. Their pedigree began with the 109th King of Ireland, Vathirmor of the O'Connors. Among their ancestors they counted Clive the fifth King of Leinster who had been baptised by St Patrick. A grand uncle in his family was Lawrence O'Toole, Archbishop of Dublin.

John Augustus Toole had to muster every argument he could find to convince the Querini family. All this, and his persistence, was taken into account. They eventually gave their consent. John and Barbara were married with much fanfare in Zante in 1811. She was 14 and he was 18 on that day. Their marriage proved to be one of the great enduring unions of our family. People who knew the couple could not fail to see the affection they had for each other. John Augustus Toole commissioned the portrait to record as faithfully as possible the girl he had seen at the moment that she had captured his heart.

The Day Nursery

Our day nursery, overlooking the bay, was divided by a big archway. One side was our dining area and the other our playroom. The dining area was furnished with a lacquered white table and chairs.

One cold winter morning Mummy decided that porridge should be made for us, to familiarise us with food we would encounter later, in England. Our cook considered porridge fit only for pigs and prepared it with reluctance. The maid who brought the steaming mixture could hardly keep a straight face. And I, accustomed to the rich Mediterranean diet and attuned to our servants' contempt, refused to eat it. When Erminia briefly left the room to consult with the housemaid, I moved quickly to the open window. The first and second floor windows did not have the iron bars that fenestrated the ground floor casements. Our house was separated from the water of the bay by a narrow road and the mole. With a hefty swing, I slung the porridge into the bay. It flew in a graceful curve and a satisfying splash was heard. Neville came up behind me and did his best. But, the walls were thick and the window none too large. His porridge landed like a heavy steaming cow pad on the sill. "Quick. Quick," I whispered. Leaning over we hastily scraped it off and flung the bits onto the road below.

When Erminia turned back into the room she found us sitting perfectly still before our miraculously empty bowls. She remained silent for a moment. The untouched spoons gleamed betrayal. And then, ever so slightly, she smiled and pretended not to have understood, for she would have been obliged to disapprove; and that, she did not.

In the playroom we had a rocking horse with real fur, and a red and gold saddle. We also had a dolls house with upstairs and downstairs and tiny furniture. It was rather big, so I was able to clear out the furniture and lie inside on my tummy and elbows, looking through the window of the dolls house. When I climbed down I would put the furniture back. I don't recall playing with the pieces.

We also had boats and many painted tin soldiers. A small puppet theatre had been made for us by Marino Kosmetatos. Neville and I gave puppet shows to each other, to Erminia and to Mummy. We saw no advertisements and did not visit toyshops, so we

never wished for more. Newness was not valued for itself, in those days. Possessions whose corners had been rounded by the fingers of our parents and grandparents before them were especially treasured; the caress of time was that which gave value. I had a beautiful doll with a porcelain face and blue eyes, an heirloom. It was almost too precious to play with.

Marino Kosmetatos had given me a piggy bank. It had a slot to receive coins but no way to get them out again. I liked the piggy. I was rather pleased that I never had money, so it did not became full and it was not necessary to break the piggy.

Erminia's Room

Our nanny's bed-sitter was next to the day nursery. From here Erminia had a commanding view of the bay. Nannies in those days were entitled to have a tray with their meals taken to their room or the nursery, but Erminia preferred to take her meals in the kitchen with the servants.

Erminia's family was of Italian descent, from Taranto. However, they had lived in Corfu for generations. She had become a Corfiot in spirit although her passport remained Italian. Her parents died when she was young and her brother had become the head of the family. From a little workshop in the Venetian quarter he mended shoes, which did not bring a big income. As a result Erminia had no dowry. Her school record had been good. She had been told that she could become at teacher, which is what she wanted, but there was no money for further education.

Her brother was married and had a small child. Brothers who had become heads of families would ensure that their sisters were provided with a dowry and that a suitable marriage had been arranged before getting married themselves. In Erminia's case this did not happen. So she went to work as a nanny.

She accepted her lot. She never expressed any anger or frustration. She was a frugal person and saved most of her salary for the education of her little niece. She must have been a beautiful girl; she was still beautiful when she lived with us.

When my sister was born, Erminia came to join our family. She was good with the child. She and Mummy became friends; when my sister died she was asked to stay on, although there were no children.

When I was born she became my nanny. When Neville was born she became his nanny too. In my child's world there were three kinds of people: Old people, usually with white hair; grown ups like my parents; and children, with whom I played. Erminia was none of these. She transcended all categories. She was a calm and peaceful presence bringing tranquillity to everyone she met. I could not have imagined my life without her.

The Bathroom

One bathroom served the bedrooms on our floor; there was another bathroom on the third floor. An enamelled iron bath with claw-and-ball feet stood diagonally in the middle of the room, taking possession of the space with a look of smug assurance. A wood burner provided hot water morning and night. There was a washstand and an

armchair. Large fresh-smelling fluffy white towels, neatly folded, were in rows on a shelf. The room was quite bare by modern standards.

Baths were run by our servants before we were taken, one by one, to be washed. Neville and I were taken to our baths in the evening. The morning was Mummy's time. She took long baths, during which she kept the hot tap running while the lukewarm water spilled down the overflow. She would eventually emerge wrapped in three fluffy white towels, one worn as a toga, one wrapped about her shoulders and one for her hair, done up rather like a turban.

She said, "If you have guests in the house it is essential to let them know when you take your bath so that they can fit in at other times. Only then shall harmony reign."

Peasant homes and many other homes did not have bathrooms. Metal tubs were used. These were filled from jugs taken back from the village pump or well. The bathers would stand in the tub and wash themselves down with sea sponges, using Sunlight soap. Such a ritual was undertaken weekly, at most. Bathers were rarely immersed in water.

Bathrooms like ours were referred to as English bathrooms. One of my grandfather's clerks, who had spent some time in England, returned to his village of origin where he built a large house with an English bathroom. Siora Barbara, my grandmother, was invited to visit and inspect the house. Tea had been prepared and was offered in the formal dining room; the clerk and his wife were determined to do the right English things. When that was over the proud clerk conducted my grandmother through the house. Their English bathroom was the culmination of the tour. My grandmother told that lady of the house that it was very modern. The lady was delighted and said, "Please God we will never have to use it."

In the peasant imagination, bathing was vaguely associated with a risk to natural good health. Baths were to be taken by people at spas when dying of consumption.

The Guest Room

On the eastern corner was a large guest room. Someone was always visiting: distant relatives and friends, and friends of friends and other well-spoken people we hardly knew. The English leisured classes in those days had perfected the art of doing the rounds of country houses until their welcome had worn thin, and then widening their circles abroad.

The guests would leave their shoes outside the bedroom door at night, looking to my way of thinking like presumptuous exclamation marks in the hall. Before the guests awoke, the shoes would be returned by our servants, polished to perfection.

Once, I saw our housemaid hurry down the hall, trying not to be seen to be hurrying, and then several of our servants gathered about the kitchen door consulting in tight muffled voices. Later Fotis, the head of our household personnel, told Mummy what had happened, not disguising his amazement and embarrassment at the duty of having to report such things. The lady in the guest room had been observed buffing her shoes on the deep blue velvet curtains.

One lady guest fancied herself to be an amateur archaeologist but she had not the inclination to undertake a worthy investigation. After getting our fisherman, Tsirelia, to pull an ancient amphora out of the sea her archaeological expedition came to an end. Finding nothing else engaging on our island of a million treasures, she packed her things and left. The amphora, which had survived an ancient shipwreck and two thousand years of storms in the sea, broke because it had not been packed properly.

The ladies who visited were not really our kind of people. They were bored. We were never bored. We were always doing things, making things, planning things, drawing things, singing, walking, talking. All of us. Our servants, too, had a dignity of purpose about themselves; even when most busy they were alive with their work. And we and they knew our places in the scheme of things. These visitors, for all their breeding, had no place our house. They knew not their purpose. They came hoping we would entertain away the vacuum of their lives, and then they departed and were forgotten, like empty pages discarded from old calendars.

The Night Nursery

Neville and I shared the night nursery, next to our parents' bedroom, on the western corner, facing the square to the north. It was a sunny room with bright colours and pictures on the walls of Georgie Porgy Pudding and Pie, Humpty Dumpty, Jack and Jill and other familiar nursery rhyme characters. Over my bed hung a picture of two children and their guardian angel. A picture of the Good Shepherd hung above Neville's bed. An open fireplace opposite our beds kept us warm in winter. A metre and a half away from the hearth were a white protective railing and a bench with pink cushions. One could sit there in winter, back to the fire, getting red ears.

Tucked in bed at night, we could hear the fishermen calling across the water and singing in the taverna; and later, if we heard a dog barking in the distance, we'd hear another… and then another; and we could hear the comforting murmur of Mummy and Erminia, their words indistinguishable, and when others were present the sonority of vowels told us which languages were spoken; and if we lay awake long enough a blanket of nature's poetry would descend, of the sea caressing the shore and tasting the hulls of boats, and the breeze sniffing the trees.

When I woke early, I'd hear the sound of a bell in the distance; and the early morning bugle call from the barracks that welcomed each day; and the creaks and clunks of shutters being opened; and the tinkling of crockery that came with the round aroma of strong coffee; and the footsteps of our housemaid coming to wake us.

Our Parents' Room

Our parents' bedroom faced the town square. The lofty coffered ceilings were decorated with leaves and classical Greek motifs in gold and red, blue and green. We did not go there often.

The Balcony

Sometimes Neville and I, with Erminia watching, were allowed onto the balcony outside our parents' bedroom looking out over the square: Maitland Square. Lord

Maitland had once been a governor of the Ionian Islands. A statue of him in a toga, unfurling a scroll of some apparent importance, stood on a pedestal in a commanding place facing the harbour.

On the far side we could see the army barracks; on the right, the sparkling blue bay and the bathhouses of Argostoli; on the left, cool pine trees that shaded places where children played and where nannies congregated and chatted and boasted of their employers, and nodded and leaned closer to confide wide-eyed stories of bandits in the mountains.

From our grandstand position, Neville and I watched the lads of the town playing football. The young bucks would play the army boys, wearing hairnets to keep their locks in place and shouting Greek words we were not supposed to learn. Sometimes visiting British sailors would exercise here, and play cricket.

Once, when the German cruiser Emden was in Argostoli, a group of German marine cadets had given a display of precision parade-ground marching in front of the Greek army barracks. They had not played any games, and had not been invited into the barracks as British sailors usually were. I watched the German sailors marching from the barracks to the mole where they were to take their longboats back to the ship.

In the middle of the square was a large but not very deep puddle. I had seen British sailors march the same route before. The British sailors were well disciplined and smart in their naval uniforms, but as they approached the puddle they would break ranks to go around it, skip-stepping and laughing as they went. I once saw a sailor deliberately stamp in the water to splash his mates. The Germans marched in a dead straight line, ignoring the puddle as if it did not exist, right across it like a knife cutting through nature's impediments without mercy.

Chapter Two: About Town

The Taverna

A taverna and some small houses stood in a row on our side of the square. Neville and I never went into the town square without a chaperone but I could look out of the night nursery window and watch the people on the sidewalk outside the taverna. At about ten o'clock every morning, Mitsos, who owned the taverna, would set out the little tin tables and chairs. At first they would stand there looking rather lonely, as if beckoning passers by. Gradually a collection of middle-aged men would gather on the sidewalk, drinking coffee and numerous glasses of water, playing backgammon and arguing about one thing and another in muted voices. If the conversation was to Mitsos' liking he would sit down to join them and drink a little cup of sweet black coffee.

Once a small round man with a pencil moustache, and a gold watch-chain going from a buttonhole to his waistcoat pocket, came with a gramophone. He and Mitsos brought it out and placed it on a chair, with the horn facing the patrons. The small round man wound it up while Mitsos steadied the wobbling chair. Then he folded out the rose thorn onto the turning music platen. A mournful tenor voice accompanied by

a mandolin could be heard emanating from the horn. The horn was quite elaborate, like a huge flower, with petals made of inlaid turtle shell and precious-looking wood. The small round man stood back, pointed his ample belly at the machine and patted himself as if he had just finished a satisfying meal. Mitsos arranged the white serviette he usually carried over his left forearm, adjusted the red carnation which he always wore tucked over his right ear, and turned to his patrons to take more orders. Later it became busy, the gramophone ran down and the music became muted before the platen stopped altogether. No one seemed to notice. I never saw the gramophone there again.

Mr Karithaki, a citizen of the town, seemed always to be there. He would occupy an expanse of sidewalk about himself by claiming at least three chairs, one for his walking stick, one for his tired leg and one for himself and sometimes another for his newspaper and small leather briefcase, which he never opened. Once, when Neville and I were out with Erminia, he greeted us and insisted that we join him. He called for three more chairs and imperiously ordered Turkish Delight, one for Neville and one for me, and three glasses of water. Erminia drank her glass of water but did not sit down. She give the impression that we were in a hurry to go somewhere. I could see that she considered Mr Karithaki to be unsuitable company for young persons of our station. I ate my Turkish Delight very slowly and sipped my water as the adults did. I liked the attention.

In the evenings the old men left and young men came in their place. Wine and small plates of *mezethes*, Greek savoury snacks, would replace the daytime coffees. Voices were often raised in heated arguments about politics and world affairs but never through drunkenness. Only one man in the town drank to excess. As this was considered an English trait he was nicknamed ‘Drinkis’.

Aunty Mary

Mary Saunders was one of those quiet heroes not noticed by the casual observer. She had been a tall slim English-looking girl in her youth. It had been discovered that she was not able to bear children. A woman from a nearby village had said that Aunty Mary had been born with her twin inside her womb. Whether this was true or not, I cannot say. We were not supposed to hear these kinds of things, so I had not asked.

Everyone who knew about Mary’s problem considered it to be a major tragedy. Tears were shed and prayers were said. Specialists in Vienna and London were consulted. But nothing could be done.

Mary calmly accepted her lot. It was anticipated that no man would be prepared to marry her, but a widower with a small child was found: Stavros Metaxas, a Greek gentleman who could speak no English, a good man with a happy sense of humour.

Aunty Mary became a Greek woman for him and his child. She cooked wonderful Greek food, hung Greek icons on the walls, kept porcelain figurines of women holding baskets of painted flowers and other such trinkets as gave Stavros pleasure. Perhaps some of these were souvenirs from Stavros’ time as a trader in Romania; maybe some had been inherited from his mother. Family portraits were black and

white photographs that showed groups of people laughing and eating. Stavros was financially comfortable and Aunty Mary did not want. But in the midst of this, the Union Jack forever fluttered in Aunty Mary's heart.

Aunty Mary kept a life-sized baby doll, dressed in a hand-sewn layette. During the daytime it was put to lie on her made bed, head on the cushion. It was beautiful. I was not allowed to touch it. A small glass cabinet above the bed contained two wedding crowns. These were floral arrangements of orange blossom. The Orthodox priest places these on the heads of the lucky couple during the ceremony, then swaps them from groom to bride and bride to groom. After the wedding, the blossoms are waxed to keep them looking fresh and housed in some auspicious place above the nuptial bed.

Aunty Mary brought up her adopted daughter to speak good English. She did her best to make a cultured lady of her. But Bouba, whose real name was Marouka, was not promising material with which to work. She was short, plump, uncoordinated, none-too-bright and wore glasses so thick that one could hardly see here eyes. She always found a way to put her foot into things. As a guest, once, she spilt tea on an admiral in his magnificent whites. On another occasion, she knocked the captain's cake onto the floor, then picked it up and handed it back to him, plucking threads of carpet off the icing after it was already in his hand. She was always well-intentioned and a very kind person. She did her best.

When the British Mediterranean Fleet was in Argostoli Aunty Mary came to life. She dressed once again in her best English outfit, dated as it was, and joined her British relatives as a guest on board the destroyers and flagships. Her face would light up as she once again spoke English, to gunnery officers, and pretended to be deeply interested in the mechanics of the guns. Life was good. Aunty Mary would gaze proudly at the huge barrels and would pat the armour casing of the turrets, affectionately, as if to suggest that these grand symbols of British Naval power were hers, too.

On one of these occasions Bouba had dressed up in her Sunday best and had brought herself along. Aunty Mary may have had the idea that a suitable match for her might be found among the junior officers. After the reception and tea and English scones with Devonshire cream and strawberry jam in the officers' mess, the British visitors were offered a tour. Aunty Mary left with the first group, as fast as possible, hoping that Bouba would be taken along in the second group.

But Bouba waddled along behind, not quite able to keep up. She began to bleat, in a sharp nasal voice, "Mama… mama… mama…"

Oh dear. This was going to spoil Aunty Mary's annual English day out on the battleship. At first Aunty Mary increased her pace and pretended not to notice. But Bouba waddled harder and faster, calling louder and sharper, "Mamaaaa…." It would have drowned the piping of the Boatswain's Call.

Aunty Mary half turned her face and in a loud stage whisper over her shoulder, she hissed *"Skase!"* without reducing her pace. She didn't want the officers to hear. This

translates to ‘burst’ but is used in Greek to mean something like ‘shut up’ or ‘get lost’ and is very rude, indeed.

Poor Bouba. Poor Aunty Mary.

Aunty Mary lived into her late nineties. She retired to an apartment in Athens after Stavros died. Bouba, who remained unmarried, was Aunty Mary’s faithful companion to the end.

The Bathhouses and Swimming

Greece, with its jagged coastline and many scattered islands, sets a maritime mood. Greeks have seafaring blood in their veins; many own boats: anything from humble fishing trawlers to great ocean-going cargo vessels. Greek fortunes have been made and lost at sea. But swimming was not in the Greek blood.

When Greece was liberated from the Ottomans the country was impoverished and remained so for a long time. People who sailed ships in faraway places sometimes had the means to build up the homeland. Mr Georgios Averof was a friend of Mummy and had once been her dancing partner at a ball in Athens. He donated the funds to build an armoured cruiser for the Greek Navy. The ship was commissioned in May, 1911, and duly named the *Georgios Averof*. It was a magnificent ship for its time. The *Averof* served as the flagship of the Greek Navy for nearly 50 years and scored many convincing victories against the Turkish fleet.

There was no shortage of sailors for this ship but in the Greek fashion everyone wanted to be the captain and things got out of hand. On her maiden voyage the crew ran the ship aground near Portsmouth, England. While in the English dry-dock for repairs, riots broke out, including brawls with the locals. A mutiny was triggered when blue cheese was served; the Greek sailors had never seen such cheese before and took it to be an attempt to poison them.

The British Navy offered to train the sailors and restore order. The British Commander found that none of the sailors could swim. He ordered them all to jump from the ship into the sea. There is no record of anyone drowning on that day. Maybe they all had lifejackets.

In my days the people of Cephalonia were not the best of swimmers but this did not deter them. On hot summer days people of all shapes and sizes would go to the beach. Men standing knee-deep in the water would be doing simple callisthenics and throwing balls to each other while their wives, mothers and children watched with evident pride. At a respectable distance matrons of all ages in full-body-covering outfits would splash and frolic about in the ankle-deep water while nervously watching over children nearby.

Our friends, both Greek and English, were all good swimmers and much swimming took place from boats at secluded beaches. Mummy, following the British Commander’s example, taught us to swim at an early age by throwing us overboard, securely strapped into lifejackets. People would watch from the shore and shake their

heads in disbelief at the evident cruelty of the English towards their children. We learned to swim breaststroke only, keeping our heads above the water.

A local entrepreneur by the name of Apergis decided that our town needed to have modern swimming facilities. Two bathhouses called ‘Apergis’ Baths’ were erected off Maitland Square on the edge of the bay, one for women and one for men, located at a proper distance from each other.

The bathhouses were made of timber and stood about a metre above the surface of the water on wooden posts. Each bathhouse protruded into the sea like a small jetty with an access balcony on the one side and little cubicles on the other. Mr Apergis apparently could not swim, otherwise he might have noticed that the bathhouses had been placed just above uninviting seaweed beds. If you stood in them, your feet would slide about on slimy clasping ribbons of posidonia; it was necessary to keep swimming.

Aunty Mary was delighted with the whole affair and when the bathhouses were completed she insisted that we all go there for a swim. Aunty Mary, Mummy, Neville, who was too small to go to the men's side, and I went to the ladies' bathhouse.

We walked down the connecting balcony and into two cubicles, one for Aunty Mary and the other for the rest of us. There was little space to change in the cubicles because most of the floor was taken up by a trapdoor under which a ladder led into waist-deep water below. After changing into our one-piece swimming gear that left parts of our legs and arms exposed, we descended through the trapdoor to the water.

I don't know whether we had more fun with the ladder or looking at Aunty Mary in her outrageous Victorian knee-length bathing suit. As she lowered herself into the water, the frilly skirt-like appendages would spread out in the water around her. She floated, it seemed, on the cusp of a great inflatable dress.

Bouba, who didn’t fancy getting wet, remained on the shore. She couldn’t see us. Her thick glasses obscured all vision of events more than a few metres away.

We swam about for a while, without getting our heads wet, then returned to the cubicles through the trapdoor and dressed again in our normal clothes. The outing had been very exciting.

Unlike the locals, we also swam in the bay. To get to a beach on the far side of the bay Mummy would row us there in our dingy. When we were very small she would use my grandfather's canoe; we would be propped up between her legs, but as we got older that became impossible. Occasionally she would swim across with one of us. We would be wearing a cumbersome lifejacket and holding on to her shoulders. She was a strong swimmer and could cross the bay easily.

In order to attract people to the bathhouses Apergis had also built a small coffee shop in which he had installed a gramophone. It was similar to the one we had seen at the taverna the previous year but without the intricately-carved inlaid turtle shell. From the trumpet came the shrill telephonic sound of *amanethes* sung by a woman called Sophia Vembo.

Ionian music has its roots in Italian and Venetian folk traditions; it is accompanied by mandolins and is soft and melodious. *Amanethes* is a Turkish style, sentimental with a warbling tragic affectation, accompanied by some kind of rasping reed instrument. Apergis' machine played old 78 shellac records; he appeared to have had only a few of these, and these he played too often. It lowered the tone, most especially on this island of softly blowing breezes and sunny days, silent but for the wavelets lapping the stone mole along the harbour.

"There goes *kakochronasis* again," Mummy would say whenever Apergis set his platens-a-turn. This is a Greek curse, meaning 'may you have a bad year'. In Greece, people often curse. It is part of the fun of living there. But no educated person would normally say such a thing; I was quite surprised when I heard her the first time.

Sometimes the record would reach the end when Apergis was busy. He would leave it turning. Then it would say: shellac, shellac, shellac, shellac… on and on.

Elsewhere in Argostoli

In the centre of another square somewhere else in the town, dedicated to someone called Valianos, stood a bandstand where noisy celebrations sometimes took place. Nearby was a statue of Sir John Napier, carved in white marble. During the war the Italians used it for target practice and destroyed the head completely. Italians during the war were good at shooting things that could not shoot back.

The Cephalonians are industrious hard-working people, unlike their neighbours, the lazy leisure-loving Corfiots. Many Cephalonian men took to the ships and made their fortunes in far-off places. When they returned to their rugged island home, each to find a suitable bride, they brought many benefits. Churches were endowed, votive shrines built and various amenities created.

The hospital in Argostoli was one of these amenities, run in those days by Sister Lilika, a loved and respected person. Whether Sister Lilika was a qualified nurse and her staff knew any more about medical care than the rest of the community, or not, I do not know. People who went there had no complaints. In Argostoli there was a lunatic asylum, which is most appropriate since Saint Gerasimos, the patron saint of Cephalonia, is particularly kind to the mentally unsound. Many miracles and cures for their afflictions have been recorded there.

There was a prison for local criminals guilty of minor offences, like shooting unfaithful wives. Rumour had it that prisoners escaped by digging their way out, with the tacit acquiescence of the police guards. Escapees would take to the mountains where they eked out their livings as bandits. Many a village peasant woman, dressed in black, climbed the slopes each night with good food in covered bowls tied up in napkins, for her son and his companions.

Professional Class

Our town was fortunate. We had both a dentist and a doctor in residence.

Mr Miliaresis, our dentist, was a handsome cultured man. He had been educated in Vienna. He lived in a fine house on the main street, with big pots of red geraniums on either side of the front door.

Mummy took me to Mr Miliaresis for an opinion on my lower teeth, which were not growing in perfect formation. We walked down a long dark hall to his surgery at the back. I was pleased to discover that the surgery looked out onto a sunny garden with whitewashed walls. As soon as I was seated a big brown rooster with blue-black tail and a red coxcomb landed on the windowsill with a loud squawk. He fixed me with a black and yellow eye. I watched his jerky movements, and his beak made to pin things down, and the iridescent sheen in feathers of colours not found in rainbows.

As a girl Mummy had been taken to Paris where her two front teeth had been replaced by a pair of gleaming crowns on a bridge. She wondered if I should, perhaps, be taken to London to see an orthodontist.

"Mrs Raymond," Mr Miliaresis said, quite taken aback, "Would you have your daughter look like an American film star with no personality?"

Doctor Kurvisiano was a busy little man with big black eyebrows. He met with Mummy's whole-hearted approval. He knew that most ailments would pass of their own accord, and rarely prescribed medicines. Good food and fresh air were his recommended cure all.

For some reason he decided that I was delicate. Much to my embarrassment, people fussed about me, insisting that I eat lots of good food: eggs, salad, olives, cheese and plenty of yoghurt. I disliked the attention. I had been raised to consider illness of any kind an admission of weakness.

Piano for Aunty Lily

As a young girl my grandmother would often hold musical evenings with her sisters. They would play German lieder and sing together. But as she got older, she stopped playing the piano. She had a Bösendorfer grand piano, a Viennese instrument handmade in the tradition of great European craftsmanship. She also had a Steinway in the ballroom. She decided to send the Bösendorfer to her daughter, my Aunt Lily, in Corfu.

A carpenter who had constructed some lifting devices in the harbour was sent for. Assistants were hired, wood was purchased and work commenced on the crane that would lift the piano from the mole to the boat. Before the end of the morning an ingenious device had been constructed. The crane resembled an ancient siege engine and soon attracted a crowd of onlookers.

Meanwhile two strapping youths prepared the piano for its journey. The legs were removed and the body of the piano was secured in a box. After much puffing and argument, the piano was lowered by means of rope and tackle to the road and transported on a flat-topped cart to the wharf, just behind my grandfather's warehouse.

The carpenter donned a sea captain's hat for the occasion. He took his position at the wheel of the winch. He turned the wheel. The crane groaned but the piano did not budge. His workmen, urged on by a rising crescendo of advice from the crowd, joined him at the wheel. Eventually the piano swung free of the cart and a cheer went up from the crowd.

As the piano was swung out over the water an argument broke out. The carpenter and workmen began to tussle over the wheel, for each – alone – sought the honour of landing the load safely on the barge. Since each was unwilling to relinquish his grip, they were reduced to gesticulating with only one arm, a handicap in Greece. In the fracas the boat builder's hat was knocked off and it rolled away in the breeze across the promenade. While some children chased it, one of the bystanders jumped in to lend another hand. Someone pulled a lever. A ratchet was released. The wheel spun out of the workmen's hands. The piano plunged into the sea.

Everyone stopped shouting.

Then everyone started shouting again. Among the onlookers were many experts on just this kind of emergency. Everyone knew exactly what to do. But since none of them had the same idea, decisive action became impossible. After many hours of shouting and shoving and swearing and pulling, the piano was retrieved, sighing and spouting water from every corner. It was dragged onto the boat and sent on its way to Corfu. By this time it was late afternoon. The workmen and the milling crowd retired to the taverna, where they congratulated each other and gave the remains of the day to boasting and resolving philosophical conundrums that had defied ages of wisdom before them.

The Bösendorfer never quite recovered from this adventure. The strings rusted and the sounding board, which had cracked on drying, buzzed when the piano was played. Later, craftsmen from the old Venetian quarter repaired the piano. But the rich mellow sound of the Bösendorfer had hardened.

Chapter Three: Fotis and Family

Fotis

Fotis, our cook, was a force to be reckoned with. He had been retained by my grandmother and educated for the post. The people of Argostoli told each other that he was a Cordon Bleu cook. From time to time the Lord Mayor would borrow him to prepare a banquet for some visiting dignitary. Fotis muttered audibly about these disruptions but clearly appreciated the honour. In our home, he rarely left the kitchen, except to oversee the serving on special occasions. From the kitchen he commanded his family members who served in our household.

When Fotis was cooking the kitchen was out of bounds. Even Mummy was not permitted entry. "No children allowed," he would command, for to him Mummy was still the child in my grandmother's house. And when Fotis and his family took their meals there, the door was always closed. Neville and I speculated; was it terrible table manners they conspired to hide from us?

When he wasn't working, Fotis would seat himself in his kitchen high chair with its wicker seat and gaze out onto the lane below, observing the goings-on. His house could be seen at the end of the lane, next to the taverna. He had contrapted a string that ran from a handle in our kitchen through metal eyes screwed onto the walls. It sagged its way across the lane to a bell in his house. He could summon his wife and daughters with a few sharp tugs.

At times approved by the chef, Mummy would visit him in his kitchen where the two would chat and exchange views on the meaning of life, the quality of the water, the increased price of salt, good omens and other things he knew so much about. I don't think they ever discussed the menu.

I cannot imagine my grandmother sending Fotis to France for a master chefs education. Fotis spoke no French. It must have been she who taught him to cook.

Chrisanthi

Chrisanthi, Fotis' wife, was a wisp of a woman bursting with energy and humour and good advice. She polished the silver and occasionally the brass, and made the brandy sauce for Christmas dinners. She woke us each morning by opening the shutters to let in the sun and fresh air. Káte, her daughter, followed her, bearing freshly-squeezed orange juice, pouring it from one large glass to the other and back, frothing it up and filling the air with a delicious morning aroma.

Chrisanthi would wake Mummy too. And if Mummy wasn't in a hurry to get up Chrisanthi would perch at the end of her brass bed and instruct her on how to interpret her dreams. Mummy regarded these servants' tales as quaint and un-credible, but never let on. She nodded seriously.

Chrisanthi was especially nice to Neville and me. She let us jump on our beds, when no one else was watching. She had a soft spot for Neville; boys, to her way of thinking, were more important. Once, when asked if she had children she replied, "Two... and I also have three daughters."

She called me a real Greek girl, and Neville an 'Englishman and a Lord' and predicted that he would become a very rich man and return to Cephalonia to buy her a set of false teeth. I had a dark complexion and looked Greek, of which she was quietly proud. Neville was blond, which showed him to be British, and this was even better. Once a visiting townsperson recommended a cream to remove the spots on Neville's face. "Those are freckles," said Mummy. "They show that he is an Englishman. There will be no cream."

Chrisanthi would tell us tales of savage Turks and Bulgarians and of virtuous girls without dowries who, nevertheless, found rich husbands. With her stories she opened other kinds of windows, through which the spirit of her Greece entered our lives.

Káte

Káte, Fotis' eldest daughter, was Mummy's ladies' maid. She was a slim dark-haired woman with a prominent nose, but elegant in her black uniform and pristine apron. In the morning she wore a gleaming white cotton apron, and in the afternoon a dainty

organza apron with a large bow at the back. The front was attached to her black dress by two precise golden safety pins. Mummy had brought matching organza caps from England but Káte refused to wear them. Neville and I kept out of her way. She didn't much like children.

In summertime we breakfasted on the terrace overlooking the sea. Fresh fruit was served with coffee, and toast with lashings of marmalade, and eggs poached or fried or scrambled. Omelettes were served too. Once a week we had scrambled eggs. Fotis permitted Káte to prepare this, after which she would bear the meal to us on a silver platter under a gleaming dome to keep it warm and to create a moment of ceremony when the lid was lifted. Mummy would receive the first serve and say, "Káte, these scrambled eggs are the best yet. You are truly an artist." Káte would flick her head and smile, embarrassed each time but pleased. These were the only times I saw her smile.

Andriani

Andriani, Fotis' second daughter, buxom and busy, did most of the cleaning. When the grown ups were not around she would sing while she worked. One day Fotis came to Mummy for help. Andriani had been drinking his vinegar to slim down, as the women of the villages advised. Mummy delivered Andriani an appropriate lecture. Plump girls, she instructed, are more likely to catch husbands. And besides, Andriani was already about as beautiful as any woman could hope to be. Andriani stopped drinking vinegar.

Spiros

Fotis and Chrisanthi had two sons, Spiros and Memas. They were not strictly part of our household. Spiros was a general handyman and carpenter. He could fix anything: sagging doors, rusty locks, boats and even cars. His main tool was a long screwdriver. Spiros looked after our boats on a part-time basis. We had three boats: my grandfather's canoe in which he had taken many daring journeys around the islands, our much-used white wooden dingy and a sailboat referred to as 'the whaler', which my father and mother had often used.

Greeks could fix anything with a long screwdriver. As often as not, however, they would ruin things. When Mummy said, "Oh yes, he will fix it with his long screwdriver," she was giving us to anticipate that the item in question was certain to be ruined beyond repair by any instrument imaginable.

Memas

Fotis' second son, Memas, was at school and destined for better things. He was the best looking in the family, or so I thought. In Greece children go to school for a long week, including Saturdays. And it was a long day for children, beginning at eight in the morning and finishing at around five in the evening. In those days there was a curfew for children out unaccompanied after dark. We rarely saw Memas.

School in Cephalonia was considered a privilege and teachers were held in high esteem. For the poorer people, the first step to success was education. One young

widow who lived in a little house near the taverna, walked her only son to school every day. At midday she took him a tasty lunch. He was quite a fat little boy. In the afternoon when he came home she drilled him in arithmetic, adding and subtracting and reciting the tables. She was good at this. After that she listened to his reading, for which she was quite a hard taskmaster. The boy grew into a fine young man and went to Athens to study law. On his return to Cephalonia he would read the newspaper to his mother every evening. She said her eyesight had become too poor. But he had long realised that his mother had never learnt to read or write. She was well informed however about many things and could count money better than most.

Anoulla

Fotis' youngest, Anoulla, was a girl of about my age. To my joy, Chrisanthi would sometimes bring Anoulla to play.

When Anoulla was a toddler, one day, she developed a high temperature and acute pains on the right side of her tummy. When Mummy heard about this she went to Fotis' house with Doctor Kurvisiano in tow. Doctor Kurvisiano diagnosed acute appendicitis and advised immediate surgery. Fotis and Chrisanthi objected strenuously; hospitals and operations, they were certain, meant imminent death. Without further ado Mummy gathered up the child and strode off to the hospital at a military pace, followed by Doctor Kurvisiano at a trot, and Fotis wringing his hands and brow, and Chrisanthi weeping and sweeping the air with heavenward arms, and behind them dogs barking, and children pausing their play, and people opening shutters and peering from windows with enquiring looks.

Fotis' Home

The feasts of saints dot the Greek calendar. Instead of birthdays, Greeks celebrate name days, a useful custom that saves having to remember birth dates and ages. The feast of Saint Constantine and Saint Helen is quite special. Constantine was the Roman Emperor who converted to Christianity and made it the official religion of Rome. He established Constantinople as the capital of the Eastern Empire. While Rome became Catholic, Constantinople remained the seat of the Orthodox Church. Helen was Emperor Constantine's mother. On this day, the wives and mothers of men named Constantine cook sweetmeats and lay the tables with good things. Constantine is a common name in Greece, so on that day it is possible to go from house to house meeting friends and relishing the specialities.

Saint Helen, we are told, saw a vision that led her to the true cross. Whether this is so or not is beside the point. Greeks do not celebrate women's name days.

Normally, we did not visit the servants in their homes. But, on Fotis' name day, we would. And we would enjoy the good things that Chrisanthi had prepared. Before going, Neville and I would be warned to say as little as possible, for good reason. Items from our house would find their way across the lane. Petty pilfering was tolerated. If something Mummy valued had disappeared she would institute a grand search, enlisting all the servants and positively turning the house upside down. Sooner or later the item would be discovered on top of a cupboard or in some other unlikely

place. Nothing really valuable was ever taken. On one of Fotis' name days I saw a vase in the shape of a red fish, which had disappeared from our nursery wall. I stared at it in amazement until Erminia distracted me with a piece of Turkish Delight. Fotis, dressed in his best suit and one of my father's Royal Scots regimental ties, took centre stage on these occasions.

Chapter Four: The Big Ford

Vangelis

I remember we had a Grand Motorcar, a Big Ford with spacious running boards along the sides and a broad radiator at the front looking rather like a temple in the classical style, to Mercury, perhaps. Vangelis was our personal chauffeur. The motorcar was square and large, rather like Vangelis, and sported a canvas roof that was usually drawn back to reveal fine leather upholstery and a polished wooden dashboard. While Vangelis worked the crank the motorcar would heave and sway about like a boat. When the motor sputtered to life he would wipe his brow with a big white handkerchief, climb into the chauffeur's seat, and we would be off. Later, I learned that we did not own a motorcar at all. Nor did anyone else on the island, except Vangelis. Vangelis was Argostoli's chauffeur.

Everyone walked wherever they went in the town. Mummy walked to visit friends. She walked to tennis. She would have walked to the shops, but never went shopping in Argostoli. Fotis, our cook, did that. Tsirelia, the fisherman, brought fresh fish to the house. He also picked figs at dawn when they were still cold and glistening with dew, and brought them to us for breakfast. The hairdresser came to our house. So did the shoemaker who would measure our feet and make soft leather shoes for us; ones that never gave us blisters, not even after long walks in the countryside.

A motorcar was needed in Cephalonia for special occasions, and Vangelis was just the person for that. He cleaned and oiled, polished and buffed his handsome old model Ford before and after every use. It bore no taxi sign, nor meter, but Vangelis donned a smart cap when he considered it appropriate to make himself and his customers feel important.

Vangelis had screwed an icon of Saint Gerasimos to the dashboard. Next to it he had fixed a vase that he cleaned and refilled for each excursion. He rarely spoke. When the whim caught him, he would stop to pick flowers along the way for his saint, and extra bunches for his customers. On Cephalonia, time was not measured as we do today in other places; a taxi driver, filling his heart with delight in a field of poppies, never made anyone late for more important things.

Occasionally Vangelis would drive us to Great Aunt Ellen's place, a long way from town. At other times we would hire Vangelis to take our visitors on scenic tours.

Scenic Tours

Vangelis' scenic tours took us over rough-hairpin-bended-unpaved roads cut into the edges of cliffs, to high points where breathtaking views and crisp breezes greeted us.

The motorcar would squeak and creak with a reassuring sway, like a well-sprung perambulator into which we were cosily tucked; Neville and I felt quite safe in Vangelis' care. Not so the visiting English ladies who, much to our delight, would grip the seats with whitened knuckles, rigidly upright, faces drained and eyes wide open or tight shut, and squeaking and hooting; "Hooh! Oh Dear! Oh Dear!" in tremulous voices, stiff upper lips notwithstanding.

One of these visits stands out in my mind. The Lady was titled and a very important person, although she was only just over 21. She had wafted in from Europe in search of something; I overheard her talking to Mummy about eligible bachelors. She squeaked like all the others on the way up the mountain.

But when we got there, she recovered her poise. She stood at on the lip of the rock. Her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled. It must have been autumn, for the knife of cold wind drew tears from the corners of my eyes. The wind took her hair and streamed it out, and it drew her dress in billows behind. Then our Lady guest pointed at something far away, and for a moment struck a heroic pose like Britannia leading her troops to glory. Neville at her side could have been a drummer boy.

The excitement of Vangelis' tour, and the sights, and the thin air, had lent her an illusion of something grand. And then it was gone. And a few days later she left for I know not where.

The Bandits

In addition to its many villages, the island has three seaside towns. On the western side are Argostoli with its deepwater harbour, and Lixouri on the opposite side of the bay. Sami is located on the other side of the mountains. Passenger ships from the Greek mainland, Italy and the neighbouring islands generally stopped there. Travellers going to Argostoli usually had to complete their journey by road.

Once, when Mummy was returning from abroad, the ship had reached Sami later than usual. Vangelis and his motorcar were waiting on the quay. It was cold and the sun was setting before Mummy, wearing a luxurious fur coat, had been seated in the back and her luggage, including a cabin trunk, strapped down for the journey over the mountain passes. Progress was slow on the dark remote unpaved roads. A light snow was falling. Suddenly the dreaded bandits appeared out of the darkness. The infamous head bandit, Spiros Sclavunakis, was among them. They stopped the motorcar with guns at the ready. Vangelis froze, white faced, clutching his steering wheel. Whereupon, Mummy stepped out:

"You silly fellows," she commanded, wagging a finger at them and looming larger than her small stature, fluffed up in furs and no-nonsense demeanour. "Can't you see I'm Alice Raymond, the English Lady of Argostoli. I am in no mood for this nonsense. Now put down your guns and behave yourselves at once!" And this she said in precisely the right tone of Cephalonian Greek.

She stepped back into the car and ordered Vangelis, "Go!"

The bandits lowered their weapons and stepped back on either side of the road, doffing their caps as Vangelis nervously crunched the gears and spun the wheels on the gravely path.

Chapter Five: Walks, Flowers and Dogs

The Daily Constitutional

Walking is essential for health, character building and joy of living. Mummy taught us that. We walked every day. We walked in spring when it feels good to be alive. We walked in summer when the streams are cool and shaded. We walked in autumn when the air is crisp and invigorating. We walked in winter, decked in our Mackintoshes, Sou'westers and Wellington boots, and then came home to a crackling fire, and drank tea and ate hot rock cakes, and our fingers tingled.

Walking with Mummy was always an adventure. Sometimes we would go too far and take shortcuts to get home on time. Once we had to ford a stream to find our way. We fell in and laughed and Mummy didn't mind about our wet clothes. Mummy pretended to have a poor sense of direction for the fun of it. She would say, "I have no bump of locality." Sometimes we may have been truly lost while she pretended to pretend. We never went into the mountains.

Wildflowers

I loved walking in spring. Wild flowers bursting with exciting fragrances and colours flourish all over the island. Anemones and blue irises abound and the scent of wild herbs can be quite heady. Once, we were walking in single file on a narrow path down a shallow valley when a wonderful spring scent came upon us. We followed it. And there, thronging the banks of a stream and crowding shoulder to shoulder on the best spots of the cool dark damp soil, looking upwards as if slightly embarrassed at having taken such long draughts of cool refreshment, stood multitudes of wild wonderful violets. More than I had ever thought possible. And Neville, as he often did when we encountered something special, ran ahead and picked a bunch, which he gave to Mummy. And Mummy, as she always did when he gave her fresh plucked flowers, carried them all the way home.

I have walked in many countries where wild flowers are plentiful. South African proteas, aloes and wild lilies are vivid with African energy. The Cape people call their country the wild flower capital of the world. On the West Australian semi-desert plateau, oceans of pink, yellow and white everlastings appear in millions after a rain. On the coastal planes you can find fascinating orchids, strange succulents and the primordial kangaroo paw with green blossoms, rampant on red and black stems. West Australians call theirs the wild flower state. But in my opinion the Greek wild flowers surpass all these for their marvellous fragrances. Species that give no scent in other places are scented in Greece. Even the wild cyclamen give out a perfume. I remember smelling roses in Athens from a florist shop located a block away.

Greeks celebrate spring flowers on the first of May. They wade through wild fields gathering armfuls to make wreaths for their front doors. Young people and children

wear flowers in their hair. In Greece, men give men flowers, women give women flowers, and couples give each other flowers. Old people are not forgotten.

Mummy assembled pots of many shapes and sizes on our terrace at home. Cuttings of the most unlikely species flourished under her slapdash care. Inside, she kept vases of mixed varieties bursting with abandon and disarray. I remember how horrified she was to see formal and stilted arrangements, which in her opinion no flower lovers could have made. Later, when we lived in South Africa, where open spaces replaced the Greek terraces, her gardens were happy celebrations of nature's abundance. No visitor would leave empty handed.

Crazy About Animals

Mummy was also crazy about animals, especially dogs. She once said "If there are no dogs in heaven, I won't go there."

We had two dogs: sometimes more. She once came back from China with chow dogs for breeding but never made any profit from this venture. She would not sell the pups to people whom she did not trust. She gave most of them to animal lovers she knew. In Cephalonia unwanted pups were sometimes abandoned in the mountains, or more frequently thrown from boats into the sea. Some of these survived. They retreated to places where people generally did not go. We went there. We would meet the feral dogs. Part of our adventure was taking food to them. Now that I think about it, I realize how adventurous that was. There was rabies on the island, and the dogs, accustomed to being chased away by peasants, would not have given everyone the tail-wagging welcome we always received.

Aunty Lily had a pedigree dachshund called Löwi, which means little lion in German. Her full name was Löwi Motsenigou d'Annunziata, after the Catholic Church near her home in Corfu. She carried her illustrious name with dignity despite her size for she was only a little dog. She put up patiently with children, governesses and servants and even Uncle Philip, the master of the house. Where Aunty Lily went she went too, even waiting outside the bathroom door for her. Aunt Lily trained her to sit up on her haunches and beg for treats from the table. She talked to her dog as if it were human.

Löwi gave birth to a litter of pedigree pups and Aunty Lily decided that Neville and I should have one. Imagine our delight when she sent two pups for us to choose from. They were purebred dachshunds with long bodies, friendly waggie tails, velvety ears and laughing faces with big brown eyes. They ran around the room sniffing at everything and to our amusement piddled on the rugs. They licked our hands, they licked our faces and when they'd had enough they began to lick each other. They pulled each other's ears and tumbled around together. They lay on their backs to have their tummies tickled and finally fell fast asleep.

The thought of sending one back to Aunty Lily was too much. At first Mummy tried to talk us out of keeping both dogs, but finally gave in on the condition that we would always speak German to them. She said the dachshund is a German breed and should only be made to understand German commands. We spoke Greek to many of our

friends, English to each other and now German to the dogs. We named them Jip and Joke.

Joke had quite a sense of humour and Jip grew up to be much like her mother, Löwi. Mummy did not believe in teaching dogs tricks; only toilet training was essential. For the rest they should behave as nature had intended. They had the run of the house and were occasionally allowed on our beds.

Someone gave us a cage with two budgerigars in it. Mummy disapproved of caging birds and would never have bought such a thing. She let them fly around the room even though they ate things, like the corners of photographs, and left unsavoury droppings on the furniture. One day, Andriani opened the shutters. The sun came in and the budgerigars flew out. Mummy was quite relieved. She consoled us with the knowledge that they were a pair, somewhere making a home and free.

One Easter, Aunt Ellen sent us a lamb. Neville and I fell in love with it right away and begged Mummy to let us keep it. She agreed; the lamb would not be slaughtered. She rented a field just out of town and we visited our lamb every day on our walks. We brought it lettuce and slices of apples and carrots and all kinds of treats. And it knew us. We were amazed to see how big it grew. One day the lamb was gone. We could find no hole in the fence. We walked around the perimeter once again holding the treats in front of ourselves, and they became too large in our hands. Mummy said nothing to console us. We walked silently that day and the treats became hot and they wilted but we could not put them down.

Walks with Erminia

Sometimes Erminia took us for walks. Erminia's walks were predictable and well-regulated affairs. She always wore her uniform. In summer, it was white cotton outfit with buttons down the front and long sleeves to cover her arms. In winter she wore a navy blue dress of woollen cloth but of exactly the same cut. The felt hat she wore in summer and winter was sometimes replaced by a beret on windy days.

The sun is gentle in Greece and the islanders have lovely golden skins. But when walking with Erminia we always wore our hats against the sun.

We always followed the same path.

I had a hoop made of light wood, and I carried a little stick. By tapping on the hoop with the stick I was able to make it run along. I would run along beside it until it fell down. Then I would wait for Neville and Erminia to catch up before starting my hoop again. I did not always have my hoop.

We walked along the foreshore of Argostoli along the paved road, known as the *Piccolo Yiro*, or 'short circuit', that went to the spit at the end of the peninsula then around the far side of the peninsula to *Giros tis Lasis*, one of the sandy beaches facing the Ionian Sea. We did not go that far.

Our walk always took us through the *Vinarias* that comprised a collection of buildings on both sides of the road. We knew that these had been built by our great grandfather,

Ernest Augustus Toole. They were impressive buildings but old; some of them seemed to be deserted.

We went on past the Katavothres Mill. *Katavothra* means glutton, in the female gender: a woman who swallows everything, edible or not. You can use this word about someone who comes to your dinner parties and asks for third helpings. It would be very insulting to call someone *katavothra*. The word applied to a hole behind the mill. Seawater was sucked into the hole and vanished underground. Since ancient times, natural and supernatural causes have been proposed. The mill had been built at the site to harness the flow by an Englishman, Mr Stevens, who was a friend of my great grandfather. They were planning to attach the mill to a new kind of olive press that was to come from Italy or somewhere in Europe, but they never got around to it. I don't know if the mill was ever used for anything. It seemed not to be very reliable, sometimes turning and sometimes not.

Near the mill was a small house inhabited a woman, Vasiliki, and her sister, whose name we never knew. Vasiliki means 'royal' and was her given name.

Vasiliki would call out in a loud voice, "Welcome, Kyria Erminia. Come and have something to eat." She used the polite address when talking to Erminia.

"Not now. Perhaps on the way back if there is time," Erminia would reply. I think Vasiliki was quite lonely there, on the outskirts of town where few people passed. The mill was no longer in use in those days. She had been left that house and lived there, operating a tiny restaurant serving the occasional visitor with simple refreshments.

We walked on to the end of the peninsula where a short groin extended into the sea. The Fanari lighthouse at the end of the groin was a strange sort of building: something like an English garden teahouse wishing it were a Greek temple. Sometimes, on very hot days we would continue past this point to a little beach with grey gritty sand. Erminia would put Nivea Cream on our faces. The cream in those days came in a flat round tin, like a shoe polish tin, and when you opened it you found the cream covered with a leaf of tin foil.

We took our shoes off to get into the water. We never went swimming with Erminia. We stood, ankle-deep, and splashed about a little. We were always fully dressed. Erminia did not get into the water; she remained buttoned up.

On our return walk we usually stopped at the Mill. Erminia felt obliged. Vasiliki would bring out a small tin table and a slightly rusty tin chair and would urge Erminia to sit down for a snack. She brought out a knob of Greek sausage, bread and olive oil. There was nothing for us children. Erminia did not always accept her invitation.

Vasiliki had a dog called Ethelontis. It was unusual for Greek townspeople to have pet dogs. Having animals that did not work was thought of as an English thing to do. *Ethelontis* means volunteer, which seemed suitable to us. We presumed it had volunteered to be her dog, that it had been one of the feral dogs and had come down to claim a tit-bit of Greek sausage and had stayed.

After exchanging a few words, Erminia would take her leave. She never had to pay for the food, which had been more or less forced upon her.

One day, as we were crossing Maitland Square on our way home, the hearse driven by Mr Panos passed by. It was a black coach pulled by a black horse. Mr Panos called out "When am I going to take you?" Erminia must have been about 35 or 40 years old. This might have been his way of flirting with her; all he had to offer was a ride to the cemetery in his hearse. She ignored him completely. She was above his nonsense.

Erminia's walks were never like Mummy's walks. For example, Mummy would have told us about Sir Charles Napier who had built the lighthouse, and about the many other things he had built on the island, perhaps adding that our great great grandfather, John Augustus Toole, had helped Sir Charles Napier administer the building of the roads and bridges. She would have told us the Ancient Greek name of the place or perhaps the story of Odysseus who, according to some, was said to have washed up here. We would have stopped to draw things, like the mill or an unusual tree. Erminia wasn't interested in those kinds of things. With Erminia, we just walked there and back again. That was that!

The Vinarias

On our way home after one of our walks with Mummy in the hills around Argostoli, we arrived at the *Vinarias*. There were many buildings, some looking like warehouses and others having the appearance of factory-like works, with racks inside and old flat-topped carts. Grasses and weeds were sprouting from between the cobblestones of the central court. Buildings on the harbour side of the road went up to a mole where small ships had once moored to collect the cargos of olive oil, currants and wines that had been produced here. The place was still. Cicadas were making a racket in the trees outside.

It was a hot day, so we sat in the shade. Mummy sat for a while looking at the buildings, then said, "It is time I told you the story of your great grandfather and the skeletons in the family closet." We both sat down to listen. We knew that this would be an exciting tale. This is the story she told us:

Ernest Augustus Toole was the youngest child of Contessa Barbara. He had been five years old when his father died. He was everybody's favourite and terribly spoiled by his mother and aunts. He grew up to become a restless and troublesome youth. He was not like his brother George, who had studied hard, and obtained a job as the accountant of the British Ionian Bank. George went on to become the manager of the Bank. Instead, Ernest fell in with a gang of well-heeled young men who spent their time drinking and gambling away their fathers' fortunes. When he lost at cards, his devoted mother paid his debts.

Contessa Barbara was well off. She had a pension from the British government as the widow of John Augustus, Deputy Assistant Commissioner General. Also, she had some property at Agios Demetrios on the island of Zante, which she had inherited. She was able to keep Ernest in pocket money and pay his gambling debts, provided

they were not too large. More than once she had been obliged to turn to George for financial assistance to pay his gambling debts.

At first George tried to help by getting Ernest a job as a teller at the British Ionian Bank. Ernest started work when he was 18 years old, taking up a position at the Corfu branch. However, he was often late and sometimes did not turn up. A few years later he stole from the bank to feed his habit. John Saunders, who was manager of the bank, could have brought criminal charges against Ernest. But, John had become part of the family, having married Mary Toole. Ernest was dismissed and the missing funds were taken from his security bond – a surety that George had paid in the first instance to secure his position.

After many angry scenes, Ernest went off to America. But apparently he did not like it there. He returned to Cephalonia and fell immediately into his old ways. After losing heavily once more at cards, his brother, George, agreed to pay his debts for the last time, on condition that he leave again for America and never return. George even bought him his ticket.

We know nothing about Ernest's activities in America. In later life he would not talk about them. His second visit to the United States also did not last long. But this time he returned with enough money to repay George.

Contessa Barbara had a young girl protégé, her lady in waiting. Her name was Marietta. She was the daughter of the foreman on the property at Agios Demetrios. Marietta's mother had died soon after the little girl was born. Barbara was the godmother. She had felt that she owed something to the child and the family; the landed gentry were often godparents to the children of their peasant workers in those days. In Greece the relationship between godparent and child is taken very seriously. She took charge of the child and brought her up, not as a member of the family of course, but as a maid.

When Ernest returned from America for the second time, Marietta had become a young woman of 21. She was short and dumpy, with plain features, and she was illiterate. Education in those days was for the gentry only. The lower classes were born to work; they were not allowed to get ideas above their station.

Ernest fell in love with Marietta. To the horror and consternation of the family he proposed to marry her. His devoted mother, his angry brother, his bewildered sisters, his shocked aunts… all pleaded with him to abandon the idea of contracting such an unsuitable marriage. They proposed alternatives, they cajoled, they threatened, they did everything possible.

Marietta refused to marry Ernest unless he promised to give up gambling. Everyone was surprised. It was not the place for a peasant girl to refuse marriage to a member of the gentry, however disreputable he may have been. Nor, indeed, was it her place to make a decision either way.

Ernest was a headstrong man who had never been dissuaded from doing what he wanted. In 1856, Ernest Toole married Marietta Konidis and cut himself off from the

family. For years his mother would not speak to either of them. His brother George and sister Anne never forgave him.

After the marriage, Ernest turned to business. From the start he was amazingly successful. He traded in everything that the Ionian Islands produced. He exported olive oil to Italy and soon acquired his own fleet of sailing ships. More than 40% of French vineyards were destroyed in just one decade because of a plague of some kind. This created an enormous demand for Greek currants and later Greek wines. Ernest Augustus turned to exporting currants.

In 1873 Ernest bought the grounds of the *Vinarias*. At the same time he purchased a quantity of wine from the Corfiot, Mr Desilla, at that time one of the richest men on the Islands. The wine business turned out to be his most successful venture. He built this business with characteristic zeal and energy, although he still continued his currant business as well. The Toole wines, made from the indigenous Robola grapes of Cephalonia, became famous throughout Greece and Germany. Wine experts from Germany's Rhineland came to Argostoli to see the *Vinarias* and study Mr Toole's methods. Ernest Augustus became the German Vice Consul in Argostoli. On the Island of Cephalonia, the cultivation of grapes increased enormously because Ernest bought up all that the locals could supply. This greatly increased the prosperity of the island and the measure of his reputation.

Ernest would start work at around four in the morning. Later, when his employees and other men were just starting work, he would be seen taking a brisk walk before breakfast. Other businessman could never understand how Ernest Toole could find the time for a walk when everyone was going to work. He went back to work again at nine and was busy until noon. After lunch he rested. He went back to work from three to six o'clock in the evening.

"Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise," said Mummy at this point in the story, quoting Benjamin Franklin. She paused and looked at each of us to make sure we were still listening. Then she went on:

One of Ernest Toole's best friends was a German from Frankfurt am Main, Mr Klaus, who was trading in nearby Patras on the mainland. He greatly admired Ernest Toole and set up a wine business of his own in friendly rivalry: *Achaea*. The *Achaea* was modelled entirely after the *Vinarias*. The two of them remained good friends.

Ernest bought himself a fine house. He became the most prosperous and most flamboyant merchant on the island. It must have been very galling to his brother George to watch his growing fortune and the accumulating balance that he kept at the British Ionian Bank. He became the largest trader on the Ionian Islands.

Ernest entertained on a lavish scale. Foreign dignitaries, eminent archaeologists and even German princes who visited Greece, stayed with him. At all functions, dinners and balls, Marietta – the simple peasant girl who spoke no word but Greek and could not even sign her name – was the perfect hostess: gracious and charming. She was the making of Ernest and kept him to his promise; he never gambled again. He often acknowledged that he owed everything to her, whom he called his lucky star.

Marietta bore Ernest Augustus a large family. All the children were educated at one of the best schools of Europe in Frankfurt am Main and they often spent holidays with Mr Klaus' relatives there. Ernest Augustus must have been a bit of a martinet; his children stood in awe of him. It is said that even when they were grown up, they did not dare speak at table unless spoken too, or ask for a second helping unless he offered one.

After Mummy had finished telling the story we sat still for a while listening to the cicadas.

“What about the skeletons?” I asked.

“Which skeletons?” Mummy replied.

“You were going to tell us about skeletons in the closet.”

“Oh those.” Mummy laughed. “They were buried and forgotten long ago.”

For many years after that I wondered where the skeletons had been buried. I imagined that they might have been somewhere under the buildings of the *Vinarias*.

Chapter Six: Home Schooling

Not to Boarding School

English children abroad began their education at home under governesses and tutors. Girls went on to finishing school in England or on the Continent. Boys were sent to boarding schools in England, the schools their fathers and grandfathers had attended.

The Saunders boys went to Stonyhurst College. It was a grand place where young boys became men. Boys as young as seven were dispatched to English boarding schools. Many were desperately unhappy. One small boy from a family we knew in Italy was sent to Harrow. He killed himself there.

Mummy was not keen on schools at all. She considered thirteen to be a suitable age for starting formal education. Schools, she said, suppressed individuality and smothered imagination. English nannies, too, were over regimental. So, we had an Italian nanny: our beloved big-hearted Erminia.

Erminia’s Instruction

It was chiefly Mummy who instructed us on table manners. She often did this a little tongue-in-cheek, sometimes starting her instruction with the phrase, “Now, when you get to Buckingham Palace to eat with the King, you will need to know this…” We knew that the probability of eating at the palace with the King was very small.

“Don’t put your elbows on the table?”

“Don’t fold your napkin when you leave the table, just crush it, like this.”

“Eat asparagus with your left hand; never with your knife and fork. Take the stem with two fingers and thumb. This is the only item you are permitted to eat with your fingers.”

“Don't extend your little finger when you lift your cup; you are not jousting when you take tea.”

For a large part, however, we learned how to behave at table by observing others around us especially on the occasions when we joined the adults in the formal dining room. The most important lessons were acquired by osmosis.

I was taught to curtsey to ladies. Neville was taught to bow. We were instructed not to speak unless spoken to when in the company of adults; British children were to be seen and not heard. I envied my Greek friends and cousins who delivered their opinions among adults like lesser equals in voices tumbling over each other for attention on any subject at any time.

Erminia had gathered from Mummy which rules should be taught. She enforced them at our nursery eating table. She did not always understand why British children had to be taught such manners but she did her best. Erminia also imparted to us some of her own ideas on child rearing. She made us to understand that it was foolish vanity to look at ourselves in the mirror before going to bed. She instructed us to sleep with one hand outside the bed covers and one under the pillow, presumably for reasons of chastity.

When we were out walking with Erminia, there would sometimes be funerals passing down the street. Erminia decided that we should not be exposed to such sad spectacles. She would take detours to avoid them. Nothing would be said. We would suddenly turn down a side street and take an inconvenient route. Far from protecting us, this resulted in both Neville and me becoming fascinated by funerals and the idea of death. Prohibition multiplies the attraction of illicit things.

Erminia understood English but could not speak it, so she spoke to us in Greek. I can remember her reading children’s books to us in Italian.

Geography, History and Literature

Mummy reserved the job of teaching us geography, history and literature for herself. She loved travelling and travel books. With joy and gusto she brought the places she had visited alive. She described England as a wonderful park with daffodils under trees and green lawns and gentle rolling hills and gardens through which one walked as if through enchanted friendly forests that opened onto serene vistas with lakes and white swans and grand houses and stables and Lords and Ladies taking tea on terraces. All the men in England were tall and handsome, like our father. Her descriptions of Big Ben, Westminster Abbey and The Tower Bridge in London made us feel oh so patriotic.

Forests of conifers were to be found in Germany; Snow-capped Alps and St. Bernard dogs in Switzerland. The leaning tower of Pisa, St. Peters at the Vatican, the bridges of Rome, the canals of Venice, and our great-great grandmother, the Contessa Querini whose family came from that magical place, were favourite topics. I once asked Mummy if we were really descended from the Kings of Leinster.

"But, of course," she did not hesitate. "Everyone in Ireland is. We are all kings." And she laughed.

Most of all during our geography lessons we liked to hear about Mummy's adventures in other exotic faraway places.

Adventure in Djibouti

One of Mummy's adventures took place in Djibouti. She had been travelling by ship, which had stopped for passengers to go ashore. The ship had been anchored at some distance out so that passengers had to hire rowing boats to return. Mummy, young and petite at that time, found herself alone in a boat with her various purchases and a tall dark boatman in his long white galabia. I imagined her looking very ladylike in a light cotton dress and big sunhat.

The boatman was respectful and fussed over her as she stepped in. But halfway, between ship and shore, his gallantry dropped away. He demanded a double fare to continue. Mummy refused. He threatened to throw the oars overboard and jump from the boat, abandoning her to the seaward current, which he promptly did. To his astonishment, Mummy, a first class sailor, lifted one of the planks from underfoot and, sitting in the stern, skilfully propelled the boat to the ship faster than he could swim. She reached the ship with plenty of time to off-load her belongings and cast his boat adrift. The last she saw of him was a distant naked swimmer – a waterlogged galabia doesn't help in these circumstances – pursuing a tiny craft caught by the seaward wind and current.

When we were out on the harbour one day, Mummy gave us lessons in how to use the planks, called *pagniola* in Greek, to propel our little white rowing boat.

Adventure in Paris

Mummy loved Paris and could describe it in detail. Notre Dame, Père Lachaise, Montmartre, the Latin Quarter and much more. One blustery evening when Mummy was walking home, carrying a large black umbrella – furled for it was not raining, she became aware of a seemingly undesirable man following her. She tried to shake him off by walking fast and taking unexpected turns, but to no avail. Then, she slowed her pace and allowed the man to catch up. As he drew near she turned suddenly, pointed the umbrella into his face and opened it with a jerk. The man ran away and was not seen by her again.

Reading

'The Highways of Literature and History' series were the most memorable of the books we used for our lessons. Mummy brought the characters alive with her enthusiasm: Napoleon, Nelson, King Canute and many others. We thought that she had personally known these people, so familiar was she with them all. Greek mythology, too, came to life in our schoolroom where the boundaries between mythical and real blurred and vanished in the drama of her telling.

In one of our books was a three-quarter-length picture of Sir Galahad, one of the knights of King Arthur's round table. His face was shining with purity and beauty. He

was very good looking. I had the privilege of knowing the romantic ideal as vividly as if this man were a real historical figure. I lived in a paradise of wonderful dreams. Although, why the holy grail should be somewhere in England did trouble me. I felt that if it were not to be found in the Holy Land, it ought to have been somewhere in Greece.

Mummy also recited poetry to us. She knew great tracts of Tennyson out of her head, which she recited in a majestic Victorian rhythm. P.B. Shelley's 'Ozymandias' was another of her favourites from which she quoted often. Once she quoted, "Man is the measure of all things, of the things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not." At that time, I did not know what she meant.

History, literature, philosophy and art were one. That was Mummy's way of seeing the world and that was her way of teaching it. We could be reading about King Edward and see a picture of him carrying his baby prince in his shield to present to the people of Wales as their own. If the mood were right, we'd move on to illustrations of shields and drawing pictures of knights in armour, perhaps; or talk of jousting; or look up Wales on our map. I remember our world map with great fondness. It was so reassuring to see the far-flung parts of the British Empire coloured pink and to learn that the sun never sets on this empire.

She once read to us the poem of Horatio at the Bridge. That made a deep impression on me. For some reason, I thought it was a poem by Tennyson.

As she read, Neville lay on the Persian carpet, making swimming motions and when she had finished he said, "This man is swimming."

We were read to at length. No abridged editions were used for these literary adventures. If we didn't understand the meaning of some word we would not interrupt for fear of disturbing the flow of the story. These words would crop up in one context and again in another. We soon acquired their meanings. As a result Neville and I developed a very good command of the English language; our intonation was somewhat suspect, coloured slightly by our knowledge of other languages, but our vocabularies were advanced in striking ways. We so enjoyed Mummy's reading that we hardly bothered to do much ourselves. All our lives, our spelling in all languages has remained quite abysmal.

German Lessons

Fräulein Yenni, our first governess, came to teach us German conversation. She arrived one afternoon and immediately took me for a brisk walk, the first of many. Fräulein spoke no English, Italian or Greek. I understood almost none of her German. I must have been four or five at the time. Mummy thought Neville was too young for these ordeals so I bore it alone, holding back tears with every step. Yet, as time went by, I began to look forward to Fräulein Yenni's excursions. She was a gentle and patient woman. It was not long before I, and later Neville, became fluent German speakers.

Then came Fräulein Bach, a large square woman with short straight hair and a ruddy complexion. She worked us at the big table in the upstairs schoolroom of our home.

'Max und Moritz' and 'Struwwel-Peter', classical German nursery room morality-tales, were her fare.

At the midpoint of each lesson, Káte would bring Fräulein Bach a cherry brandy schnapps and a slice of Gleischweir cake. The Fräulein would fling her head backwards and the liquor down in one gulp. And then she would work the cake away, making extraordinary clicking sounds with each bite.

Fräulein Bach read to us from a book with gruesome descriptions of bullfights. Neville and I had been brought up to love animals. Naturally, we associated Fräulein Bach with the monstrous matadors and took a great dislike to her. We plotted ways to get revenge, such as feeding her to the wolves or to the bears or to the bandits in the mountains and, after much scheming, settled on a nasty nickname. Having never been to school, and having played only with suitable children under vigilant nannies' eyes, we were hard pressed for rude words but imagined we had found something really terribly naughty with 'Impy Beetroot'. Imps, we knew, were rather like goblins and quite undesirable creatures.

On hot summer days we sometimes took our lessons in one of our boats, a wooden dingy sporting a white canvas awning. Tsirelia, our boatman, would row us slowly around the bay while Fräulein Bach read aloud. Fräulein was always the first to board with Tsirelia's assistance. Only after she had been seated were we permitted to board. We would jump in with legs wide apart and pretend, each time, to loose our balance and we would rock the boat alarmingly from side to side. Fräulein Bach would shriek for help. Tsirelia always stayed put, studying the horizon with a glint in his eyes.

Gymnastics

Mrs Pil was our gym teacher. She had recently married a Cephalonian, Mr Pilarinos, in England, and had come with him to Argostoli. She called herself 'Pil' and made a place for herself in the community by giving English lessons in her Cockney accent. Not wishing to embarrass Mrs Pil by being the only notable family on the island not to employ her, Mummy contrived for her to teach us gymnastics.

Mrs Pil knew nothing about gymnastics. On the terrace, she marched us up and down while barking military commands, "Ten-Shun! Heels t'getha, Toes 'part! Foord march! Left... Left... Left Roit Left. Aaaadeez." Her father must have been a sergeant major and stellar martinet.

As we marched I imagined drummer boys and I rolled the rhythm under my breath with lips and teeth and tongue: ferut tut tut, ferut tut tut, frut tut tu-tu-tu tut. I regretted the military in lieu of naval exercises, for at that time I aspired to become an admiral in the Royal Navy.

Naval Instruction

When Mummy, Neville and I were walking on the seashore one day, I found a British naval manual half floating in the shallow water: Manual of Seamanship, by Authority of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, 1937. I took it home and dried it out

carefully by the fire. I read the manual from cover to cover many times, thinking it would come in useful for my future as an Admiral of the Royal Fleet.

It was full of fascinating information, including pictures of flags, knots of various kinds and more. There were detailed instructions on how to fold your hammock and clothes. I found some other admiralty instruction books in my grandfather's library, containing diagrams of ships rigging, which I studied. I found keys to Morse code and instructions on how to send messages by flashing lights. I practiced by translating suitable commands into code and I memorised many of them. I thought commands such as "England expects every man to do his duty," and "Hold the line," and other similar expressions would one day prove invaluable.

I organised a small group of friends to prepare ourselves for joining the navy. I persuaded a few mothers to obtain striped navy and white tops for the girls. For Neville I found a navy top and beret. My friends were not particularly enthusiastic but came a few times to my naval meetings. Rock cakes and tea were served.

I showed then pictures and instructions on how to fold a hammock and the beautifully coloured semaphore flags. I was not able to persuade any of the mothers to make or obtain a set of these flags for us. This was disappointing but I persisted with determination. Neville was on my side.

I tried teaching the group Morse code, but to no avail. One night, Mummy put an electrical torch in the night nursery between Neville's and my beds. She showed us how to flash long and short Morse signals to each other. We took turns flashing messages. Neville sent SOS signals. I sent my messages and told Neville what had been sent. He did try to learn them. Sometimes he guessed correctly.

We had rope of various kinds in the house. Tsirelia gave me some lighter rope, which I called my 'casting line'. Neville and I practiced the knots shown in the manuals and I learnt their names. I bullied the others to follow suit but they were not much interested. They stopped coming. I continued my preparations.

Thalie and the Knots

One day Neville and I were on the terrace outside the blue drawing room. Inside a group of Mummy's friends was drinking tea and making conversation. Mr Thalie, or Thalie as we were allowed to call him, was the only man there. He had made his escape from the drawing room and come out to play with us. Thalie had no children of his own. He had no idea of how to play with or to talk to us. He had heard about my ability with knots and decided to exercise a bit of one-upmanship. He tied me up. Neville protested. But Thalie was a big man. He laughed and told us his knots were stronger and better than the Admiralty knots.

I tried to extricate myself, at first without success.

"I will untie you on condition that you do not tie me up next," he offered.

The idea of tying up Thalie, a grown-up guest to our house, had not crossed my mind. I considered his offer, however, and determined to do just that. To make a promise that I did not intend to keep would have been against my sense of honour.

Furthermore, my instinct told me not to submit to anything that would bind me to a loss of autonomy, for such would blemish the integrity of an admiral.

"I shall promise no such thing." I retorted.

I set to with renewed vigour to extricate myself. As soon as I was free, I held Thalie to his implied agreement. I tied him up with very professional knots. Neville stood by watching and holding the loops when I asked him to while I closed the knots from the other side.

Thalie laughed. He thought the whole affair was a joke and sat still while I worked. But a joke it was not. Thalie could not extricate himself. He had to call for help. When the help came, he did not admit to having started the sorry affair. I was sent to my room for punishment. Neville secretly came to console me. We agreed that the Admiralty knots really did work. As for Thalie, he had acted according to type and I could not hold anything against him.

When I discovered that girls were not admitted to the navy, to say nothing of becoming admirals, and wanting something similarly grand, I settled on becoming a poet instead, preferably a poet laureate. I was not quite sure what 'laureate' meant but I was sure it was grand. I anticipated being buried in Westminster Abbey Poets Corner.

I never did get around to writing any poetry.

The Franciscan Nuns

A small number of Italian nuns lived in a tiny Franciscan convent in the centre of town. Together they braved the Greek Orthodox milieu and ministered to the Italian community. They also taught a variety of subjects to the children of the more cosmopolitan residents.

We went to Sister Seraphina for private lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic. She was a tall thin American nun. Sister Seraphina taught us the times tables by rote and tried to teach us spelling. I remember vividly the nuns fussing over us, and that there were treats and laughs and jokes, but of the lessons little remains. My grandmother had given me an imposing leather satchel for my two copybooks. It made me feel really very grand. One day she asked me what I had learned. I stood still and thought as hard as I could. I couldn't think of anything at all. Nothing. And told her so. My grandmother was not amused.

An exquisitely beautiful young nun, Sister Julia, taught art. Mummy considered Sister Julia's work to be stilted and old fashioned, but let me go to art lessons once a week. To balance what she had taught, Mummy encouraged me to draw from nature and from good examples of contemporary drawing. My brother and I had large soft pencils, watercolours and handmade Whatman paper brought for us from London. Mummy believed that giving us the best materials would encourage us to do our best work. I had a sketchpad, which I often took about with me. Mummy would remind me, "Have you got your sketchpad? Put it in your rucksack."

Neville was interested in drawing only ships. His sketches of Nelson's ships in full sail were intricately detailed and quite outstanding in their way.

The nuns also taught music. In Cephalonia, Mummy thought we were too young for formal music lessons. Our appreciation of music came from my grandmother's German folk songs, Aunt Lily's piano playing and the Greek songs that filled the air around us.

Greek Calligraphy

Kyria Stella, a thin lady who always wore a bowler hat and black dresses, taught us Greek. She and her sister lived with their ancient widowed father, for whom they cared. They had lived in Russia and had been very well-to-do, but had lost everything at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution. They retired to a frugal life in Argostoli, supported by Kyria Stella's tutoring. Despite diminished circumstances, Kyria Stella and her sister were ladies to the fingertips. They were treated with utmost respect by everyone in our house. Kyria Stella always arrived precisely on time. After the obligatory curtsying and bowing we would proceed to our upstairs schoolroom and be seated at the big table.

Kyria Stella told us about the poets and heroes of Greek history and she taught us reading and writing in the Greek alphabet. She was a serious calligrapher and loved writing the words we had to read. She wrote with studied concentration. For her it was a privilege to write these letters. Neville and I would watch and wait patiently for our turn. But our turn never came. She thought we were not ready.

We did not write a single Greek letter under Kyria Stella's tutelage. Not one.

Religious Education

Mummy entrusted Kyria Stella with our religious education and gave her strict instructions to stay away from the Old Testament, which she considered quite unsuitable for children. Kyria Stella was a pious woman who spoke to us with reverence about God, Our Lady and the Holy Saints.

Mummy did not require prompting from organised religion to sustain her moral values. Those to which she aspired and taught us were: strength of character, courage, loyalty, self-control and, above all, a sense of honour and duty. She taught us to take responsibility for our own actions. She often said, "*Des Menschen Wille ist sein Himmelreich*." This, she demonstrated by her actions.

Nevertheless, religion was inseparable from our everyday life. At bedtime we said our prayers to an Anglican Saviour, "Gentle Jesus meek and mild, look upon a little child. Pity my simplicity, suffer me to come to thee." I was puzzled. Why had Jesus to 'suffer' me?

Sometimes we said a German prayer:

> Vater, lass die Augen dein
> über meinem Bette sein.
> Hab ich Unrecht heut getan,

sieh es, lieber Gott, nicht an,
deine Gnad und Jesu Blut
macht ja allen Schaden gut.
Alle, die mir sind verwandt,
Gott, lass ruhen in deiner Hut;
alle Menschen, groß und klein,
sollen dir befohlen sein.

The line "*Alle, die mir sind verwandt, Gott, lass ruhen in deiner Hut,*" means, "All those who are my family, God, take into your care." 'Hut' also means hat. I pictured God's top hat into which I would climb for protection.

The gentle Anglican Jesus with long fair hair and pale blue eyes was very different from the dark majestic *Isus Hristos* of the icons we saw in Greek churches. I wondered about that.

We were surrounded by people of many denominations. My grandmother and Aunty Lily were Protestant, Uncle Philip and the Lavrano cousins were Greek Orthodox, Mummy was Catholic and we were being brought up in the Church of England. It didn't seem to matter much to which denomination one belonged, as long as one was sincere and respectful of other people's beliefs. We saw many Orthodox Churches and shrines in Cephalonia and one little Catholic Church, to which Mummy occasionally took us for Sunday mass.

It was not these, however, but the inestimable privilege of being born in Greece that was the greatest influence on my religious education. Orthodox religious practices, its liturgies and its arts, are deeply embedded in the Greek sense of national identity. Everyone is on familiar terms with Our Lady and the saints. We lived in a land where angels and saints, spirits and demons, wise men and prophets – mythological and historical – seemed as real as the wind and the beasts, the waves and the fishes.

If a Greek peasant, while taking his sheep to a higher field, were to stop by a well and discover Saint Gerasimos and Socrates debating the extent of the universe or the quality of the water to be had there, he would greet them as naturally as if they were his cousins. He would tell them his opinions.

The world of the peasants was also dominated by superstition and fear. They invoked the protection of saints as naturally as wearing amulets to ward off the evil eye. They found nothing contradictory in praying for the intercession of the Holy Virgin while cursing neighbours who were suspected of bringing bad luck, illness or failed harvests. They lit candles at shrines and hung blue beads over the cots of babies. Anthropologists have identified ancient pagan practices alive and thriving in Orthodox disguises. As children we were only dimly aware of these things. They were not part of our world in which life flowed with innocent joy.

Greeks celebrate Easter like nowhere else on earth, with a climax of magnificent liturgies. On Holy Saturday, after a serious Lenten fast of forty days, they clean their homes and then whitewash the houses and terraces, the stairways and even the bases of trees. On Easter Sunday doors and windows are opened, delicious home-cooked

foods and wine are served, and rejoicing tumbles out onto the streets. They dye eggs red for Easter and greet each other, “Christ has risen” and respond “Truly he has risen.”

Kyria Stella died of starvation during the German occupation.

Chapter Seven: Ioannina Stories

Adventure and Good Food

Ioannina is a quite lakeside town on the Greek mainland set at the foot of tall mountains. I had been sent there, when I was six, for a change of air. Although Erminia accompanied me, I had never been anywhere without Mummy before, which made it quite an adventure.

The taxi man who drove us from the nearby port knew who we were. He took us straight to the house of our hosts. It was a little white house like many others in the town. A potted basil plant stood at the front door. The good couple were friends of Mummy. They had often suggested that we should visit. Mr Lignos, and his good wife Kyria Lula, came out to welcome us. I cannot remember his first name. Perhaps I was never told. The good husband insisted on paying our taxi fare and his good wife kept kissing me and asking questions about the family without waiting for answers.

After refreshments we were settled into our bedrooms. My room was furnished with a child-size brass bed, a small table and two chairs, and a picture of the lake; I could also see the lake from my window. I sat there for a while. Then I decided that it would be quite fine.

Then it was lunchtime. In the formal dining room a delicious meal awaited us. The good husband seemed to relish his food and didn’t talk much. He was a thin man with premature grey hair and a sad face with rings under his eyes. His wife was short and plump with pink cheeks and pensive dark eyes. She talked a lot and kept fussing over us and piling our plates with food. They had no children.

I soon became accustomed to the routine there. Breakfast consisted of ripe red cherries, a thick slice of bread and honey and a big cup of milky coffee. After breakfast the good husband would pat me on the head and say, “Be a good girl,” and he would leave for work or perhaps the taverna.

The good wife must have enjoyed cooking; she spent most of every morning in the kitchen with the maid. The house always smelt of good things to eat. Lunch was at one o’clock or thereabouts. After lunch everyone changed into pyjamas and retreated to their rooms for an afternoon rest.

Dinner was later than I was used to. And after that the husband and wife would take me down to the lakeside. Arm in arm, and holding my hand, we would saunter up and down the road between the water and various coffee shops and tavernas. As the evening drew on more people joined these walks, some arm in arm, others holding hands. Men walked about in this fashion. Also boys. Girls giggled and looked pretty in their best dresses. The men and women who walked hand in hand were always

married couples. At the little tables in front of the shops old people watched the procession and drank small glasses of ouzo and water. Various friends stopped to talk to us and asked who I was. The good husband told them that I was the daughter of their English friend; and the people bent down and pinched my cheeks and talked about me as if I could not hear. One lady said "She has her mother's eyes," and I was pleased about that.

Oral Traditions

Every afternoon the good wife would take me outside under a shady pergola and give me a spoonful of sweet cherry conserve and a tall glass of water. There we sat, next to each other on two kitchen chairs, and she would tell me gruesome stories about the time when Greece was occupied by the Ottoman Turks. She told of how the Turkish conquerors came into villages, killed all the men and took away the women. Only the old people were left to wail and mourn. The Turks would steal the baby boys to be brought up as Turks in their harems.

She told me of the Greek priests who kept the spirit of Greece alive. She told of how they would brand the newborn babies with a cross so that they would always know that they were Christian and Greek. Some of these boys, she told me, escaped to the mountains when they were older where they joined brave bands of Greek freedom fighters.

She told me of how the priests led funeral processions to cemeteries in the mountains. When they arrived, out of sight of the Turks, coffins would be opened to reveal guns for the freedom fighters. When the Turks discovered this ruse they ordered all funerals in Greece to take place with open coffins. This tradition persisted long after the occupation had ended.

At that time, she told me, many of the elaborate ornaments that women wore such as earrings, silver belts and broaches had secret messages worked into their fine silver filigree. These gave directions to places where weapons had been hidden and where food could be obtained.

Eleni and Ali Pasha

The good wife told me about the big fat Ottoman, Ali Pasha, who was sent to be governor of Ioannina. In those days Turkish men had many wives and Greek girls stolen from the villages in their harems. The Pasha had the biggest harem in the district.

In Ioannina and surrounding places young Greek women did their best not to be noticed by the Turks. They kept their eyes cast down and wore kerchiefs to cover their shiny long hair.

She told me about Eleni, a modest and beautiful girl. She never went out of the house without her black kerchief. One day, as Ali Pasha was passing by, her kerchief accidentally slipped and the Pasha caught a glimpse of her beautiful face. There and then he decided that he wanted to take Eleni for himself. He summoned Eleni's father and told him to bring her to the court.

The father was frightened in the Pasha's presence and tried to think of a way to save his daughter. Although it was not true he told the Pasha that Eleni was engaged to a man in the neighbouring village. The Pasha, who was accustomed to getting his way, brushed the father aside and ordered Eleni to be brought immediately. He would kill all the men of that village if she did not come. When she arrived he gave her two silver bangles and told her that she would be happier in his harem than married to some village boy. Eleni looked at the Turk with fire in her black Greek eyes and said, "I would rather be dead than go to you."

"You will be dead," Ali Pasha said, "if you do not submit."

He had his servants prepare a wooden barrel with knives sticking in to it. Eleni was put into the barrel and rolled down the mountain. When the barrel was opened Eleni was dead. Later I was shown the place where the barrel had rolled down the mountain to the lake.

The Zalongo Rock

The good wife told me the story of a Sulioti village far away on a steep mountainside. The Turks went there to steal the peasants' goats and when the villagers resisted, they killed them all. They saved only the beautiful young girls of the village for themselves. One brave girl spoke for them all. She asked the Turks to allow them to wear their finery and to dance together on the mountain top before they had to leave their home forever. On the edge of the mountain was the Zalongo rock, a huge cliff falling away into a thin river valley far below, with rocky banks. The Turks agreed and stopped to watch the Sulioti girls dance.

As the good wife spoke I pictured the dancers in their Sunday clothes. I had seen and even worn Greek peasant costumes. I saw in my mind's eye the long floral skirts decorated with coloured ribbons, the crisp white blouses and red velvet jackets embroidered with elaborate designs in gold. I saw the women's beautiful shining black hair coiled on their heads.

The girls stood tall and proud, one by one they held hands and began to dance in a long chain that moved around to form a circle. The dance is called the Sirto today. As they danced they went further and further away from the watching Turks, towards the edge of the Zalongo rock. And then one by one they threw themselves over the precipice.

The good wife told me these stories as if they were the most ordinary things, but I was all stirred up.

"And what happened to them?" I asked.

"Well, of course, they were dashed to death on the rocks below." And she popped another peeled potato into the dish.

I wanted her never to stop. Too soon it was time to return home.

Ferry Late

When we left Ioannina the husband patted me on the head and smiled for the first time. The good wife plied me with hot homemade biscuits. She said goodbye many times with tears in her eyes and she kissed and hugged me so much that we were late. When we reached the port the ship was already leaving. Fortunately the husband knew the harbour master. I heard the harbour master call out on his loud hailer, "Come back for a little English girl and her Nanny."

Come to think of it now, we may not have been late. The ship might have left early, on the whim of the Captain. You never know about these matters in Greece.

When I told Mummy about the Sulioti girls she said, "That is just the kind of story Kyria Lula would tell." And she looked at me gravely. "The Sulioti were brigands. They made the roads and mountain passes unsafe. You should remember this; the Greeks were not always good and the Turks were not always bad."

Chapter Eight: Summer Holidays in Corfu

Hot in Summer

In Athens it gets very hot during the summer and all who can afford it escape to the seaside. Even peasants go home to their villages of origin. On the Islands there is no need for escape. But even here a summer holiday atmosphere prevailed. People went to the beach more often, had longer afternoon sleeps and did less work. As far as I can remember most of the people I knew did not seem to do any serious work all year round. But like everyone else we enjoyed the summer holidays. Most of our summer holidays were spent in Corfu with our Greek cousins, John and Max, and their parents, Uncle Philip and Aunty Lily. Their estate in Chlomos was like a second home for us.

Ferry to Corfu

The little ferry that took us from Cephalonia to Corfu, named Polykos, might as well have been a transatlantic liner for the excitement and glamour it had for Neville and me. There were two classes: Lux and Second Class. The people in Lux sat on deck chairs, and were waited on by the camerotto, who brought little bottles of sweet lemonade.

If the captain was a Cephalonian and knew our family, he would greet us ceremoniously in his magnificent uniform.

"Hello Mrs Alice. What a pleasure it is to have you on our ship again," he said with a flourish. "Are you going to see your dear sister?" Greeks like these on the Islands in those days knew everyone and everyone's business. And as he greeted us, loudly so that everyone would know that he was greeting ostensibly very important persons whom he knew personally, he would go up to the deck chairs and move them a little as if to make it better for us.

While Vangelis organised our luggage, Erminia ushered Neville and me to our deck chairs. Mummy approved of the stowage and other arrangements before taking her chair.

The deck chairs, each comprising a wooden folding frame and a colourful hammock-like canvas sheet running from front to back, were arranged in a straight line looking out to sea. We sat in the same positions every time: Mummy, then Neville and me, then Erminia. On one of these trips a refeened, somewhat grouchy looking and rather fat lady was seated on Mummy's right. On the other side of Erminia were a number of vacant deck chairs.

Towards the rear of the ferry we could see the people in second class. Some were seated on the wooden deck, others on boxes. Little children, who had been made to sit on the deck, were making a merry noise. Their mothers alternately smacked and then hugged their children and pushed food into their mouths. The children laughed and were again troublesome evoking new rounds of smacking and hugging. Women could be seen unwrapping and passing parcels of food, which were eaten with relish. Rubbish was strewn about with abandon. The men were standing in a cluster near the railings, talking and smoking cigarettes.

As the ferry started to move, the thrumming of the engine could be heard and felt. Conversation became difficult. The smell of burnt oil and diesel swirled around and mixed with the salty scent of the sea. Just as we cleared the harbour, four or five men from the second class section walked up, greeted Mummy and then picked up the vacant chairs and carried them to the second class area. The camerotto appeared and ordered them to replace the chairs. Above the noise of the engine I could not hear what was being said, but by the gestures could see that the men had refused and a magnificent argument had broken out. At any moment, it seemed, knives might be drawn and throats slit. Other attendants joined the commotion and a tug of war started. One large attendant, perhaps the engine master, yanked one of the chairs back to the first class section with two men at the other end holding on grimly and yelling. Neville and I watched with fixed fascination. Mummy kept reading her book without looking up, so we knew that nothing bad would happen. Erminia tried hard to distract our attention; she said something we did not hear and pointed at something in the distance. She knew that English children, for some reason unknown to her, were not supposed to stare.

After much swearing and blaspheming the attendants won the battle and the deck chairs were returned. No knives had been drawn; indeed, no blows had been landed. And the empty chairs were back in line with their canvas seats flapping gaily in the breeze. The men in the second class section returned to standing at the railing as if nothing had happened.

A few moments later, a big man with a grey moustache, dressed in a somewhat crumpled suit and sporting a cigarette tucked behind his right ear, walked up to our area. He greeted us and sat down on one of the deck chairs, two seats away from Erminia. Within moments the camerotto arrived and began to remonstrate with him. The man took a deep draw from the lighted cigarette in his hand and blew smoke at

the camerotto; right into his face. The camerotto became livid with fury. He yelled and swore and shook all over and was about to call the senior attendants when the man took a bill of paper money from his breast pocket, tore it in half, and put one half into the camerotto's hand. The camerotto, instantly silenced, looked at the half bill, quickly pocketed it and, after glancing up and down the deck for other opportunities but finding none, disappeared below. That was the last we saw of him until the end of the trip. The big man sat back in his chair with a look of satisfaction and tried to start a conversation with Erminia. Erminia did not respond. She remained calmly gazing at the island of Cephalonia receding in the distance.

After a while everyone seemed to settle down. Only the drone of the engine could be heard and a light breeze could be felt as we moved. Some people tried to shout above the engine noise but soon gave up. The children fell quiet at the far end of the deck.

Now and again gulls swooped from the sky to inspect the boat. The big man two deck chairs down from Erminia took to staring vacantly at the horizon. Mummy continued reading her book, looking up from time to time. The fat lady next to Mummy was lying back in her deck chair, looking uncomfortable, with eyes closed. Neville and I watched and waited. The engine thrummed on.

Neville was the first to see Corfu in the distance. "I can see Kerkyra," he shouted in Greek and he began to jump up and down. The passengers on both ends of the deck roused themselves. A tremor of excitement passed through the crowd. Mummy closed her book and looked up with a smile on her face. Erminia tried to subdue Neville. The refeened lady next to Mummy opened her handbag and began to apply lipstick to her face and to fix her hair. The big man with the cigarette over his right ear appeared still to be asleep.

Corfu looked green and lush compared to the rugged scenery of Cephalonia. It seemed like a wonderland to Neville and me. Soon the old Venetian fort came into sight. Then the tall buildings lining the port area. They were only about four or five stories high but they seemed quite magnificent to us.

At the quay, the fat lady pushed everyone aside and was the first to leave the boat. Then the rest of our party disembarked in single file, with the big man close behind. The camerotto had reappeared on deck. As the big man walked by, he wordlessly passed the camerotto the second half of his well-earned bribe. The people in the second class came last. They descended from the boat in a great jostle, handing parcels over the railings and pushing this way and that. They were greeted rowdily by waiting relatives and friends.

Drive to Chlomos

The Lavrano motorcar, driven by Aristidis, was waiting on the waterfront for us. Aristidis was the majordomo of the Chlomos estate: the head of the household staff, the butler, the driver and the chaperone when the occasion required. Uncle Philip had once said that Aristidis was worth his weight in gold. Aristidis stood by to help load the luggage.

Neville and I were very excited. Having drives in motorcars was a special event in those days, and with Aristidis driving it was always a thrilling trip.

After dropping Erminia at her brother's house in the old Venetian quarter and making a short stop-over at Aunty Lily's town house, we set out for Chlomos on the high part of the southern end of the Island of Corfu.

The drive there took us through stately olive groves and charming villages on a narrow dusty road of potholes and loose gravel. This did not slow our progress. Aristidis knew the road well: every bump, every pothole and every turn along the way. He negotiated the hurdles at frightening speed, including the tight bends around corners hanging over deep ravines on one side and rising rocky slopes on the other. It is most fortunate that we never met oncoming traffic at those narrow bends. We passed churches, votive shrines and picturesque villages. At every bend in the road and at every village, he hooted the bugle-like horn loudly by vigorously squeezing its rubber ball.

Barefoot peasant children waved and ran after our car as we passed by; cars did not pass every day. Women in the olive groves and vegetable gardens straightened, often placing a hand on their hip or the small of their back to relieve the aches of hard labour, and watched us vanish in a cloud of dust. From time to time chickens would scatter ahead of the car, clucking in protest, and goats would look up lazily, their bells clunking.

Neville and I greeted each familiar place along the way with excitement and we waved. All along the cicadas made their usual busy summer din. The drive seemed to take hours, until we heard Aristidis changing gears with a crunch and begin the steep upward drive that we had been waiting for. The final stage of our wonderful journey took us up to the village of Chlomos, perched high above the surrounding countryside.

Soon the village came into sight. The road through the village was wide enough for no more than a man and his donkey. Aristidis parked the car and we continued on foot. A small crowd had gathered to view our arrival. A woman called out, “Welcome Mrs Alice.”

A cluster of young chaps volunteered to carry our belongings. Aristidis selected the two tallest for the honour and the small tip. Neville and I ran ahead until we reached the entrance to the estate.

The Lavrano Estate

Green iron gates marked the entrance to the Estate. From there a broad cobbled walk way descended through an avenue of Oleander trees, covered in pink blossoms at this time of year, towards the big house. Stepped gardens were laid out on each side. Clay pots of various sizes bursting with geraniums were everywhere.

The house was known as the *Archondikon* in the village, which means ‘Nobleman’s Manor’. We didn’t call it that. It was a beautiful, functional, clean building, not ostentatious in any way, stately yet rustic, with simple lines and fine proportions.

External walls were rose coloured. It had a terracotta roof and green shutters. Below the living quarters were extensive wine cellars. Through barred windows we could see huge barrels lined up against the walls. The kitchen and the servants' quarters were on the ground floor. The stairs to the first floor were outside the building and ascended to a covered porch. Living quarters for the family were on the first floor. Inside, the walls were painted white. The wooden floors were clean but not shiny or polished as were our floors in Argostoli. Heavy beams ran across the ceilings.

This house had everything that was needed: nothing more. There was no running water and there was no electricity at Chlomos, but we lived like kings and queens there.

The house had been built in 1460 by the founder of the family and it had been owned continuously by the family since. The founder is rumoured to have been a local adventurer, perhaps from a line of adventurers left behind after the crusades. Other stories tell that he was a pious knight from Portugal on his way to the Holy Land, but that is an odd tale since the crusades had been long fought and lost by the time of his arrival. Whoever he was, it seems likely that the startling beauty of the land and sea had distracted him from his intentions. The place had been wild in those days. And he claimed it all. The Lavrano family has since flourished there for many generations. They cultivated the land, built the town and made roads. In our time olive groves and vineyards stretched from the house to the cobalt blue Ionian Sea below in an arc from the north to the southeast, taking – it seemed – a quarter of the island. From this mountain perch, it felt as though the land were floating between the blue of the sea and the blue of the sky, an ethereal sky that seemed infinite and yet gave the feeling that you could reach out and touch it. You could never be unaware of the sea and the sky in Chlomos.

The village near the estate, more like a cluster of houses along a few narrow lanes hugging the hillside, had been built of local stone. The houses were stuccoed and painted pink or tan or sky blue. In centuries before the houses had been the property of the estate, but time had confirmed their *de facto* status as villagers' freehold.

Uncle Philip was the senior member of the Lavrano family. On the death of his parents Philip had inherited the extensive family estate. He must have been quite a dashing young man. In preparation for his role he had been sent to university in France. He also studied the latest methods in viticulture. When he returned to Corfu he put his knowledge to good use. His wines became known and respected in Greece and Europe; they won European prizes, competing with Italian and French wines. Many of the villagers worked for Uncle Philip, harvesting the grapes, pruning the vines, repairing the trellises on which they grew, clearing the ground and performing many other labours. Grapes for wine making were pressed in great vats belonging to the estate. Mostly it was the women who laboured, except for the really heavy back-breaking work; only the women did that.

Village women and children would gather the olives at harvest time. After the olives were pressed they would be paid in kind. They could sell their olive oil in the town to buy things, or keep it for their own consumption. The villagers often had a few

animals and olive trees of their own. They used Uncle Philip's oil presses and paid him a portion of their oil.

Although the estate was the acknowledged property of the Lavranos, the olive trees were not necessarily. Among the many thousands that belonged to Uncle Philip, here and there were small stands of trees marked with the names of their peasant owners. Olive trees live for centuries. These trees were passed down from father to son, often over many generations. Ownership of olive trees, in Greece, is independent of the ownership of the land. And the land unquestionably belonged to the Lavrano estate.

There were no surveys in those days but everyone knew their trees and they generally respected the boundaries. Some of the young men of the village, the ones who had spent time in Corfu town, would claim trees that belonged to the estate. A bit of cheating was considered a sport and quite legitimate, especially if some cleverness or unexpected trickery has been employed. At the village *cafeneon* the youths would boast of their cleverness. The elders would remonstrate with them, remembering that they had been young once; they muttered under their beards and smiled into their moustaches when it seemed their youngsters had got away with it. Aristidis, who spent his afternoons at the village *cafeneon*, had a foot in both camps. He would listen to the young men's boasts and report to Uncle Philip. Uncle Philip would summon the culprits and give them a lecture. He would tell them what fine and upright people their parents and grandparents were: people with honour. Stealing olive trees, he would remind them, should not be permitted as it would dishonour their families. Then he would forgive them and send them on their way with a pat on the back.

Uncle Philip would occasionally make a gift of an olive tree to a deserving family, perhaps on the birth of the first male child after many girls, or for the dowry of a girl who had been in loyal service in the big house.

The peasants were not serfs in the Northern European sense, for they regarded themselves as equals, no lesser persons than the Lavranos themselves. It is more accurate to call them villagers even though many were illiterate simple people. There was a friendly paternal relationship between them and Uncle Philip. They called him *Partsinevelos*, which means something like 'father of the family'. Aunty Lily was referred to as *Kyria*: Lady. The Lavrano family was responsible for taking care of the local amenities, paying for the doctor when he was needed and making a suitable donation to the church each year. Philip would sometimes be called upon to mediate in disputes. Aunty Lily was viewed as a wise mother for all.

Once several women from the village, dressed in their Sunday best, came to consult Aunty Lily about an infestation of head lice among the village children. Aunty Lily advised that all the children should have their heads shaved. Every boy's head was duly shaved. The girls kept their hair and their lice. Aunty Lily understood this and so she then prescribed herbal remedies and regular washing instead. The peasants, who were unaccustomed to taking baths, complied.

A feudal atmosphere prevailed, but it was a gentle Ionian feudalism. These people whose ancestors had invented democracy were themselves never lesser than their masters in the things that mattered: their self respect and individual liberty. There is a

Greek word for this: *philotimo*. It refers to a sense of the honourable self. It is the wellspring of the striking individuality of the Ionian Greeks. The villagers knew their place but would look you straight in the eye and say exactly what they thought.

Greeting at the Gates

John and Max were waiting to greet us at the gates. Tiny lizards basking in the sun scattered themselves as we approached the house where Aunty Lilly was waiting to welcome us on the porch. She hugged us and was truly happy to see us. We followed her into the large living room. Most indoor activities took place in this room, which was rather like the grand hall of a small castle. Access to the rest of the house – a small drawing room, bedrooms and a balcony – was through the central room.

Uncle Philip's part of the hall was furnished with leather seats and a leather embossed table. Two locked wall-mounted glass-fronted gun cabinets defined his end of the hall. The men would sit here discussing politics, business and hunting expeditions on the mainland.

At some distance a sitting area for ladies was positioned near a window with a spectacular view of the estate and the sea. You could see the violet Albanian mountains in the distance to the north and the Pindus Mountains on the Greek mainland to the east. They would light up pink and vermillion in their shining snowy peaks when the sun went down behind the house on the other side. A large open fireplace was close by, big enough for us children to sit in. The Bösendorfer, which had come from Cephalonia, was in its place of honour near one of the corners, opposite the fireplace. The wing was always open, to reflect the sound into the room; the piano seemed always ready to be played.

Uncle Philip's two older widowed sisters, who were on a short visit to Chlomos, woke up from their lengthy afternoon naps to join the party. Aunty Emma, the eldest, was a tall slim woman, always immaculately dressed in fashionable clothes. Her wavy grey hair was drawn into a chignon that revealed her classical face to advantage. She was considered a great beauty. I thought she looked rather like an ancient Greek statue, carved out of marble. Aunty Saffo, on the other hand, was not considered a great beauty. She wore ungainly shoes and bright coloured clothes that were not fashionable. She had a great puff of white hair on the top of her head that would not stay in place. She made us laugh and she told stories about her son who lived in Athens. According to her, he was quite an exceptional person.

The boys' Swiss governess, Mademoiselle Besançon, joined us at tea. Although she was officially the *Stütze der Hausfrau*, she did not appear to do anything useful. Most of the time she amused herself in Chlomos by sitting in garden chairs reading books and looking after the views. Her job was to speak French to the boys, which she did with a Swiss accent, from time to time.

In the middle of the room stood a long, solid refectory table. Afternoon tea was already set; bread and butter with home made plum jam and Aunty Lily's special Gleischweir cake filled the room with their aroma.

Everyone sat at the grand table. This was to be a truly grand tea. In Cephalonia we did not have butter, as there were no cows on that island. Aunty Lily would send butter to us at Christmas, which we regarded as a great treat. The ice chest we had there would not keep butter for long. The butter in Chlomos had been freshly churned. It was always soft. It had never been in a cooler. Neville and I helped ourselves to great lashings of butter as if it were cream and smothered our slices of bread. Koula, the scullery maid, brought up the hot tea and Aunty Lily, sensibly, asked her to bring some more butter.

After tea, I asked permission to leave the table. I requested permission for Neville, John and Max to accompany me. Neville and I wanted to see that all was as wonderful as we had remembered. We had dreamt of Chlomos during our absence.

We visited the cows, the donkey, the horses called Ontsolo, the pig, the white Angora rabbits with pink eyes, the chickens who had the run of the farmyard, and the much pedigreed daschund, Löwi Motsenigou d'Annunziata. These annual greeting rituals were moments of great delight for us. Here we felt free, but always protected. Here it was exciting but never dangerous. Here we were at our second home with our cousins. Here our lives became enriched each year with new discoveries and holiday adventures, anchored by the things that remained unchanged or that grew up slowly with us each year.

Evening

At dinner time, that evening, Uncle Philip took his place at the head of the table and we followed suit. Then we were presented with the fruits of Uncle Philip's great hunting expedition that afternoon: tiny little birds roasted in the Greek style, with plenty of oil and lemon and herbs picked from the mountain side. The herbs had been gathered fresh by Koula or one of the other kitchen maids. In Chlomos one of the kitchen maids gathered fresh herbs each day.

Uncle Philip considered it a test for us children to eat the tiny birds without using our fingers: only forks and knives. It was difficult. We tried hard as we wanted to be the winner for having done it best. This ritual was repeated every evening. Sometimes Uncle Philip said that Neville – the youngest present – was the winner, but we knew that this was not true.

I cannot remember Uncle Philip ever returning with anything more substantial from his expeditions, although I had heard him talk about the great dangers of hunting wild boar in Albania.

Dinner at Chlomos was always a loud tumultuous occasion. Everyone talked at once at the top of their voices. Neville and I found this very entertaining but we were not able to let ourselves go; we remained listening and watching.

After dinner, the table was cleared by the servants. It was getting dark. One of the servants, Aphrodite, brought some lamp spirits and a hurricane lamp. Uncle Philip primed the device and pumped the lamp with a brass plunger. Then he lit it with a match and lowered the glass and brass top of the lamp, clicked it shut and hung it on a hook above the table in the centre of the room. The lamp was very bright; you could

not look directly into it. It made a hissing sound and gave all the light we needed. Since the walls of the room were painted white, no part became dark. Then Uncle Philip and his sisters sat at the table and played cards. From time to time, Uncle Philip would take down the lamp and pump it again. When he did that the shadows would jump up the walls and shake around and then they would drop to the floor again as Uncle Philip put the lamp back on its hook.

Uncle Philip enjoyed having his hair combed. We children did this, taking turns. We stood behind his chair and combed gently, looking at his cards and never betraying him. Aunty Lily would not comb Uncle Philip's hair. However, one evening she stood behind him and patted his shoulders. Later Neville said that he had heard Uncle Philip purring.

Aunty Lily and Mummy usually sat in the ladies' part of the room and talked to each other in low voices. Sometimes they read books; the light from the single lamp was sufficient but they would also light candles. They were not interested in cards.

Bed time always came too soon in Chlomos. Mummy would lead us to the bedroom by candle light, holding a hand in front of the flame to stop it blowing out as we went. When we were in bed the candle was extinguished but the door to the living area was left ajar. Often we would hear the jackals howling in the distance. We pulled our covers over our ears, although we felt safe with the window shutters closed. Unlike the shutters in Cephalonia that had Venetian blinds in them, the shutters at Chlomos were solid.

After we were in bed Aunty Lily would go to the piano and play. She loved Chopin and often played his waltzes. She played Beethoven sonatas too, and Brahms. Schubert lieder were also played and sung. Everyone listened in silence. Even the jackals fell silent. We fell asleep every evening as she played on into the night.

The Next Morning

The big green shutters of Chlomos did not allow much sunlight to enter the room. At dawn, a round ball of orange light appeared at the top of the opposite wall and worked its way down. Neville called this the 'light-clock'. When the ball had reached the floor Aphrodite came into our room with two big enamel jugs of water: one hot and one cold. She pulled out a tin hip bath from under one of the beds and filled it with water. Neville and I took turns bathing and washing ourselves with sponges that had been gathered from the sea; and then got dressed. Aphrodite, unlike Erminia who would have soaped and sponged us, turned and looked the other way and urged us to wash properly.

Aphrodite was a young peasant girl of about 15 years. She carried herself with the dignity of a virtuous and modest woman. She was very serious when serving at table under Aristidis' eagle eyes. She was always eager to please but was not servile. On her morning rounds she laughed with us children; she knew how to be one of us. And she knew when not to be one of us.

Aphrodite had a special way of looking. She looked with interest and innocent curiosity. The peasants in those parts can out-stare anyone; they look you straight in

the face. They ask personal questions without embarrassment like: Where is your father? How old are you? When are you leaving? These are simple questions that deal with the time frame of the moment. They never asked questions that extended beyond the boundaries of their place in the scheme of things. Nothing was asked that might indicate envy at a disparity in wealth or privilege. They would never want to know, for example, whether we had a car and driver at home.

The peasant women and girls of Corfu always wore a simple version of their native costumes that consisted of a long floral skirt and a white blouse. On Sundays and other special occasions a more decorated skirt, with ribbons too, was worn. A red velvet waistcoat, called *peseli*, richly hand-embroidered with golden threads, was worn over a frilly lacy blouse. *Peseli* were often made lovingly by grandmothers and passed down the generations. The young women's hair was worn up, piled up with a cushion hidden inside and held in place with a red headband. The older women from the villages, who knew the art, would wrap and weave the hair and fix it in place. Married women also wore a kerchief at the back of their head, rather like a little lacy handkerchief pinned across the back of their headdress. They would wear whatever gold they might possess as chains around the necks, in pendant gold earrings and in bracelets. Through years of carrying heavy burdens on their heads, such as water jars on their way from the village pumps to the houses, these women stood tall and regal.

Townspeople did not wear peasant costumes. We only saw these at Chlomos. However, many an elegant upper-class lady envied these peasants their looks. It was customary for upper-class people to have their portraits taken wearing the national dress. I noticed that these people, even when dressed in the most magnificent peasant outfits, rarely achieved the poise, bearing and sense of inner strength that shone from the peasant women of the villages. I could see that they had dressed themselves up in other people's costumes and had done so self consciously and awkwardly.

I did not see the Corfu peasant outfit for men. No doubt there was one. I did see photographs of John and Prince Philip wearing the *fustanella*. This is the Greek male costume still worn today by the national guard: a shirt with long baggy sleeves, a white multi-pleated skirt, knee length socks and pointed shoes with pompoms. The jacket is similar to the one worn by girls but is usually black and has many buttons on the front. Boys wear a kind of beret. John looked as if he were about to break into a Greek dance in the picture. Perhaps children of any social standing can wear the national costumes with a natural ease that defies adults.

I have pictures of myself in the peasant costume. Mummy felt that a Scottish kilt would be more appropriate for Neville, but as there were none of these to be had at Chlomos and white *fustanella* were nearly as difficult to get, Neville finished up wearing a clown costume on that day.

Aunty Lily was energetic, creative and an outstanding musician. She would invite Alecos, Aunty Emma's son, and other musician friends for sessions of chamber music on weekends. She launched various new ideas among the ladies in Corfu: The *jupe culotte*, long skirt-like shorts, which she wore when she rode her bicycle, for example. Ladies did not ride bicycles in those days, until she popularised the sport. All very

daring. When her boys grew out of their shoes she cut off the fronts to create extra space. Their toes poked out. She made holes in the sides of old winter shoes for ventilation and to create summer sandals. Everything she did was an innovation on the island. She was so un-Greek, so Swiss, so bright-eyed! She was just a wonderful person. They all loved her.

To the Beach

Expeditions on donkeys down to the beach seemed to take a very long time but we were never in a hurry at Chlomos. Accompanied by various adults including nannies and governesses and with trusty villagers leading the donkeys, we would take a rocky path flanked by olive groves that zigzagged down the mountainside. The boys were allowed to ride astride while the ladies of the party had to sit sideways on very uncomfortable wooden saddles.

One time we reached a bend in the path where we encountered a peasant with his donkey coming up the mountain. There was very little room to manoeuvre. The peasant struggled to get his donkey to stand aside, into the olive grove. His donkey, not understanding the rules of propriety that apply when a peasant's donkey encounters the entourage of the landed gentry, would not give ground. The donkeys on both sides began to bray at the top of their voices, a very loud sound when donkeys are standing their ground. Neville got such a fright that he fell off his mount. Fortunately he was not hurt. The peasants fussed over him appropriately but the ladies could not come off the wooden saddles, so they made gestures and tried to appear helpful from atop their ungainly perches. Everyone got the giggles including Neville, Aunty Lily and Mummy.

On the pebbly beach, shade trees branched out nearly to the water's edge. No visitors came to this beach uninvited. We usually had a short swim before heading home for lunch; we had come for the invigorating effect, not to loll about and never to sunbathe. We came. We did what we had come for. We left. Sometimes we saw dolphins further out in the bay.

On our way back up the mountain we stopped to pay a visit to the family graveyard and chapel of Agia Pelagiá. It was always quiet and cool around the chapel.

Theodore Lavranos, Philip's grandfather, was buried here. I heard Aunty Lily once say that he was a real ladies man. When he was 75 years old he walked all the way from Corfu Town to Chlomos, as he usually did. The distance was 28 kilometres over rocky hilly terrain that was steep in places. On the way a tremendous thunderstorm hit the island. When he reached Chlomos he was drenched and cold. His elder grand-daughters, Aunty Elizebetta and Aunty Sappho begged him to change clothes before having lunch, but he insisted on eating first. He contracted pneumonia and died a few days later. I found his grave. There were many Lavrano graves in this place. Agia Pelagiá had been the family chapel since the 15th Century.

Under the Pine Trees

We spent most of our days under the tall pine trees near the house. The trees had been planted by Aunty Lily when she first got married and were already quite large. We

played there for hours inventing our own games. I made outlines of house plans. I drew the walls on the ground by scooping up pine needles, which lay in the shade of the big trees. The boys would help under my direction. The rooms we formed were big enough for us to sit in; openings connected these rooms to each other. Then we would sit inside them and I would tell them what we were doing. I would direct them from one room to the other and invent stories of domestic bliss for our entertainment.

The Swiss governess reclined in a chair near by and did not interfere with us. She appeared to be reading a French novel. Sometimes we ventured a little further down to the *meli kukes*, a small clump of trees with round translucent leaves. We lay on our backs and looked up into the green light and breathed in the peace of Chlomos. In the distance we could hear the sound of the farm animals: the clucking of the chickens, the distant braying of the donkeys and always the crazy summer din of the cicadas.

One day I set about to teach Neville and Max to fly. John was more interested in looking for scorpions under rocks. He did not join us. On the level below the pine trees we had discovered a springy mound of dried grape skins, discarded from the presses. The mound provided a soft landing for us to jump onto from the stone wall above. We each took turns jumping madly waving our arms like wings in an effort to fly. I urged the others to try harder. I told them about Wendy and the boys, who had managed to fly under Peter Pan's tuition. John and Max had not heard of Peter Pan and Wendy, so I explained everything. “Where there is a will there is a way,” I shouted and ordered them to try harder. Just as I thought we were making some progress the Swiss governess looked up from her book and put an end to our endeavours.

Sometimes Mummy and Aunty Lily came down to sit under the tall pines. Often they read to us in German or in English. These were children's books, not the classics that Mummy would read to us in the school room at home. But mostly they talked to each other.

Once I head Aunty Lily say to Mummy that she looked forward to the day when the boys would be grown up. I thought, “Why look forward to another day, when today is so wonderful.” This is absolutely true. I thought it just like that, at that moment, even as a child. And I have never forgotten it.

Naughty Boy

One of our cousins, Max, got up to all sorts of mischief, which amazed and impressed Neville and me. The idea of being ‘naughty’ had quite simply not crossed our minds until we went to Chlomos. Aunty Lily often spanked Max. Nothing like that had ever happened to us, perhaps because we knew exactly how far we could go. Uncle Philip did not punish anyone. He threatened to slap the naughty ones but never did.

Our days were interrupted by lunch and long afternoon sleep times when the shutters were closed and complete silence reigned in the house until four o'clock in the afternoon. Usually I had my afternoon nap with Neville but one day Neville was made to share a room with John, who quietly read a book. I was put with Max. As soon as no footsteps could be heard, Max crept off his bed and tip-toed to the window. I knew

he was up to some mischief. He looked furtively around and beckoned me to follow him. Just below the window was a rusty metal pergola covered by a robust vine. Max climbed onto the wide window sill and skilfully dropped onto the pergola below. He urged me to do the same. I knew that this was not right so I refused. He tried various arguments but when he saw that he was not succeeding he told me that I was just a girl and scared. I decided that honour required me to show Max that I was as good as any boy, so out I went.

Balancing on the steel beam was not as easy as it looked when Max had done it. But going down the rusty post was the hardest of all, especially as I wore a dress that did not protect my legs. When we were finally down on the lower level, the two of us wondered what to do next. We went to the beehives and the silk worm trees; we walked about trying to think of something to do with the stolen time. But as the time passed I began to feel quite uneasy. We did not know what to do. We had left the room but had not choreographed our next move in any way.

At four o'clock our absence was discovered and we were soon tracked down. Max got a royal hiding from Aunty Lily and ran away crying. I don't know where he ran to. I waited for my turn but Aunty Lily did not smack me because, she said, I was a girl. So I was sent to my room for the remainder of the afternoon. I wished at that moment that I had been born a boy.

Wild Animals in the Garret

The bedroom where Neville and I slept when we stayed at Chlomos opened on to the living room as did most of the rooms in the house. Uncle Philip and Aunty Lily's room, however, was located on the other end of short passage. The WC was also there. A fixed ladder ascended to the garret about half way down the passage. At the top of the ladder was a large black hole in the ceiling. The entrance to the garret could not be closed. I was terrified of this black hole.

Every time I went down the hallway I had to pass the black hole and the ladder. It was a dreadful horror. There was no other way to the WC. When I needed to go, I walked fast until I reached the foot of the ladder, then I ran, looking neither left nor right. The fear would not go away.

I was too ashamed to confide in anyone.

One day, when I was about ten years old, I considered something Mummy had often said: "You must face your fears. You must not run away." I reminded myself that I was British and that our family were not the kind of people who are afraid. I decided to climb the ladder on my own, without telling anyone.

I climbed slowly, step by step, until my head and shoulders were above the garret floor. "Is anybody there?" I said as I peered into the blackened shadow. The hair prickled on the back of my neck, and the wood creaked at the top of the ladder.

Two small round windows gave some light into the space. As my eyes adjusted I became aware of wild animals staring at me in the gloom. Their tusks like ivory sabres were drawn at the sides of their mouths. They did not move. Only the motes of

dust rising in the faint sunbeams had been stirred and shaken by my call. Then I realised the animals were hunting trophies, arrayed on the attic wall: heads of wild boar with fur still intact stared blankly through vitreous eyes. They had been brought back by Uncle Philip from hunting expeditions to Albania. Aunty Lily would not have them in the living rooms below.

I continued climbing until I was inside the attic. I made myself walk slowly around the room, from one end of the attic to the other. I saw many trunks and boxes, locked down and bolted shut. I felt sorry for the boar. The big one had a sad expression, I thought. Then, I went back to the hole in the floor and the ladder that went down to the hall in the world of living men. I felt like running but made myself go down as slowly as I had entered, one step at a time.

After that I was no longer afraid of the black hole in the ceiling.

Pronouncements of the Partsinevolos

In the harvest season, Uncle Philip worked very hard, starting at early dawn, organising and sometimes helping the people with the labour. My cousin John told me that. However, I was never there in those seasons and did not see this happening. It seemed to me that Uncle Philip was always on holiday.

When the grapes had surrendered their juice at the end of summer and the good oil had been pressed from the ripe olives in late autumn, Uncle Philip returned to the leisure that suited him best. In the front garden, surrounded by oleander trees, Uncle Philip had a table with a stone top. He would have some chairs taken to the table and would sit there to receive deputations from the village. He would play *diloti*, a card game occasionally played for money, or draughts or backgammon with men from the village.

One day I watched the proceedings with interest. I just looked but did not speak in case I was sent away. Uncle Philip sat on a small chair; a second chair on the other side of the table was there. Aristidis stood close by, leaning on a nearby oleander tree. I watched a man from the village walking down from the gate towards the garden table. He was quite old and took the steps slowly. When he reached the table, he took off his cap and uncovered a head of tight grey curls. He folded his cap and put it in his pocket. His white moustache gave him a military air. His eyebrows were heavy and dark. In his hand he held a small parcel containing *kolokithakia* (zucchini, courgette, marrow or squash).

“The first of the season,” he said, handing them to Uncle Philip.

Uncle Philip examined the *kolokithakia*, commented on their colour and size, and declared how good they looked. The old man told him that he had personally tended the little crop. Uncle Philip beckoned Aristidis to take the *kolokithakia*. Aristidis in turn called for Koula, the scullery maid, who was working in the kitchen just behind us. When she did not answer immediately Aristidis called again, impatiently. She shouted from inside, *“Amesos!”* which means 'immediately'.

“Immediately now or never!” he shouted back.

The maid came running, holding her ankle-length dress with both hands just high enough to safely jump up the two garden steps on the cobbled path. She took the gift from Uncle Philip. Unlike an English maid, who might have made a small bow towards the master of the house, she gave Aristidis a telling glance and left without a word.

The old man sat down and arranged the backgammon disks on the board. Then the two men played in deep concentration, with Aristidis watching over Uncle Philip's shoulder. For a while only the clack of the disks could be heard; and the snaps as the conquered disks were demonstratively clicked onto the table. After one of them had won the game, they began to talk about all kinds of interesting things.

First they talked about one young girl who had become engaged to a man from another village. Great arrangements were being made by the girl's family; arrangements that would put them into debt for many months, if not years. No doubt the old man was hoping that Uncle Philip would make a contribution to the dowry. Then the two talked about world politics and the rise of the Fascists. The old man thought himself to be knowledgeable about every matter of worldly importance. That he could neither write nor read was no impediment. Uncle Philip listened and nodded.

Uncle Philip had bought Max an air gun. It was pumped by folding it, like a shotgun, but instead of placing a cartridge in the breech a small pellet was used. When the gun was fired it did not make a bang. Instead, something like a sneezing sound occurred and the pellet would be flung out at an alarming velocity.

The old man told Uncle Philip that Max had been practicing target shooting by aiming at the peasants from behind. Fortunately the peasants wore wide baggy trousers made of a heavy home-spun woollen cloth that took most of the sting out of the shots. Uncle Philip promised to confiscate the gun immediately. He called for Max and threatened to slap him. Slapping in the Greek style is done on the cheek with the back of the hand. Uncle Philip held up his hand with arm bent, palm facing his chin in threatening preparation, not all too convincing from his seated position. On cue, the old man remonstrated; Max was only a boy and meant no real harm. So Uncle Philip did not slap Max and later he clean forgot to confiscate the gun.

Max went on shooting the peasants in the bum.

When Aunty Lily heard about it she was not so understanding. She took away his pellets.

Max, who looked like a cupid with his head of dark curls and golden complexion, was always up to mischief and sometimes very clever about it. I taught Max some of the knots I had learned from the Seaman's Manual. One of these was a quick release knot known as a draw hitch. It never crossed my mind that he would use it for mischief. The next day he rigged up a heavy stone under Mummy's bed. The stone was attached with a draw hitch tied to a string that ran out through a chink in the shutters. When Mummy had fallen asleep after lunch that day, Max pulled the string. This loosened the heavy stone that began to swing as a pendulum under the bed. Mummy

immediately woke up and gripped the edges of the bed, certain that the whole island was swaying in a major earthquake. No one could prove that Max had done it.

John, three years older than Max, was mature for his age and rarely did anything to embarrass the family. He was always busy investigating the habits of insects and plants. Everything in nature interested him. In the village he was known as the *philosophos* and the peasants respected him.

Telephone

There was no telephone in the Chlomos house. People wrote to each other in those days. Aunty Lily wrote beautifully composed letters in her fine copperplate handwriting. The post left Chlomos only once a week. The postman sometimes did not come because he was attending a wedding or some other important event, but no one was in a hurry and it did not matter.

Occasionally an urgent message had to be sent to town. At these times Aristidis would go to the priest's house in the village. The priest was in charge of the village telephone. Once the four of us children were allowed to go with Aristidis. It was a fine day. The village looked bright in the early morning sunshine. The friendly faces of the local peasants looked out of windows and doors, and greeted us as we went by. We responded politely to the greetings.

"Oh just look," I heard one of them saying. "Those are Siore Alice's children."

"Hasn't the little boy grown," said another. And, "Doesn't the girl look just like her mother."

The little white church with its bell tower stood next to the priest's house. Outside, on two green chairs sat the priest and a friend. A little child at his feet was playing with stones. The priest rose to greet us and shook hands all around. He looked like one of the great saints in the Greek icons, with his long black robes and *kabilafki*, the tall black head-dress worn by orthodox priests and his white beard and long hair worn in a bun at the back of his head.

Directing himself to us children he asked, "How is Krios Philipos?" and "How is the Kyria?" thus referring to Aunty Lily as 'the respected wife.' We answered. And he also asked after Mummy, "How is Kyria Alice?"

Then he ushered us into his little white house. On the wall opposite the entrance door was a black telephone. The priest walked ceremoniously up to the telephone, slowly and deliberately as if in a procession approaching something important. He put a small black trumpet to his ear and began turning a crank that was attached to the lower part of the contraption on the wall. There was no dial and there were no numbers. Soon a voice was head from far away, even by we who did not have the trumpet to our ears. Everyone yelled on the telephones in Greece in those days, as if they did not believe that sound could be made to travel through the wires otherwise.

My children tell me that I too spent my life yelling onto telephones; presumably this Greek habit had become so deeply imprinted on my unconscious that I was never able

to shake it even when using modern instruments that could have carried a whisper to the other ends of the globe.

The priest yelled at the voice in the machine and asked, “Who is that?”

Back came the reply. It was the bank, in town.

“I want the hotel, Bella Venetzia. We must make a reservation for some important guests of the Lavranos.” He shouted back, making the most of the occasion, as if it were a state event.

The bank clerk hung up the phone and the priest turned the crank again. He repeated the procedure a number of times, getting a lawyer’s office, the Municipal Chambers and a doctor’s surgery, among others, until eventually the desired connection had been made. Aristidis was then called to the telephone and after he had yelled for a while at the hotel receptionist our business with the telephone was concluded.

At that point a little old lady dressed in black came out with glasses of cold water from the spring and a spoonful of sour cherry conserve for each of us. She was the priest's wife. We took the proffered treats and the little old lady disappeared, upon which - after much hand shaking - we walked back to the big house. That was the first time that Neville and I had seen a telephone.

Christopher Lavrano

Unlike the rest of us who arrived by car or bus, Christopher Lavrano walked all the way from Corfu Town to Chlomos. Dressed in shorts and hiking boots and with a knapsack on his back, he would leave early in the morning and arrive late in the afternoon looking flushed and healthy, and always smiling broadly. He was very different from the lay-about young men I knew of in the leading Corfu families.

Christopher was an athletic and good-looking young man. He always appeared suntanned but possibly this was the natural colour of his golden Mediterranean skin. I think he used some hair treatment to make his shiny black hair stay in place. When he was formally dressed he smelt of soap and cleanliness.

Christopher's father, Uncle Angelo, was Uncle Philip’s younger brother. While Philip was a rural man who liked hunting, Uncle Angelo was an urbanite. He would take a daily constitutional, walking for about an hour, before returning to his office. If it was raining, he would walk up and down the covered walkway of the Liston Colonnade in Corfu Town. He had started the Boy Scouts and was the Head Scout in Corfu. In his youth Uncle Angelo had married Margot Galati, a beautiful Greek lady from Romania. He had been madly in love with his young wife. She died when Christopher was born.

Christopher was a handsome little boy who looked a lot like his mother. At the time of his wife's death Uncle Angelo, in a great melodramatic gesture, swore never to get married again and to make it his life's vocation to care for Christopher. He imported a nanny with good references from Scotland to take over the day-to-day duties of child rearing. Later he married the Corfiot society lady, Marie Dessylla, who had been Margot’s friend.

Christopher joined the Boy Scouts as soon as he was old enough. He sailed, played tennis, rode horses and went hiking all over the island. The first time that Christopher visited us at Chlomos, Mummy discovered that he spoke English with a strong Scottish brogue. Uncle Angelo could read English but not speak it fluently, so he was unaware of this. Mummy told Uncle Angelo that the boy would really have to learn to speak the King's English. So Christopher was given private elocution lessons at home. Later, he studied mechanical and electrical engineering at the Athens Polytechnic, a good university, and he finished third in his class.

On our last visit to Chlomos before the war, when I was about 11 years old and Christopher was 22, he called me Funny Face. I took that to be a great compliment. I imagined that I was madly in love in love with him. I watched him all the time when I thought no one would see me watching.

He was my cousin by Greek reckoning, although not a blood relative, but in Greece cousins many time removed, godparents and even best-men at weddings are considered relatives. Romance within these boundaries is strictly prohibited. I understood that.

I don't think he noticed me much.

Chapter Nine: Holidays in Europe

Rome

Greeks always spoke of going to Europe when they travelled west, as if Greece were in a world of its own or perhaps part of Asia. Our gateway to Europe was the little Italian port town of Brindisi, not much of a place in those days. We would go there Lux class on the Polikos. From Brindisi we would go up through Italy by train. It was fascinating to look out of the windows and see farms and villages fly by. More fascinating even were the jostling crowds on the stations and the vendors who sold delicious sausages and Chianti.

"Italy is much more civilised since the advent of Mussolini" was Mummy's comment when we reached Rome with our suitcases intact and passports still in our possession. Mummy kept us amused with graphic descriptions of the trams in Rome, which in the days before Mussolini, she said, were like moving fountains with people on board spitting out on all sides. Under Mussolini there were notices everywhere saying "*e vietato d sputare*." It is forbidden to spit.

Rome, like Athens, is very hot in summer so our holidays there were in spring or autumn. Mummy loved Rome with its museums, art galleries, churches and imposing buildings. We did a lot of walking; she never tired of revisiting the works of our favourite artists. Rafael was one of them. Neville and I always referred to a painting or a picture in a book that we particularly liked as a real Rafael and complimented each other on our drawings as being 'real Rafaels.' Many of the works we saw in Rome were familiar to us as Mummy had an extensive art library at home which we consulted during our home schooling.

Miss Gladys Creswell, an old friend of Mummy, lived in Rome and always welcomed us there. Gladys, Miss Cresswell to me, was a typical British spinster. More British than Devonshire tea yet she had a crush on Mussolini and was on first name terms with him.

Through Miss Cresswell, we had front row seats and saw Mussolini and heard him giving one of his theatrical speeches. He was an excellent orator. Politics did not come into it for me; this event was more like an exciting outing to the circus.

Switzerland

In Switzerland we stayed just outside the little village of Teufen with the Niederer family. He was the local taxi driver. The daughter of the household had worked as an au pair for Aunty Lily and the Lavranos cousins. Their house was a typical A-frame in the Swiss style with geraniums in window boxes, blue shutters and a tidy garden. The road just outside the garden was swept daily by Mrs Niederer and everything inside and outside was squeaky clean. The attic room above the ground floor living area was reserved for visitors. From there we had a magnificent view of the mountains beyond with the snow-capped peaks of the great mount Säntis.

Two little girls from the village, Marta and Milli Mittelhofer, often came up the mountain to play with me. I was allowed to take off my shoes and run barefoot with them through the surrounding meadows. I remember the excitement and delight of it all.

Wearing proper footwear, I went climbing with Mummy on well-trodden paths in the mountains. In those days everyone had a walking stick. I had one to fit my size. On reaching a certain altitude along the way we would stop for refreshments at little mountain cabins and be rewarded for our efforts with a small metal badge certifying that we had reached that point. These badges of honour were affixed to our walking sticks. I was very proud to have four of these. If I remember rightly the badge for the Säntis, or perhaps one of the others, was in the form of an edelweiss. Edelweiss and Alpen-roselein grew abundantly on those slopes.

We also visited Uncle Max Toman, a banker relative of Aunty Lily, who lived in Berne. Uncle Max had a country house on Lake Constance: Bodensee. It was a comfortable place with a large garden going right down to the lake where his boat was moored to a small private jetty. His elderly housekeeper kept the place warm and clean, cooked good food, welcomed guests and waited on Uncle Max.

On our first visit we were taken on an extended tour of the garden. It seemed to me that Uncle Max was personally introducing Mummy to every plant with great pride. Unfortunately I was desperate to make a wee and having been schooled not to speak to grown-ups unless spoken to I suffered in silence. When I could not hold on any longer I contrived to stand behind a rose bush with my head sticking out and the rest of me hidden from view. It was a great relief to feel the warm wee running down my legs. My shoes and socks were inundated but Uncle Max was so busy showing off his garden that he did not notice. Later, Mummy and Frau Niederer were very understanding and discreet about it all.

And Shopping in England

Mummy's trips to England were mainly for shopping and we usually did not accompany her on these journeys. Shopping was a serious business with lists of things that were best bought in England: Burberry Mackintoshes, Wellingtons, china replacements for our Spode dinner sets and Liberty fabrics, as well as items requested by friends. There was no extravagance or impulse buying on these trips; everything was planned carefully. Mummy always returned with her big cabin trunk full of exciting things.

On one visit to England, probably before Neville was born, we stayed in the naval town of Southsea. When weather permitted Erminia took me for a walk sitting bolt upright in my pram to take the air on the pier. After one such outing Erminia informed Mummy that she would not take me out of the house again. She had seen sailors sitting on park benches with girls wantonly on their laps. A small child should not see such debauchery, she was sure. After that Erminia was happy to stay at home in Greece.

Exciting as our European holidays were they remained rather unreal. I shall always remember the first glimpse of our harbour, on our homeward trip, with wide open arms welcoming us to its familiar embrace. As we neared our house I could see in my mind's eye Erminia with soft-boiled eggs and toast fingers ready for our supper and then a familiar cosy bed to sleep in.

Chapter Ten: Christmas in Argostoli

The Days Before Christmas

Easter is the big religious feast in Greece, not Christmas. However, our family celebrated Christmas with great gusto. We stretched the celebrations over many days.

Saint Nicholas is the German 'Sint Klaus' and his feast day is celebrated on the 6th of December. On this day Neville and I would be invited into Fotis' kitchen to help with the plum pudding. Fotis had already prepared the fruit, chopped up in little cubes: apples, figs, dates, Robola raisins and thin slivers of lemon peel. We all had a turn at mixing the rich thick dough. Cinnamon was ground and brandy was added. The dough was then put in a porcelain bowl, covered with a damp towel and put to mature in the ice cupboard. We would not see it again until Christmas day.

I don't remember any plums in our pudding. Perhaps we always made a Greek version of the English pudding.

On the 23rd of December the blue drawing room was closed off. The curtains of the French doors to the terrace were drawn shut. Neville and I were not permitted in. A tall Cephalonian pine tree was set up. The rooms in our house had high ceilings; the tree took advantage of this. Once, Neville and I entered the room in error. We saw Marino on a ladder attaching an angel to the pinnacle of the tree. We quickly backed away, hoping we had not been noticed.

Christmas Eve German Style

On the 24th of December we celebrated Christmas in the German style. That evening after dinner Erminia, Neville and I would stand outside the drawing room, with an excited tumbling in our tummies, waiting patiently to be admitted. Mummy would open the door for us from inside the drawing room and welcome us in. Every year we were overwhelmed by the sight of the tree and the smell of pine and candles. It was winter and quite cool inside the house despite the many fireplaces; the tree radiated warmth into the room.

The tree was hung with the home-made decorations that had been passed down from generation to generation. Others had been purchased in England or Germany and added to the collection. There was a great variety and some of these were very special. I had once made one by embroidering decorations on a cloth that was fitted over a fibrous ball. Some of the decorations were shells of sea urchins. My grandmother's decorations had come from Germany, and were painted wooden figures including little soldiers, little drums and little sleds with boxes on them; everything was small and brightly coloured. Many branches had been covered with cotton wool 'snow'.

We could see Fotis standing behind the tree, with both hands wrapped in wet towels. When he heard a little bit of crackling, indicating that a candle had set a branch on fire, he would bang the branch, clapping out the flames, but most of the time he remained standing there, hidden behind the tree.

A few close friends would be present. I remember Marino Kosmetatos always being there. Ioanna Kosmetatos was often present. My grandmother, whom Neville and I called Nona, was seated in the same armchair every year. She was portly and her white hair was neatly pulled back into a bun. Great Aunty Ellen, Nona's sister, was always present. She sat quietly and watched.

On the table where Mummy kept her trophies and figurines she had arranged a small Christmas nativity scene. The figures were made of wood and painted in bright colours. Some of the pieces were cracked and all were worn at the edges. They were very old and very beautiful. No one took much notice of the nativity scene. We were so keen to see what presents we were going to get that we forgot about that.

We looked at the French doors that opened on to the terrace where Father Christmas was going to enter. We waited in trepidation for his coming, for he was a pretty terrifying German Father Christmas.

Then we heard an almighty knock on the door. Father Christmas had come at last.

Max Vlachos, the opera singer of Cephalonia, was always our German Father Christmas, although he was as Greek as Greek could be. We knew that it was Max Vlachos but on this evening he really became Father Christmas; somehow we entered into the role play, suspending completely our disbelief. He was big and portly.

Father Christmas carried two sacks. One contained birch sticks with which to spank naughty children. The other contained gifts. We didn't think we had been naughty,

but we never could tell. He would open the sack with birch sticks and rattle them. Then he would reprimand us in one way or another. One year, I remember, he reprimanded us for speaking Greek to each other. Word had come to him, he said in Greek, that we had been very naughty in this matter. In the future, he instructed us, we had better speak English. He looked threateningly at us and rattled the sack of birch sticks again. Neville sucked in his breath and tried to hide behind me.

“But you have been mostly good,” he would say and then he would open the other sack. Max Vlachos spoke the Greek of the Islands and could sing in Italian, but he spoke no other languages.

Most presents were things that had been made for us. They were often things that we needed. But one Christmas Neville got a small car with pedals. He could sit in it and by pushing the pedals he could drive around. I received a bed jacket knitted by someone, possibly Ioanna Kosmetatos, Marino's sister. I looked at the car and wished that I could have had one too.

One Christmas my grandmother gave me a watch with a diamond on it. At the same Christmas, Erminia gave me a very cheap watch. Most ladies had jewel boxes from which they would occasionally give each other gifts. I had seen Erminia's jewel box and knew that it contained a pair of pendant gold earrings that she had inherited from her mother and nothing else. I new that the watch had been bought for me and I knew that it had been difficult for her to pay for even that watch. From then on, I always wore Erminia's watch. On important occasions Erminia would insist that I put on the jewelled watch that my grandmother had given me.

After the presents had been opened, Káte would come in with a tray of German Christmas biscuits made by Nona. This was a highlight to the evening; the smell of the biscuits would fill the room and remind us of every prior Christmas. Everyone congratulated Nona and said what excellent biscuits they were.

Once, I watched Father Christmas seat himself on the divan, making it creak. He began to gobble down the biscuits as fast as he could. Káte saw this. She removed the tray and carried it around to each person individually. I watched as Káte passed by Max Vlachos on her second time around the room. He took a hold of the tray with one hand, preventing Káte from moving forward, and with the other hand started taking more biscuits from the tray. A sort of restrained tug of war ensued. At that moment the Father Christmas illusion vanished in a flash. The familiar pattern of Mr Vlachos’ greed betrayed the gluttonous buffoon inside the costume.

At the end of the evening, Great Aunt Ellen would take a candle from the tree and place it in front of the nativity scene, fixing it to the table with a drop of hot wax. Then she and Nona would sing Christmas carols in German and English, and we would all join in.

> Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!
> Alles schläft; einsam wacht
> Nur das traute hoch heilige Paar.

Holder Knab' im lockigen Haar,
Schlafe in himmlischer Ruh!

Singing the Kalanda

The kitchen was on our level of the house, one above the street. Steps from the lane came up to a small landing outside the kitchen door. On Christmas Eve some children from very poor families would come to the kitchen door, chanting in thin little voices. They would ting on a home-made triangle and a bang a tin of some kind. They always had happy expressions on their faces.

The chants were not what you would expect at Christmas in Europe. In the traditional pentatonic scale of Orthodox rituals they would tell the story of Saint Basil who always seemed to be coming from Caesarea with an ink pot, and would bid the listeners come and sing with them. Saint Basil is the Greek Father Christmas.

The children were invited into the entrance hall. We were invited to listen to their chanting. This was very exciting for us, as they were the only children present on Christmas day. And these were little street urchins whom we would not normally meet. We stood there in our pyjamas for this was usually well past our bed time. We generally went to bed no later than eight o'clock. That was not so for Greek children, who on other days of the year might be up helping in their fathers' cafes until 11 at night, or later. I rather hoped that we might be allowed to play with them but that never happened.

They were poor and it was cold at Christmas so Fotis would give them a hot chocolate, pieces of English cake and some coins. I seem to remember that they were barefoot, but that surely cannot have been the case in the middle of winter. Maybe it was.

Christmas Day British Style

On Christmas Day, we celebrated a typical British Christmas. We had gone to sleep on Christmas Eve with empty stockings at the feet of our beds. When we woke up the stockings were full of little treasures: Little tin soldiers for Neville; a doll made of celluloid for me; a few marbles each; small chocolates and other little surprises.

Christmas Lunch was a big feast. Neville and I ate in the dining room with the grownups. Turkey was served, which had been pre-carved by Fotis, so expertly that it did not show on the outside. We served ourselves with the silver service. Turkey with chestnut stuffing and cabbage salad cut very fine and dressed with oil and lemon was supposed to be English food but it had been made with a distinctly Greek flavour.

Then our plum pudding would be served. Fotis would finish the plum pudding in the kitchen, pour brandy over it and set it alight so that a bluish flame would leap to and fro across the pudding. A twig of holly on the top would catch fire and crackle, sputtering orange and yellow. Then Fotis carried it like this into the dining room. This was a grand spectacle. I remember glancing at Neville once and seeing his eyes and mouth wide open at the wonder of it.

Chrisanthi would follow Fotis, bearing the brandy sauce that she made each year. It was passed around and everybody clapped for Chrisanthi and told her what a wonderful person she was.

Boxing Day

Fotis and all his family members got something at Christmas. This was given in an envelope. It was probably money. You would never have given money to family members; that would have been quite improper. It was given on Boxing Day.

On Boxing Day every year we would go on a scenic tour. Vangelis would arrive early in the morning to help us pack the picnic into the boot. This was a long drive to some high point on the island but not the peaks, which were under snow at that time of year.

Once, when we were going with Nona and Max Vlachos, I started singing "*Oh Tannenbaum."* I was hoping to impress Max Vlachos with my singing. I sang the first verse:

> O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum,
> Wie grün sind deine Blätter!
> Du grünst nicht nur zur Sommerzeit,
> Nein, auch im Winter, wenn es schneit.
> O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum,
> Wie treu sind deine Blätter!

Max Vlachos took no notice. So I started singing again. I didn't know the other verses.

During the third time around, he said, not addressing anyone in particular, "Can someone stop this child. I cannot bear it anymore." I was rather crestfallen and fell silent: Very hurt, actually, as I thought that I had been entertaining everyone and was doing so in his honour.

Chapter Eleven: Great Aunt Ellen

Mila

Great Aunt Ellen like her sister, my grandmother, had been educated by various governesses and had completed finishing school in Frankfurt am Main in Germany. As was expected of young ladies at that time, Aunt Ellen was well read, spoke three languages fluently, played the piano, embroidered, knitted and painted attractive watercolours of flowers after the fashion of Queen Victoria's sketchbooks. She had been prepared for the role of good wife and mother.

When she was nineteen Ellen was married to a man of the Mila family. I've never known his Christian name since he was referred to only as Mila. Something tells me that he might have been called Gerasimos.

Mila had inherited extensive properties in Cephalonia around Elios as well as various business interests in Europe. He must have been considered a good match. After an exciting honeymoon in Paris, Mila brought Ellen back to his ancestral estate. The family home, which had not been lived in for many years, was freshly painted and

made welcoming for the young bride. From the terrace Ellen could see the Mila property stretching down the hill to the inimitable blue Ionian Sea below. She would be happy here.

Once Ellen was comfortably ensconced, Mila left to attend business in Romania. Ellen prepared the house for his return. And she waited. I can imagine her, now, far from family and friends, sitting on the terrace anticipating all that was to come and wondering quite how it would work out. To fill her days she would go down to the vineyards and olive groves to watch the hired peasants at work. She took an interest in everything that went on: the women and children who picked the ripe olives, the men at work in the vineyards, the barefoot shepherd boy and the cook's vegetable garden.

In Charge

One day Ellen gave up waiting. She packed away her smart city clothes, put on a plain black dress, pensioned off the managers who had been running the estate and took charge.

The peasants watched, anticipating disaster. "No good will come of this," they told each other. "Who does she think she is? She shall surely come to grief." The women looked on with anxious sympathy. On Cephalonia the village women, in addition to caring for the children, did the cooking, the cleaning, the sewing and the mending, and most of the work in the fields. They were competent and strong and sure of themselves, but right in their place. The men of Cephalonia, who thought they ran everything, generally sat about in the taverns boasting, talking politics and philosophy, about which they knew everything, and drinking sweet dark coffee. They played backgammon and had opinions about the foreign woman. However, under Ellen's firm but just management the property thrived, including the beehives she imported. The shepherd boy received a pair of shoes. The people learned to love and respect her.

The Estate

Mummy was particularly fond of Aunt Ellen and we would occasionally take the long journey to Elios in the old Ford car. Aunt Ellen was always smiling, though stern somehow, dressed in black and with her pure white hair in a neat bun. Everything was tidy: the gleaming white terrace with its panoramic view, the flowers in the garden, the lines of tomato plants, the rows of green vegetables and the stone-walled checker board gardens of sweet smelling herbs and an orderly orchard where lemon and orange trees seemed always to be heavy with fruit. There in the springtime the almond trees were covered in white blossoms. Spring, it seemed, came to Aunt Ellen's garden before it had arrived anywhere else.

The house was not so exciting for us children. Shutters were generally closed to keep out the glare and the smell of furniture polish hung in the air. Heavy dark-wood shone dully like black mirrors. After the bright sunshine the house seemed gloomy and hollow, small inside and yet too big for its emptiness. Outside, under the stairs, Aunt Ellen kept her supply of firewood stacked so neatly that it seemed to have become a picture in a children's story book; was that her Swiss-German way of doing things, or

was that, the care she gave to land and house, her way of loving an absent landlord, one who never saw these things so that the orderliness of it all became a mask with which to hide abandonment? I was too small and innocent to know these things. And yet I knew these things. Such is the innocence of small children.

Aunt Ellen's Visits

As Aunt Ellen became older, Mummy increasingly worried about her living alone and so far from the family but she dared not suggest to Aunt Ellen that she leave her beloved Elios. Sometimes Mummy would prevail on her to visit us in Argostoli for a few days.

In my grandmother's part of the house was a bedroom waiting for Aunt Ellen. The room was bright, with whitewashed walls and a view of the sea, a big brass bed, two armchairs, a bureau, cupboard and an ornate porcelain washstand with an elegant jug. On the wall hung a beautiful Byzantine icon of The Mother and Child that watched you wherever you stood in the room. It was a respected place. I once sat there watching the Virgin and listening.

When Aunt Ellen came she played the piano with my grandmother and sang the German songs they had learned as girls. She never stayed a day longer than promised.

Mila Returns

One day a registered letter with a French postmark came for Aunt Ellen. It was from Mila. He would be coming home.

Aunt Ellen was terribly excited and came to town to tell us all about it. She went to the dentist to fix her teeth, to the dressmaker and to the hairdresser. When Mila arrived I saw that he was not a knight in shining armour but an old man with white hair, though tall and well groomed in his elegant attire.

Aunt Ellen was delighted. Mila took her to Paris where he bought her a diamond broach, a fur coat and a great many fashionable dresses. Then they returned to the house with the white terrace and the faraway view of the sea.

Three months after his return Mila died. He was sitting on the terrace looking out to sea when his heart stopped. Aunt Ellen buried him in the family mausoleum and returned to wearing black dresses. I can picture her now, sitting on her terrace in the evening, white hair shining like a moon-lit halo, motionless as late twilight conjures cool breezes that furnish her with their night-time sighs. She was, however, like all the women of our family, strong and capable and self assured and not given to maudlin thoughts.

Aunt Ellen became close to the people she knew and worked with every day. These were the peasants. With age she became shorter and her gait became slower. A passerby, seeing her in the orchard, would have supposed her to be a peasant woman. Of course, her English remained beautiful, her German perfect, her French – which she spoke with a slight Swiss-German accent – crisp and clear, and her formal Greek that of educated Athenians. But she had ceased to speak these languages. The Greek she spoke every day became the Greek of the islanders. Her life became resonant with

the seasons, the harvest and the rhythm of feast days; her concerns revolved about the births, marriages and deaths among her people. To the end, she governed Elios, which had become hers, in dignified authority touched with motherly love.

Chapter Twelve: Moving Upstairs

Ernest Saunders and the Business

My grandfather left his business to Mummy and Ernest Saunders, my mother's cousin. Mummy was to be the sleeping partner and Ernest was to run the business. My grandfather considered that Mummy, being a woman, would be unable to understand business affairs. At that time he was probably right.

Ernest Saunders, like all the Saunders boys, had been sent to Stonyhurst. Unlike my grandfather, he did not appear to excel in sports or learning. When he was a young teenager old he stole a gold pocket watch from one of the masters. He was caught and sent home in disgrace.

Ernest's misdemeanour was never discussed but was not forgotten. He was referred to as Ernest, never Uncle Ernest. He remained in Cephalonia, married a Greek woman named Lela and had a son whom we did not get to know. The son's name may have been Henry. My grandfather had been the only one in the family to befriend Ernest. In his opinion Ernest deserved a second chance and he gave him a job in his export business.

During my grandfather's days the business had provided a comfortable living for the family. Profits from good years went to the peasants who supplied the currants. Things changed when Ernest took over. He began to draw heavily on the company. The island folk got less and less for their contribution.

A delegation of villagers came to see my grandmother. She was concerned but powerless to help. Mummy appointed my father, Eric Raymond, to be her proxy in the business. But Eric had no experience in commercial matters and he did not understand the subtleties of Ernest's business dealings. He enjoyed Ernest's friendship and believed the flattery that fed and tamed him. He adopted Ernest's lavish lifestyle.

One day, while Neville and I were watching the boats in the harbour from our nursery window, a small seaplane appeared, descended and skimmed along the flat water. It came to a stop in front of our house. Various people on the road were watching in wonder. To our surprise and delight Ernest and my father emerged from the aircraft. That was the start of the wild spending spree that the two of them got up to.

In good times their extravagant ways may have been possible, but the world was suffering in the aftermath of the Great Depression. European markets had collapsed. The currant business went bankrupt. Many people on the island lost their livelihoods. The liquidator gave people permission to go to our house and take anything that could be sold to provide cash for their families. No one came. The people loved my

grandfather, James Saunders, and respected our family too much, even all that time after his death.

Divorce

There were, around that time, frequent conversations to which Neville and I were not privy, and my father disappeared from our lives. Mummy told us that he would be living in England from now on. At first I imagined that I would miss him. He had occasionally spoken to me in the way grown-ups did. But so many interesting and unusual things happened after his departure that I hardly thought of him again.

We saw Papsy again, once. He came from England to visit Neville and me. We went with him for a long drive all the way around the island, or so it seemed. We had been warned to be on our best behaviour and didn't talk much. When we got home he gave us each a present. I was given a large yellow teddy bear with an electric flex hanging from its mouth. At the end of the flex was a pear shaped switch that could be used to light the teddy bear's eyes. I propped it up at the end of my bed but never played with it. It didn't fit with the rest of my toys. I realized that he meant to please me but didn't know how. I didn't know how to please him.

Much later Papsy sent his lawyer from England, Mr Stoneham. He was a kindly man with white hair and a long white beard. Mummy said that he was a real gentleman. We were introduced to him in the drawing room. He asked us what sport we played but we didn't know what he meant. He then asked if we liked swimming in the sea and we said we did. Before leaving he gave Neville a large silver pound sterling. In Greece only servants received tips. Neville did not know what to do with the pound sterling.

One day when Mummy was reading to us she stopped and seemed to be thinking of something else. We waited for her to resume but she closed the book, looked at us seriously and said, "We are going to be poor from now on." I had seen a picture in one of our books of a little poor girl holding a basket of eggs she had collected. Her feet were bare and she was very pretty. I quite liked the idea. I expected that I too would go barefoot and collect freshly laid eggs. However, nothing much changed. Fotis and family remained, Erminia took care of us and various governesses came and went as before. We moved upstairs to my grandmother's part of the house. The offices on the ground floor and our living quarters on the first floor remained empty. Maria, our seamstress, made white covers for the furniture from bolts of linen. The house where we had lived became quite a ghostly place. The move upstairs, however, was quite an adventure because our day nursery, now called the playroom, moved up to my grandfather's attic.

Mummy never said anything derogatory to us about our father. On the contrary, she wanted us to be proud of our Raymond family heritage. She told us that our family had originated in France; Raymond de Toulouse, a crusader who had fought with the Duke of Antioch was an ancestor of ours. She told us about Commander George Raymond who had been a worthy midshipman aboard the Shannon. She reminded us that our father had been awarded the Distinguished Service Order with bar for his bravery in the Great War. But by the many things she did not say, I knew that she and

he had not been happy together. And like so many things that I knew without knowing that I knew, I knew this.

Later, when I was an adult, she said that his shortcomings were not his fault, but of his upbringing that had given him the idea that the world owed him a living. His mother had told him to depend on relatives who would die and leave him everything they had. He was eventually left an amount of money. Fortunately, it was left in a trust so he could receive it in small instalments only.

Adenes

Doctor Kurvisiano had diagnosed *adenes*, too many hot humours in my blood. He was not a quack. He had studied in Austria and had measured my temperature under my armpit; it was consistently too high at 37.2 degrees, he said. He recommended eating raw eggs and regular changes of air as prophylaxis. I don't think there was anything wrong with me at all.

I had to suck the jolly raw eggs out. At those times I was really sure that there was nothing wrong with me. However, I did like the holidays for changes of air. Once Doctor Kurvisiano arranged for a trip to Innsbruck, in Austria, and came at our expense to observe my recovery. He spent most of the time visiting friends of his, people he knew from his student days. Mummy and I visited the house with a golden roof, built by Archduke Friedrich IV. Inside, the Archduke had assembled a collection of full-length statues of famous people who, the Archduke thought, were related to his illustrious family. Among them were statues of many recent German nobles and also ancient Romans and Greeks. King Arthur of the Round Table was included. I was fascinated by this. King Arthur was in full armour, leaning on his sword with his head forward as if mourning or in deep contemplation.

No one ever declared that I was cured and the holidays for changes of air continued.

I remember a holiday I took with Mummy in San Candido near Cortina d'Ampezzo. Neville was not with us, nor was Erminia. We stayed in a delightful hotel overlooking a green valley and forests beyond.

Mr Ugolini, an Italian friend of Mummy, came to join us and we spent happy times together. He held my hands and swung me around and around. He and Mummy were always smiling and laughing. He was a gentleman. He wore a fedora and looked very suave, I thought. I liked him.

Mr Ugolini was a famous archaeologist working on the ruins of Butrinto in Albania. After much study and some conjecture he had developed a theory about the origins of the Italian people and the existence of an ancient empire from before the time of Rome that extended as far as Albania to the east and Malta to the west. These theories suited Mussolini's propaganda and so Ugolini was given generous funding for his expeditions. He became known as Mussolini's Archaeologist and was laughed at for distorting science to political ends. But this was to change. Ugolini's careful reading of ancient documents and maps led him to identify the location of the hitherto lost centre of the ancient town. He unearthed a theatre and ancient walls, including the now famous Lion Gate of Butrinto. Furthermore, his discoveries supported his theory.

Then everyone wanted to know Mr Luigi Maria Ugolini. Mussolini honoured him by erecting a statue of him in his native town, which was also Mussolini's own birthplace.

Ugolini knew how to please the politicians of his time but he was not interested in politics. His passion and his dreams were in Albania where, despite poor health and trouble from old war wounds, he worked day and night uncovering the old city. He was also a romantic. He believed that the Trojan hero Aenaes had visited Butrinto after the fall of Troy. Ancient classics, including Homer's Iliad and Virgil's Aeneid, provided him with inspiration. Mummy shared these interests and was very much under the spell of this attractive and brilliant man. She had often visited the site of his works. They would sit up late at night outside their tents, lighted only by the moon and the dying remains of a campfire, discussing the classics and imagining the lives of ancient heroes together.

Long after our holiday in San Candido Mummy told me that Ugolini had proposed marriage to her at that little hotel. He wished to adopt me but to send Neville to his father in England. He felt that he could not adopt someone else's son, whose name should not be changed. Mummy regretfully refused.

Later Ugolini became ill and it was discovered that his days were numbered. Against doctors' advice he continued with his arduous work and commenced writing a book about the discoveries. It was a race against time, he had written to Mummy.

Some time after our return to Argostoli, I saw Mummy sitting at the writing table with a letter. Some photographs of her and Ugolini and of his excavations were on the table. She was looking at them when I came into the room. She looked at me and for a moment I saw a look of sadness on her face: Just a flash and then it was gone. She squared herself upright on the chair, put the photographs and the letter into an envelope, put the envelope into a box, put the box into the drawer at the writing table and closed the drawer. Then she said, "Well, that's that."

Mummy had wanted to care for Ugolini but decided that her duty lay elsewhere. In the end Ugolini required full-time nursing. Mummy prevailed on an English lady who had long been secretly in love with him to take up the challenge. In deference to her, Mummy did not see Mr Ugolini again. Only the happy memories remained.

Grandmother Grows Old

After my grandfather died, my grandmother lost her inclination for travelling to Paris, Rome, Athens or even Corfu. She was content to stay in Argostoli surrounded by old friends and family. The dinner parties that she had been known for became smaller, more intimate affairs and less frequent. However, her matriarchal status did not diminish. She still made cherry brandy, cooked crisp spicy German biscuits at Christmas and presided over the family.

During our stay on the second floor Mummy, my brother and I shared the large bedroom that had been my grandparents room. A small anteroom, originally used as a dressing room, connected the bedroom to the rest of the house. When we moved in,

Mummy converted this into the dog's room with a velvet *chaise longue* for Jip and Joke to sleep on.

The living room, which was in daily use, was a happy place to visit despite its heavy brown velvet curtains and aspidistras. An open fire made it comfortable in winter. A small wind-up organ played three tunes, fast at first and slow at the end. Neville was fascinated with this object and called it the domoule, a word he made up. One of the tunes it played was *Eine Kleine Nacht Music*.

Overlooking the bay was the spare bedroom kept for Great Aunt Ellen's visits. My grandfather's library came next. The walls were covered with shelves from floor to ceiling, loaded with gold embossed hardcover leather-bound books including the prizes he had won in his school days. When we moved in, Mummy added her own books, many of which were paperback Penguins, a very modern and economical invention of that time. They looked rather out of place in those elegant shelves.

On the left side of the building overlooking the lane were the upstairs kitchen, the schoolroom and the sewing room with the stairs to my grandfather's attic. The attic was our new playroom and it became a familiar space into which we brought our things.

Overlooking the lane was a spare room, which became my grandmother's bedroom when we moved in. Sometimes, when the noise from the taverna below floated up, my grandmother would toss water from her flower vase to the lane below. It would land with a splash and silence would be restored. In Corfu people were known to empty chamber pots out of windows without warning.

Doing the Rounds

Doing the visiting rounds and receiving visitors were the done things. When my grandmother felt so inclined she would arrange for a carriage. Helped by the coachman she would ascend and lower her small plump self into the seat of honour, facing the coachman and horses. Oh how regal she appeared, sitting perfectly upright and elegant in the sombre colours appropriate for a widow of her age. She wore a black hat cocked slightly to one side to show her neatly coiffed white hair. Opposite her in the carriage sat a maid holding my grandmother's visiting cards.

When I was ten and getting to be quite a lady, I was invited to accompany my grandmother. I was given the responsibility for holding the cards, which were carried in a small bag. I was really chuffed, and sat up perfectly straight. Our first stop was at a stately house in the centre of town.

"Out you go," said my grandmother. "Ring the front doorbell and wait for a maid to appear."

The coach was very high above the ground. The house was very big. The door was really huge. I did not know the people there, not one bit. I was only ten, and not quite a lady. Then I saw my grandmother's stern gaze and remembered what Nelson had said, "England expects every man to do his duty."

So. I stood down from the coach. I went up the steps. I looked about for a bell, but there was none. A gleaming brass knocker seemed the only means to announce our arrival. I knocked as hard as I could. I waited. I knew that it was not becoming of a lady to knock more than once.

Then a maid opened the door and looked at me dubiously. She seemed annoyed. I handed her one of Nona's cards as I had been instructed. She took it and closed the door at me. Nona remained sitting perfectly upright and stern. I glimpsed someone peeking out from behind the shutters of a window on the upper floor. I heard footsteps and the maid returned, this time with a pleasant look on her face.

"The lady of the house is not receiving guests," she said. "She is indisposed." Upon which the maid exchanged a knowing glance with the coachman and closed the door again.

On our next stop another maid answered my call and received the card, in just the same manner as at the first place. A moment later the lady of the house came bouncing out to meet my grandmother, talking happily and bobbing up and down like a dove on a branch. She helped my grandmother step from the carriage and kissed her on both cheeks. My cheeks were pinched. Then she ushered us through an entrance hall hung with gilt-framed mirrors and into a small sitting room dominated by a large piano. Pots of aspidistras on tall stands and various ornaments stood about the room. Straight-backed armchairs with velvet upholstery were provided. My grandmother was offered a glass of water and sour cherry conserve. I was given a small bowl of red caramel-coated almonds, a delicacy of the island called *mandoles*. After some chit-chat and exchange of news my grandmother took her leave. We departed before I had finished the *mandoles*.

At home Nona received cards in the same way from visiting ladies and she, too, was usually not receiving guests. The cards were mounted on the big sideboard until Nona started cooking biscuits and cakes. The cards would then be used to scoop the remains of mixture from the bowls.

Visits to and from close friends were conducted on invitation, not on card dropping formalities.

Shortly after my eleventh birthday Nona sent for me. She told me that I was old enough to have my own visiting cards. These she presented to me, wrapped in white tissue paper tied with a pink ribbon. I opened the package carefully. There they were: shiny white cards with 'Miss Raymond' emblazoned in black. I wondered why it was Miss Raymond and not Vivian Iris Raymond. I thanked Nona but said nothing more. But she seemed to read my mind.

"You, Iris, are the eldest daughter of the Raymond family. You are the only one who may use the title Miss without your Christian names. And you must."

I understood that this to be an honour of sorts. I treasured those cards but never used them.

Mr Vasso's Hat

Mr Vasso had been the chief clerk in my grandfather's currant business. Mr Vasso, a loyal and good man whose job filled his life, never married. In my grandfather's days he used to visit once a week and the two men spent the evening exchanging ideas about this and that.

After my grandfather died Mr Vasso continued to visit once a week, always on the same day, to pay his respects to the widow of his former employer. He came in the late afternoon. In Greece, the main meal of the day is taken at lunchtime so Mr Vasso would come for a light supper and stay to play a game of cards.

My grandmother always received him in the schoolroom, a room that had been set aside for generations of family children to be schooled at home. It was a comfortable room with an open fireplace, a rocking chair and a *chaise longue* that no one sat in. In the middle of the room were solid chairs about a large heavy table. A massive sideboard with a built-in mirror was installed against one wall. Half way up the mirror was a solid ornate shelf upon which stood a line of tall glass jars full of cherries in brandy, reflected in the mirror.

Cherry brandy was one of my grandmother's specialties. When cherries were in season the pick would be processed in the kitchen under her eagle eye. Neville and I were each occasionally allowed one plump red cherry doused in brandy: a real treat.

Mr Vasso always wore a hat when he came to the house. He wore his hat when he rang the front door bell, he wore his hat when he was ushered into the house and he wore his hat when the maid led him into the schoolroom. He was the only person who entered our house with his hat on.

After an appropriate delay my grandmother would enter the schoolroom to receive him. Only then, and only after the door had been firmly closed, did he take off his hat. He would take it off with great solemnity and from its depths he would conjure forth a small bunch of field flowers for Siora Barbara. He would present them to her with a tidy bow. She would receive them with a suitable nod and thanks. Then they would be seated at opposite sides of the large heavy table for the supper and a game of cards.

Mummy had issued a general instruction to Erminia to take us upstairs to say good night to Nona each evening before we retired to bed. When Mr Vasso was visiting, however, we were not to be taken to the schoolroom. At first we wondered what might be going on up there. Later we discovered that his table manners were too terrible to be exposed to impressionable children as we. He would dip his bread into the sauce on his plate to soak up some of the juices, we were told. Neville and I understood immediately; Greek sauces are well worth dipping into. Once when Erminia was not watching, we tried it too.

Mr Vasso's News

One evening when Mr Vasso came on his weekly visit there was something about his countenance which made my grandmother think he had some news to tell: some occurrence in the town, perhaps a marriage, a birth, a breakout from the prison or

even a royal visit. His appearance was the same as always, the grey striped suit that he had worn for years, the same tie, the same knitted waistcoat and the same hat. But there was a gleam in the old man's eyes that belied his years. My grandmother being a very proper lady did not prompt him in any way. She waited. The usual greetings took place.

"Hello Vasso and welcome."

"Good evening Siora Barbara and how are you?"

"Well, thanks be to God."

The field flowers were presented and received.

The light supper was served and when the plates were cleared away by the maid, playing cards were produced. Mr Vasso began to shuffle the cards in the deliberate manner as he always did on these occasions. And then he began to tell his news.

"Something wonderful happened to me last night," he said. "I went with my friends to the theatre and watched a cinematic motion picture of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. It was in German but that did not bother me because I had heard the story before on a radio play, and besides there were Greek subtitles." He paused perhaps hoping that my grandmother might consider also going to the theatre.

"Ah yes!" she said. "Shakespeare in German is even better than in English."

"I wish you had seen it. It was beautifully done." Mr Vasso added.

"Well, if it was so good maybe the children should be the ones to see it."

So, Mummy was duly told and it was decided that we should see *Romeo and Julie*t in German.

We had never been to the theatre before. We were dressed in our best clothes for the occasion. Neville wore dark blue velvet shorts, a frilly embroidered white shirt and a many-coloured woven jacket with pompoms; I wore a hand embroidered smock.

At that time there was only one theatre in Argostoli. It had been built for live performances. A removable screen was added later to the venue that, nevertheless, remained essentially an opera house. Neville and I were quite overawed by the magnificence of the place, by the red velvet seats in our logue, by the view of the people sitting in rows below and the elaborate wall decorations. It was truly a palace of high culture.

At first the projector misbehaved, probably because it had been threaded incorrectly. The picture jerked rapidly up and down on the screen and the machine somewhere behind us made a rattling ratcheting sound. It was turned off and for a moment an orange glow appeared on the screen. Then the room went dark. We waited silently with the rest of the people. Then a man appeared on the stage and explained that the 'cinematicon' was being restarted.

After a few more false starts the film began: oh wonder of wonders. It seemed like a dream to us. That it was black and white, and rather jerky did not trouble us at all. Our

minds were transported and our hearts were moved by the untimely deaths of the lovers. Towards the finish we struggled to keep our eyes open but persevered. When the show was over and the lights went on, everyone in the theatre clapped and cheered.

The next morning after breakfast Neville and I took my doll and lay her out on the nursery dining table. Death seemed fascinating and unreal to us. To make the doll's resting place appropriate we went out to the terrace and picked some of Mummy's best geraniums, which we sprinkled over our Juliet. When Káte came in with our lunch she threatened to tell Mummy about the flowers and unceremoniously picked up the doll and sat it on the rocking horse.

Some time later we saw *Othello* in the same theatre. *"Hast du schon zur Nachtgebete,"* Othello's advice to his victim before murdering her, seemed appropriate to us. We were especially interested in *Othello* because we had been told that the original person, on whom Shakespeare had based his character, had been a Querini Admiral in our family. He was nicknamed 'the moor' because of his swarthy complexion and deep tan from standing on the deck of his ship, hunting down the pirates of the Ionian Sea.

The third time, we were taken to the theatre to hear a live Verdi opera. This was a grand occasion. Everyone took opera very seriously on the island. Italian opera companies visited the island on a regular basis. The quality of the performances varied greatly but rumour had it that this was a top company with first class singers. Everyone in the theatre arrived in high spirits.

When the big velvet curtains opened Neville and I were amazed by the realistic stage setting and the elaborate costumes. The soprano and tenor were outstanding, not only for their singing but also for their appearance. The tenor was a thin little man in a jewelled waistcoat and a surprisingly powerful voice. The prima donna was a big woman who towered over him. Neville particularly enjoyed watching her ample bosom tremble and heave as she breathed. Her hands clasped in front of her, she seemed to us to sing like a nightingale.

Everyone was spellbound and listened in absolute silence until she broke into a splendid coloratura at which everyone in the theatre went quite mad. They cheered, they clapped and they called out Bravo! Bravo! Then they began to throw bouquets and even items of jewellery onto the stage. In the melee that ensued one rather solid bouquet of flowers hit the prima donna squarely on the chest and seemed to take her breath away, for she stopped singing altogether and looked quite forlorn. Attendants rushed out of the wings with handkerchiefs and glasses of water for the shocked prima donna.

Silence fell on the over-zealous opera lovers and the curtains were drawn. A few moments later a bald man with a big moustache parted the curtains and stepped out to advise that the performance would resume shortly and asked the patrons to control their enthusiasm until the finish. All went beautifully after that. The particular aria that had been interrupted was not attempted again that night. When the curtains closed

for the last time we all clapped until our arms hurt but the singers did not come out to take a bow.

Neville and I greatly enjoyed the events of that evening and have loved opera ever since. It is hard for young people today to imagine the impact that this event had on our lives. We dreamed the opera for months afterwards.

My Stay with Aunt Emma

Some time after her 80th birthday, my grandmother became ill. At first nothing much seemed to change. Neville and I were asked to be quiet in the schoolroom. The servants went into and out of her room more often, and more quietly. Dr Kurvisiano came and went. Then I was sent to stay with my Aunt Emma, Uncle Philip's sister who lived in Corfu Town.

Aunt Emma's house stood on its own and was surrounded by a white wall enclosing a small front garden in which stood a tall magnolia tree. It is to this house and this Aunt, whom I did not know well, that I was dispatched at the time of my grandmother's illness. I was sent there without Erminia, abandoned to the mercy of Aunt Emma and her elderly maidservant.

Aunt Emma tried to be kind, but kept reminding me that it was a great responsibility to look after me. There was nothing to do. Every day and at all times she had me dolled up in my party dresses, like a little princess. She wanted me to look pretty if anyone visited. Hardly anyone did.

One day I climbed the magnolia tree and Aunt Emma was gripped with panic.

"Oh dear, oh dear! Come please come down quick! Oh what a danger! Oh dear, what a responsibility. You might scrape your knee or tear your dress."

We never went anywhere all the time I was with her and I knew boredom for the first and last time in my life. Going home to Argostoli was a great relief.

The Icon

One day, while I was away, Mummy, with Fotis, Chrisanthi, Káte and Andriani gathered about my grandmother's bed. Aunty Lily had also come from Corfu. My grandmother had called them to give them her blessing. Then she pointed at the icon that hung on the wall opposite. It was one of those Byzantine icons with a carved wooden frame like a door on the front. Gold leaf inlay had been use to make the haloes of the Virgin and the Child, and the whole had become darkened with age and candle smoke over the centuries, and seemed sombre.

"Look," said Barbara, "The Holy Virgin is coming out." Chrisanthi moved forward to see if something on the icon had come lose. But the hinged frame was firmly in place, closed with brass lockers on the side. And when they turned back they saw Barbara smiling, and her arms were stretched out, hands open as if to receive something, and her eyes were closed, and she was no longer breathing.

This is the story I was told when I returned from my stay with Aunt Emma.

Leaving Cephalonia

After my grandmother died the house seemed empty. Mummy decided that we should move to Corfu where she had always wanted to live. After her parents had gone, there were no family ties to bind. Affection for her sister, my Aunty Lily, in Corfu was beckoning her. All that polishing of floors and brass, was just too much for one woman and two children, she thought; not that she or we ever did any polishing but that it was done on our behalf. It was expensive to run such a house. Fotis went to Mummy and offered to remain as head of the household without pay.

"I am one of the family," he said, "I live here." But this was not possible. Mummy referred to the big pink house that had been home for our family for so long as a white elephant. I found this offensive, even disloyal, and resolved that I would come back and reclaim the house when I grew up.

On the evening we left, Vangelis with Fotis sitting beside him in the old Ford car, drove us to the Fanari lighthouse at the end of the peninsula. No one spoke. Twilight was coming fast and the shadows weighed heavily on us.

A small dingy was waiting to take us out to the boat. It was not the ferry with a camerotto in attendance and bottles of fizzy lemonade. The boat was small. It had been loaded with the possessions we were taking to Corfu. There were no other passengers. Neville and I stepped into the dingy. Mummy stopped for a moment and looked at Fotis and Vangelis as though she wanted to say something and then changed her mind. Vangelis took a big white handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose. Fotis did not move. He just looked at Mummy and said in Greek, "Go into the good of God," but would be better translated, 'Go with God's blessing.'

The water behind the boat glowed with phosphorescence as we pulled away, leaving a faint trail connecting us to the shore that stretched and broke and faded away into the black sea.

Neville and I waved across the water but Fotis and Vangelis did not wave back. We were amazed and did not understand why. They just stood there in the twilight, watching. Next to Vangelis' ample form, Fotis appeared thinner and older than usual. And as we moved away they became slight shadows standing on the mole that fingered the wide velvet water of the harbour under the endless sky. And in a town on the other side of the bay, lights came on in windows and people continued their lives as if nothing had changed.

Chapter Thirteen: Corfu

European Island

Cephalonia is a wild place, rocky and hard, like the mainland of Greece. Its people have been shaped and hardened by the land. Corfu is soft, lush and green. It has been shaped and tamed by its people. Every tree and curve of the shoreline seems to have been put in place by an inspired designer. It is an island of gardens on the canvas of the Pantocrator, arranged against the violet Albanian ranges across the sea. The

climate is cooler, with misty days and plentiful winter rains. Here we felt ourselves to be in Europe.

Houses in Corfu Town

The houses in the centre of Corfu Town are about four or five storeys high and closely packed together. They are approached by narrow lanes and stairways. The buildings of the Venetian quarter feature crumbling ochre, orange and white stucco walls, sometimes pink or yellow, with shuttered windows and narrow balconies. The buildings are old and tired, it seems. They have stood for centuries, leaning against each other and sagging here and there. From the beginning of the 20th Century people have been knotting the parts together with telephone wires and power cables, opportunistically fixed to the corners of buildings and the edges of roofs, trussing these late medieval and early Renaissance buildings in an unregulated tangle.

The lanes of the Jewish quarter had a cavernous quality, with the buildings huddling together for protection. People went there to get their shoes fixed, or to have a suit remodelled.

Aunty Lily's town house was four storeys high, and typical of the better town houses not far from the Liston Colonnade that faces the square where cricket is played to this day. The lane leading to her house was named Motsenigou after one of the Doges of Venice at the time of the Venetian era. Looking down the lane at street level to the north, you could see the bell tower of the Catholic Church d'Annunziata that had stood there since 1394.

The other side of the house overlooked a small piazza. The Catholic Cathedral, Duomo di San Giacomo e San Christoforo, which had been the Catholic Cathedral since 1632, opened onto the piazza. That is the new Church, elegant in its Renaissance cassock of modern design.

The house was entered from the lane on the ground floor by a common stair servicing all levels. The ground floor was tenanted by a bachelor, Albert van Bellingen Pickard, the Honorary Consul for Belgium. He never had visitors and no one knew what he did. One of the rooms was used as an office by Uncle Philip. The first floor was rented to the widowed Mrs Angelica Petrinelli and her unmarried sister, Siora Elena. The two upper floors and the attic were reserved for the use of Aunty Lily, Uncle Philip and our cousins John and Max. The attic served as quarters for Aristidis when he was in town, the maid and the foreign governess for the boys.

Whether rich or poor, the houses of Corfu had one thing in common; stray cats in all shapes and sizes lived in the entries, fought there, slept there, screeched at night there and created a terrible smell. Mrs Petrinelli threw water at them from the windows when the screeching on the street became too loud, to little effect.

Our New Home

"I'm in love with Corfu," said Mummy as soon as we arrived.

She rented a house for us in the suburb of Anemomylos close to Mon Repos, the King's summer palace where Prince Philip was born. My father had been a personal

friend of the King's brother, Prince Andrew of the Hellenes and his wife, Alice von Battenberg who had lived there. For some reason that I cannot comprehend, my father had one of the Prince's fine silk dressing gowns. Perhaps it was given to him. My parents used to visit the Prince and Princess there before I was born, but after we moved to Corfu none of us went to Mon Repos. The Prince and Princess were not living there any longer. Besides, we had better things to do. We set about exploring our new home.

Our place was a relatively modest two-storey house with kitchen and servants' quarters at ground floor. A broad marble stair that spoke of grander days led from the ground level entrance to the main living area on the first floor. The house was surrounded by a walled garden. A paved path led from a central gate to the front door. Just inside the entrance, on either side of the path, were two large fig trees. Outside, a narrow road separated the house and garden from a small beach and the sea beyond.

Erminia and Káte had gone ahead of us by ferry and were cleaning and polishing when we arrived. Much to our surprise, Tsirelia was also there. He had come to help move furniture and other heavy items.

When these jobs were completed Mummy arranged for Tsirelia to stay for a while and help us settle in. Taking our two daschunds, Jip and Joke, for a morning walk was one of his tasks. One morning, both dogs did their business in front of a church, of which there are many in Corfu. This was too much for Tsirelia.

"I couldn't pull them away," he protested, as if the dogs ought to have understood the sacredness of the precinct. He refused to take the dogs out again.

In Cephalonia, Neville and I had looked up to Tsirelia in his little wooden rowing boat as if he were a living embodiment of Poseidon. He was the King of our harbour. He knew so much about the underwater Posidonia fields and the creatures that lived there. He understood the ways of the gulls and other sea birds, and fed them as he cleaned his fish. He would crack open the sea urchins, and eat them raw with bread and olive oil. Sometimes we joined him; it was a most exciting and romantic way to eat. About our heads the gulls wheeled, calling for bits, while the salty smell of the sea mingled with the flavour of the meal. We picked up the food with our hands.

He told us that the birds took only what they could eat: no more. He did the same, unlike those who blasted the fish out of the water with dynamite. It was illegal to use dynamite, but being Greece few took any notice. Once, when we were boating with Tsirelia we saw a fisherman with one hand and he told us why.

We had not forgotten his trips across the bay in the early mornings and the cold figs sprinkled with dew that he brought for our breakfast. We were sure that he was too important to take dogs for walks.

There was no room in the servants' quarters for a man. Besides, Tsirelia had always lived on his own. So a camp bed was put under the main stairs. One night Neville and I got out of bed and crept down the elegant stairs to visit Tsirelia. We found that he was fast asleep. We crept back up the stairs and looked at him over the balustrade. To our amazement he was lying in bed with his hat on. Not long after that Tsirelia left for

Cephalonia, having finished the jobs for which he had been hired. We cried. But there was so much to do in Corfu that our tears were short-lived. Besides, Mummy told us that he was back where he belonged.

Pissoires

We went for walks every day with our dogs on leads and made sure to avoid churches and other sacred places. On these outings we looked, instead, for the famous Corfu public toilets that we had heard about. These were pissoires, for men only. Ladies, obviously, did not require such amenities.

There were two pissoires on the Corfu esplanade, the one a concession to a Mr Gritsi and the other to a Mr Contarini. They were known respectively by the concessionaires' names: '*Stou Gritsi*' or '*Stou Contarini*'. Both were constructions from British Protectorate times. Before that the Corfiots relieved themselves wherever it suited them. At the end of the British Protectorate, when there were two parties vying for victory in the plebiscite, one for union with Mother Greece and the other for maintenance of the British Protectorate, the saying went, "*Elefthera Kerkyra - chezeis opou theleis.*" Free Corfu, piss wherever you like.

Metal posts arranged in a tiny spiral maze and clad with corrugated iron extending from two to five feet above ground level, led to a central hole in the ground. Men using this amenity could be seen walking around in the spiral, with their legs showing below and, if they were tall, their hats and heads showing above. We pictured these pissoires as if we had seen them but actually never had.

Káte said that Corfu was uncivilised compared to Cephalonia, where modern public amenities were well provided for men and women.

When we asked Erminia, a Corfiot, about the pissoires, she did not appear to be interested and spoke to us about other interesting things to see. Mummy found the matter amusing. She told us that a modern toilet block had recently been built adjacent to the main town square. Many Corfiots were proud of it.

I do not know why we became interested in the pissoires. I do not think we imagined taking the dogs to them.

Naval Exercises

Neville and I played hide and seek in the shrubbery around our new house. We climbed the fig trees near the entry gate. They were sturdy trees and easy to climb. We took a tree each and appointed ourselves captains. My tree, of course, was the flagship. We tied a string from the branch of one tree to a branch of the other. By pulling the string with long and short tugs we sent Morse messages to each other. I would signal messages such as, "Enemy sighted, starboard." Neville had not learned Morse code, and so his messages were usually meaningless but rhythmically convincing sequences of tugs that did us both satisfaction. He often sent SOS.

We always played these games in English, of course.

Drawings

From our fig trees we could see outside our garden. Neville watched the boats passing by. From the lawn, I drew details of the fig tree: its big leaves and its grey trunk.

One day I took my watercolour pad and soft pencils to the kitchen where I drew a half-size half profile of Erminia. She kept saying, "I am busy, why don't you draw somebody else." But I wanted to draw Erminia, even if she kept moving about. I knew her gentle kind face so well, it did not matter. I loved Erminia more than anyone else at that time. She moved and I sketched. She smiled shyly and I saw. She turned away and I called forth a golden thread of memories that stretched across the sea and touched an archipelago of tender moments in my life, her happy smile, her gentle hands, her deep brown loving eyes etched forever in my mind, and it found its way into my drawing.

Later, Mummy showed my drawing to Mr Dragumi, an artist friend. He must have been impressed for he volunteered to give me drawing lessons. From then on, he came to the house on a regular basis. I looked forward to his visits.

One day Mr Dragumi came for my art lesson with a basket of fresh sweet-smelling lemons. He asked for help to bring them up the stairs. In the room where my lessons took place he arranged the lemons, changing their positions, leaning back to look and moving in again to adjust, until he was satisfied. One of the lemons still displayed its shiny green leaves. To my surprise he did not give this lemon pride of place. Instead he chose another as the centrepiece. The light from the window always came from the left hand side and cast curved shadows just where he wanted them.

I roughed out the composition with bold charcoal strokes. The repetitive oval shapes made it easy. Something more challenging would have been to my liking, I thought. He looked at what I had done with no comment and started rummaging in his old canvas bag. Then he brought out a long box of coloured pastels that bore the marks of previous use. He put the box in front of me and said "Now make these lemons come alive. What colours are the lemons; what colours are the shadows?" he asked. "Now look here," he instructed, "Is this really yellow. Look again. No. It is green. The light passes between the leaves. And here it is orange where the light is reflected from table. And look at this shadow here. Is this not blue? Can you not see that this is reflecting the sky? Now use all the colours."

And then in the curved yellow shapes I saw what I had not seen before: the dimpled skin, the colour that changed hue and intensity from one part to the other, the many colours in lemons. I saw that the shadows were not just grey as I had thought. I saw the sparkling highlights. I used the pastels with great joy and the little arrangement came to life.

"Now you have seen these lemons for the first time and that knowledge will be with you forever," he said. Then he put the pastels carefully back in his bag.

Piano Lessons

At about this time Mummy decided that I was old enough to start learning the piano, which girls of good families were expected to do. Unless you were a peasant in Greece, chances on the marriage market were limited for girls who could not play the piano, embroider cushions and exercise other ladylike skills. But I did not want to learn the piano; I wanted to learn the violin like my cousin, John. Most of Mummy's lady friends shook their heads and agreed that the violin was quite inappropriate for a girl.

I insisted. Mummy agreed.

I was sent to Mr Nikokavuras, which means 'Nick the crab', a top violin teacher who taught John. I did not dare to tell Mummy that learning from Mr Nikokavuras was not much fun at all. He kept comparing me to my cousin and even threatened to smack me with a ruler when I could not reach the standard set by John.

Mr Nikokavuras was too important to teach in people's houses. The pupils came to him.

German Lessons

The German teachers, a married couple, also taught from their home. Lessons took place in their living room, where the lady of the house taught us to read and write educated German.

When the lessons were over, she would give us hot chocolate as a treat, while her husband read Schiller and Goethe out loud. He read from beautiful leather-bound old books, which he handled with reverential care. Neville and I were already fluent in German and knew many of the poems from our grandmother. The deliberate cadence of his reading, his deep voice and the music and the power of it all, filled our imaginations with a sense of grandeur.

From these lessons I learned many poems that I can still recite today:

> Fest gemauert in der Erden
> Steht die Form, aus Lehm gebrannt.
> Heute muß die Glocke werden.
> Frisch Gesellen, seid zur Hand.
> Von der Stirne heiß
> Rinnen muß der Schweiß,
> Soll das Werk den Meister loben,
> Doch der Segen kommt von oben.

When they were not working, our teachers were often seen at a local coffee shop with their Corfiot friends discussing current events, as people did in those days, observing the north with anxiety. Our teachers were anti-Hitler and outspoken about it, even though they were tall and seemed perfect specimens of *die Herrenrasse*. They referred to Neville and me as '*die Riesenkinder*': the giant children.

One day, when we went to their house for our usual lesson, we found the door locked. A note was pinned there to say that they had been called back to Germany urgently.

We waited for them to return. No one seemed to know what had happened. Rumours of all kinds went around the town. Later we discovered that they had jumped to their deaths from a fourth-floor window of a Nazi office building in Berlin.

As far as we knew, no one came to unlock the door of their house or to pick up their belongings. We were sad for the loss of our teachers and sad for the beautiful leather-bound poetry books that no one would read any more. We felt, although we could not have said it at that time, that history was closing a chapter on German poetry and all that we had loved of that great civilisation.

After a while no one spoke of our German teachers, and life appeared to return to normal. We did not have any more German lessons.

Italian Schooling

When the new school year began, Mummy enrolled us in local Italian schools. For Neville it was the Brothers School for Boys, and for me the Italian Convent for Girls.

At the Brothers School the boys were served an Italian pasta dish for lunch every day. The Brothers liked Neville and he, especially, liked the Italian pasta.

There was no pasta served at the Convent. The girls brought their own lunches. Every day some loving mothers would be seen at the school gate bringing hot dishes for their children. These were often steaming bowls of Italian pasta sprinkled with cheese; the delightful aroma would make the rest of us hungry.

The nuns were kind and welcoming to me. However, they found that I did not fit comfortably into their required mould. They said that I asked too many impertinent questions. I do not recall anything impertinent about my questions. In all probability, I was forthright in a degree to which the nuns were unaccustomed. My class companions seemed to me to be incurious, which I thought odd but to which I paid no attention.

I liked the seemingly endless stream of special feast days at that school. On one of these a play was presented for the edification of the girls.

The proscenium curtains opened, which was done by nuns pulling them by hand and walking off to the left and to the right. We saw very few props and only two actors, selected from among the senior girls. One girl, sitting in a chair, was wearing a homely dress and appeared to be polishing a vase. The other girl, standing centre stage, wore a white tennis dress that just covered her knees, and sported various touches of forbidden glamour such as bright make up. She carried a tennis racquet, which she swung about awkwardly as she spoke, striking nothing in particular. She announced loudly that she was going to a tennis party where she would meet an eligible man, who she anticipated would propose marriage. She sneered at the other girl, turned away with a contemptuous gesture and left. But then almost instantly she reappeared arm in arm with the man of her dreams, who was another senior school girl embellished with a painted moustache and wearing a suit that was decidedly too

large. The ‘man’ of the play took one look at the girl polishing the vase, fell on ‘his’ knees in front of her and proposed.

Everyone clapped. I laughed loudly.

The teacher in charge, Miss Angelina Esposito, called me to her office and asked what I had found so funny about the ‘excellent morality play’ we had had just seen. I told her that my mother played tennis because she enjoyed it, and because it made her feel good. I told her that Mummy was just the kind of person I admired and wanted to emulate. I intended to play tennis too, but not for the purpose of catching men. And I certainly did not intend to spend my life polishing vases. Besides, the men I knew had scullery maids to polish their vases but something told me it would be better not to say anything about that. Miss Esposito had nothing to say.

A few weeks later, on another special day, a concert was arranged. The school choir sang beautifully. The music teacher played a number of pieces on the piano. Last of all, I came on to play a solo of *'Du lieber Mond'* on the violin. Mr Nikokavuras had made me practice the piece while tapping my foot lightly to keep time. So, with the heel of my right foot placed firmly on the stage floor I tapped my leather-soled shoes onto the wooden planks. The entire audience was soon in fits of laughter, although for what I did not know. I was playing the notes very well, so I continued with determined concentration to the end. I didn’t miss a beat. Then I saw Miss Esposito looking grim and not laughing at all. Mr Nikokavuras would have been proud of me for the violin, I am sure.

The New Gym Teacher

One day a new gym teacher was presented to us. The nuns told us that she had been sent from Italy especially to our school. Our usual gym teacher was not at assembly. She had taken up other duties. The nuns said that it was a great honour for our school to have such an important person sent all the way from Italy to teach us.

I had a feeling that the nuns were not comfortable with this unexpected honour. The very size of the new gym teacher would have made the thin bird-like nuns want to flutter away. Unlike the previous teacher, she was a hefty woman with muscular arms and legs, which she exposed quite shamelessly.

After morning prayers the nuns rose to leave the assembly area; that was the signal for the girls to go to their classrooms. On this occasion the new teacher instructed us to remain seated. She commanded us to refer to her as *Caposquadra*, and told us that from now on we would be known as *Piccole Italiane All'estero*: Little Italian Girls Living Abroad. She said we should always be proud of being Italian.

I felt very British and did not want to be Italian. However, when she distributed smart new uniforms, I decided that I could put up with being called a Little Italian Girl for the time being. The uniforms consisted of knee length pleated black skirts, white tops and white shoes. We were ordered to keep the uniforms spotless.

The next day our lessons began in earnest. To my surprise, we did not learn callisthenics. Instead we were taught to march in military fashion. I was good at

marching, having practiced with Mrs Pil in Cephalonia. Marching proved difficult for most of the other girls, who had not been exposed to anything like it before. And the Caposquadra's marching was tough business compared to Mrs Pil's ideas. While on the march, for example, when commanded we had to stamp the ground in a double-beat step and continue on in perfect formation.

We practiced and practiced until the Caposquadra was satisfied with our performance. After that we marched to town in formation, wearing our smart new uniforms and stamping every time the Caposquadra shouted "Passo!" We marched around the town square and we marched up and down the Garitza Promenade, the beautiful seaside walk that graces the town in long gentle curve along the foreshore. Corfiots, who love a free show, stood about staring at us. Some shook their heads in disbelief. We felt very grand.

Once this goal had been achieved, we practiced synchronised gymnastics. It was hard work and the Caposquadra did not put up with excuses. Bichelia, a short plump and jolly little girl, and I were among the best.

When the Caposquadra was once again satisfied with the performance of our group, invitations were sent out to parents and various town dignitaries. Seats were arranged. On the day we marched into the arena to the sound of military drums. I was in the front row and when we were all in the arena I surreptitiously looked back. It was a magnificent sight. It seemed to me that there were hundreds of girls in perfectly straight rows, in smart uniforms and performing faultlessly, as if one mind were commanding the single body of us. I could feel my heart beating with excited pride and purpose. When the show was over, 'Giovinezza' was sung by the choir and we all joined in, singing lustily at the top of our voices. I can still sing this song today:

> Giovinezza, Giovinezza,
> Primavera di bellezza
> Della vita nell'asprezza
> Il tuo canto squilla e va!
> E per Benito Mussolini,
> Eja eja alalà
> E per la nostra Patria bella,
> Eja eja alalà

Mummy was not amused. Both Neville and I were withdrawn from the Italian schools immediately. It was back to Mummy's imaginative home-teaching once again.

Mitzi

Among Mummy's friends in Corfu was the Italian Consul's wife, Mitzi Bianco Zanotti. She was an aristocratic woman, pleasant and charming to adults and children. We liked her but could not come to terms with her name. We considered 'Mitzi' more suitable for a cat: A grey cat, at that.

We had heard that Mitzi and her husband had been unable to conceive a child for many years. They consulted doctors without effect. One day, while Mitzi was praying

the rosary, she made a vow to Our Lady; if she were to bear a child she would dress him only in blue and white until he was ten.

Mitzi Bianco got her wish. A beautiful boy was born. The consul was overjoyed and blessed his wife again and again, and took up praying the rosary.

The boy was three years old when we knew him. He had a head of golden curls, a fine complexion and blue eyes like his father's. He wore blue velvet shorts, white shirts and lovingly knitted blue jumpers and cardigans.

Shortly after the fascist display at my Italian school, Mitzi Bianco Zanotti came to visit. Because she was Italian and a good friend, Neville and I took tea too and we listened. Nothing was said about the incident at the school. Mitzi told us that she loved Corfu, its friendly people and the informal relaxed atmosphere. She knew that at any moment her husband could be given a new posting and that their family would have to move once again. She looked sad as she said this. Then, she spoke about her son's formal schooling. When the time comes, she said, he will be taught at home by tutors.

"If home learning was good enough for the Pope, then it shall be good enough for my boy."

She had said as much as was prudent in her position.

Friends in Corfu

Many of Mummy's earliest happy memories were of Corfu; the people she loved lived there. She and Aunty Lily were specially close. Living on Corfu made it possible for them to see each other regularly. Many of Mummy's friends were interesting and eccentric people.

Theodore Stephanides, his wife Maria and daughter Alexia, lived in Corfu Town. Mrs Stephanides was a very tall thin English lady. We though she resembled a cypress tree. Neville invented the nickname of Cyperball which was odd; there was nothing round about her.

The adults would sit in a very large drawing room drinking tea. Mrs Stephanides would serve steaming English scones with cream and strawberry jam from Harrods.

Theodore would stay in his study where he had his microscopes, biology specimens in various tanks and a library that covered one entire wall. His study opened on to the drawing room. Men who were visiting would often take their scones and join Theodore in his study.

We children were sent out to play in the large garden at the back of the house. Neville played easily with Alexia, who was his age. She called him Bobo and told him what to do. I watched, mostly, caught between them and the adult world where I did not yet belong.

Alexia had a marvellous wooden Wendy House in which she and Neville played. In the centre of the garden was a large empty pond that we could jump into and climb out of again. The garden was large enough to furnish many hours of exploration,

which engaged me while Neville and Alexia opened and closed the doors and shutters of their Wendy make-believe home. There were trees to climb and another pond with goldfish. I made drawings of some of the goldfish.

Sailing with Kostas Aspiotis

Among Mummy's friends were Mr and Mrs Aspiotis, who lived in their stately residence, the Villa Rossa, set in a manicured garden. They had two daughters, Marie and Lea. Konstantinos Aspiotis, or Kostas as we knew him, had inherited a lithography printing works from his father. When he took over the company he brought in modern presses and obtained significant contracts. The Greek postage stamps of the day were printed in his workshop, as well as bank notes and other security papers. In 1935, just prior to our arrival in Corfu, he had sold his company and retired a very wealthy man. He was partial to high quality cars.

Mrs Aspiotis presided over a well-run home. She gave many formal tea parties ably helped by her daughter Marie and various old retainers. Marie was extremely beautiful.

Mrs Aspiotis wore long dresses for these occasions. A lace nightcap invariably covered her tight grey curls. Neville and I thought it was very funny, as people we knew did not wear nightcaps. Our grandmother didn't wear a nightcap, but we had seen illustrations of the old grandmother in the story of Little Red Riding Hood wearing one in bed. We did not think people wore them to tea parties and we found it rather fascinating.

Kostas Aspiotis was a man of action and preferred to spend time yachting with his daughter Lea, who was a fun-loving tomboy. Lea fell in love with one of the sailors on board the yacht. Kostas would not give permission for the marriage. The Aspiotis family never saw Lea again. Rumour had it that she lived in a distant village and had been seen to go about barefoot.

As the years went by Marie became a leading figure in Corfu society. She was a writer, historian and philanthropist. She never married and people blamed Lea for this. In those days no respectable man would want to be discovered with a peasant brother-in-law. Marie was also very intelligent.

Kostas missed Lea and made up for it by asking friends to sail with him. Mummy, Neville and I were often invited to join him aboard the ‘Aspasia’. Apparently it was a difficult yacht to sail but that did not deter Kostas.

Kostas had an old-fashioned gramophone aboard the yacht and a number of records of traditional Corfiot music. When he approached a village close to the shore, Kostas dropped anchor, brought out his player, wound it up and put on an appropriate record for the villagers to hear. He would pull out a penny whistle with which he accompanied the music. The purpose of this was to make the villagers more aware of their heritage. This, in Kostas' mind, would make the island attractive to tourists. In those days, very few tourists came to Corfu and those that did generally knew how to behave. But not always.

Theodore Stephanides once told us an amusing story that was doing the rounds at that time. Some English bohemians had made their way to a secluded beach. Here they felt free to undress and sunbathe.

"Well, it seems, these people had read about naked sports in Ancient Greece and … umm... not understanding that times had changed somewhat, must have thought that nakedness was the thing to do in Greece." explained Theodore. "They had not noticed that a church stood on a nearby promontory, with full view of the beach. And the good priest was sitting on his porch, so you can guess what happened next. The priest marshalled the youths of the nearby village, who were only too pleased to defend the modesty of the village and to observe the naked tourists for themselves. They took up positions in the hills around the beach and pelted the nude bathers with stones. Now… umm… as you know, village youths generally have good aim."

Theodore Stephanides stroked his beard. Then added, "Yes, it is a thing about Greeks. We love to throw stones. If we go to a precipice we throw stones down it. When we go walking we throw stones to amuse ourselves. Curious, isn't it."

One of the most beautiful places we visited on Kostas' yacht was Kouloura. In those days there was little at Kouloura besides the semi-circular harbour embraced by its rather long stone jetty and a large heavily built but simple house. It was located far to the north of Corfu Town. The overland route was almost impassable in those days.

Kouloura was owned by Mrs Gennatos, a mutual friend. She was widowed so she always wore black when at home. Theodore Stephanides said that she spoke English with a remarkable accent, but we did not notice that since we always spoke Greek there. The King of Greece would visit her in the summer. Once, when she was in Athens, she visited the King wearing colourful clothes she judged to be more appropriate for the national capital. The King was taken aback, "Oh, you are not in black. I do so prefer you in your black." I overheard her telling Mummy this story.

Once when we were there Commander Vaughan-Hughes and Vana were there; Vana was Mrs Gennatos' niece and they were frequent visitors. They declared that Kouloura was the most beautiful spot on the Earth. Later the Vaughan-Hughes family inherited the property and the harbour to be their retirement home.

Mummy always referred to the Commander as the Admiral.

Scènes de la Vie de Bohème

Just around the Kouloura peninsula, in the bay of Kalami, was the white house where Lawrence and Nancy Durrell stayed. We visited them quite a few times. At that time they were newcomers to Corfu and Lawrence Durrell was not yet a well known writer.

The established British community was not comfortable with the Durrells' bohemian lifestyle. The Durrells were not members of the professional or officer classes, and were certainly not gentry. They were quite unlike any other British people on the islands at that time. They associated with the peasants and villagers in a way that offended both those below and above their station. This is not because the

establishment looked down on the villagers. We were genuinely fond of our servants. The villagers of Chlomos were almost family. Furthermore, the villagers had a uniquely Greek sense of pride and bearing that permitted no acknowledgement of inferiority. However, they knew their place. There were many subtle rules that defined just what interactions were appropriate across the social strata. The Durrells did not understand these conventions. They did not fit.

The Durrells' behaviour sent out ripples of indignation across the island. I later discovered that Lawrence and Nancy had been the naked bathers stoned by the village priest and boys, although Theodore Stephanides had not told us that. Apparently the Durrells learned to seek out isolated bays to avoid stonings, but were seen nevertheless. Worse still, they took visiting friends on their skinny dipping excursions, including unaccompanied young ladies from England. That was noticed. Margaret Durrell, Lawrence's younger sister who lived with her mother and brothers on another part of the Island, would sunbathe in the olive grove in her scanty sun frock with matching frilly knickers. This was offensive to the villagers in those parts. Word spread.

Mummy thought the snobbish attitude was ridiculous. She said the Durrells were interesting people who added colour to life. Kostas Aspiotis was also fascinated and the Durrells gave a good excuse to visit that part of the island.

I was not so sure. At the Durrells' I saw a painting by Nancy. It represented Adam and Eve standing in a bathtub. The bathtub was deep but transparent so Adam and Eve were visible in their nakedness, sporting exaggerated pubic hairs that had been painted in hard angry strokes. Their bodies were grotesquely ill-proportioned. Our life in Greece was filled with statues and paintings of nude figures in the city squares, on the buildings and at home in our library. We had large coffee table books of European art for our home schooling. I had seen many of the original statues in Rome. The nudes I knew were idealised and beautiful: sometimes abstracted by the timeless quality of white marble, sometimes softened by the painters' skilled draftsmanship and masterful chiaroscuro. I was shocked by the ugliness of Nancy's painting.

Lawrence talked loudly and drank too much. He slapped the local peasant fisherman on the shoulders, and invited him to eat with the family, and served him whisky. It seemed to me that the Durrells were ill-disciplined, with pretensions but without the sensitivity or upbringing to participate in the ancient and settled culture of Corfu.

I had heard Mummy's friends talk about degenerates, a term I had not understood, but decided that the they must have been referring to people like the Durrells. Lawrence was declaring that he would bring high literary culture to the island when this perception struck me: high literary culture to this island home of Homer. To the Greeks. I had been watching him expostulate while he had been not noticing me.

Many decades later I attended a performance of Sophocles in Athens, recited in Ancient Greek. Professors of literature were there, with dictionaries to translate the prose into modern demotic Greek. When the play started, I discovered that Sophocles sounded so much like the peasant Greek of Ithica and Cephalonia that I could understand every word.

Unrelated to our boat trips, we once visited Mrs Durrell and the rest of the family in their home near Corfu Town. Mummy was keen to meet Mrs Durrell.

We were served a meal outside. Gerald, Lawrence's youngest brother, was a few years older than me. He seemed to be a very big boy. He ignored me. Neville played with Alexia, who was also there. I sat with the adults, whom I mostly did not know. I watched and listened. The Durrells all talked at once, shouting across the table and calling from the kitchen door, behaviour I associated with my Greek cousins but not with English people.

At one point a ruckus broke out when someone emptied a kitchen bowl of water into the garden. It had contained Gerald's tadpoles. Many years later in his book, My Family and Other Animals, Gerald described this scene in fabulously exaggerated terms; the tadpoles had become snakes, flung far and wide amid shrieks of horror. As an adult I enjoyed the book for its entertaining stories, but was offended by the mocking tone towards the Greeks. The Greeks are exuberant excitable people, full of energy and abundant self confidence. But they are not clowns. Indeed, it had seemed to me that the Durrells had been the clowns.

Visit to Athens

We had various relatives scattered all over Greece. Arthur Hill, a British businessman from Athens, married Evanthia Toole, my great aunt. Their son, Edgar James, married Olga Fanny Peters, whose mother was Angelica Toole, sister of Evanthia. Cousin marriages were not uncommon in view of limited choice for British people living in those far-flung dominions and wishing to marry British or European people of their class. We usually visited the Hills when we went to Athens. Arthur, Archie and Harry were the children of Edgar and Olga.

Arthur was frequently at boarding school in England. When he came home for the holidays he pretended not to know how to speak Greek. He looked down his nose and spoke to me in English. I was up to that and answered him in German.

Then there were the twins, Archie and Harry. Archie had a squint, but Harry was handsome and sported a head of very straight blond hair. They were about Neville's age and were not expected to play with me. Aunty Olga used to ask me which of the boys I liked best. Perhaps she was planning another cousin marriage. I invariably answered "Harry, with the blond hair." I liked that blond hair. Her father, Ollig Peters, was German, tall, blond and blue-eyed. She approved of my answer.

Marino's brother, Petros, an industrial chemist in Athens, married a girl out of the top drawer. I had been selected to serve as the head flower girl at the wedding. A special dress had been hand-painted for me by Marietta Peters, an artist in Athens. Marietta was Olga Fanny's sister and Mummy's cousin. She worked very hard on the dress. It was to be the wedding of the century. Nothing was left to chance. Here the son and daughter of two of the leading families of Greece were celebrating their vows. It was almost a state occasion.

The ceremony at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Athens was quite magnificent, and the chanting of many bishops and their acolytes was mesmerising. During the

ceremony I forgot to move forward in time; the train I was holding was torn off the bride as she approached the altar.

Uncle John

In Athens we stayed with Uncle John Saunders. He owned a big house in Ekali, a smart northern suburb of Athens on the foothills of the mountains. There was plenty of room for Mummy, Neville and me. We called it the house of roses because of the beautiful garden. Uncle John kept a full-time gardener to tend his roses.

I am not sure if he was the eldest of the six Saunders uncles and aunts in that branch of the family, but he had the bearing of a leader. He was the principal of the Lloyds Insurance Agency for Greece. Greece was a land of ship owners and so it was a good business to be in. He employed family members, knowing that he could trust them. His brother, Arthur Saunders, worked for him running a branch office in Thessalonica. Another brother, Charles, ran a branch office in Patras. James Saunders, who we called Uncle Jimmy, worked for him in Piraeus.

Uncle Jimmy lived with Uncle John. The lowest floor of the house was his area. This was not quite a cellar as the windows looked out at about knee level. He had quite a nice view of the rose garden from below. I always had the feeling that he was a lesser member of the family because of his position in the architecture of things. But Uncle Jimmy was always fun and told jokes and laughed a lot.

They had a Russian housekeeper called Fenia. She lived on a mezzanine floor that looked down into the entrance hall. She could see people who were standing at the front door through the window.

The top floor of the house was rented to an American family. Erminia saw the children who lived there playing on the roof terrace: two girls. She told me to go upstairs and see if I could play with them. The roof terrace was in their part of the house. This was really very exciting as visits in the past had always been prearranged. I went un-chaperoned up the spiral metal stairs at the rear of the house, past the level of doorways to other levels and arrived at the roof terrace.

“Hello,” I said, feeling very important. The American mother was sitting on a tin chair on the terrace. When she turned towards me I curtsied and introduced myself as I thought proper. I stood there and they looked at me. The two American girls said a few things that I no longer remember. Then they told me that they had an appointment and would be leaving, but would be back at two o’clock that afternoon.

I left and spent the next few hours waiting below in great anticipation. The girls had seemed nice enough. At precisely two o’clock I went back to the terrace. No one was there. I knocked on their entry door, one level below. There was no answer. There was no sign of life. They had not kept their appointment. Then I thought, “so much for American girls.” I left and I did not go back.

Uncle John had a car with a dickey seat. Every time we visited he took me for a ride; just me. I loved it. I always wanted to ride in the dickey seat, which bounced up and down as we rumbled along the Athenian roads. I once went with Uncle John all the

way to his office in Piraeus. It was a wonderful day with bright sunshine coming out of a clear blue sky. We passed the Acropolis with the Parthenon gleaming like a row of jewels on the hilltop. We motored down broad treed boulevards lined with stately neoclassical homes. Athens was truly a wonderful city. I felt like the Queen in my dickey seat and I waved to people who looked up.

In Piraeus, Uncle John was known and respected for what people considered old-fashioned British ways. Most of the ship owners conducted legitimate business with Lloyds. But others would run their old ships aground or report other self-inflicted disasters and expect to be covered. On that day one of these characters turned up with a fabricated tale of woe. Uncle John refused to lodge the claim with London. An argument broke out but John stood firm. Then the Captain, as he styled himself, offered a bribe. John refused. The Captain could hardly believe it. He kept increasing the bribe until he had finally offered John the whole settlement and more; it had become a question of honour. He stood there waving his arms with a look of childlike astonishment on his face: innocent childlike astonishment. Then… his face sagged… he dropped his arms by his side. And he asked:

"If your hand gets into the honey pot, don't you lick your fingers?"

"No." said Uncle John. "I wash my hands."

The Boy Scouts

Back in Corfu, Angelo Lavranos, Uncle Philip's brother, was spoken of with reverence and referred to as a hero. He had been wounded at the Battle of Sarantaporo in Northern Thessaly in the First Balkan War, and at the Battle of Kilkis in Macedonia in the Second Balkan War. There was no point in talking to him about it. He was a man who lived in the present.

At that time the Prime Minister, Ioannis Metaxas, was set on modelling Greece along Fascist lines. Metaxas had seized power just as the Communists were about to. He was either hated as a dictator, mostly by the Communists who would have instituted an immeasurably worse dictatorship, or loved by those who saw him as the only hope for making Greece an orderly and prosperous nation. A third thread in Greek politics, personified by Eleftherios Venizelos, represented a liberal world view and favoured a republican system of government. It is misleading, however, to think of Greek politics as comprised of three clearly delineated alternatives. There were then and there are still today as many mutually incompatible political viewpoints as there are Greeks.

Metaxas took personal interest in his youth movement, *Ethniki Organosi Neolaias*. Its purpose was to transform Greek society by raising a generation of patriotic and civilised young men. He modelled the movement on the Fascist and National Socialist movements in Italy and Germany. Even the *Saluto Romano* had been copied, re-designated 'the pure ancient Greek greeting' without any historical basis what-so-ever. In theory membership of the *Neolaia* was voluntary but by various means it became effectively compulsory.

Uncle Angelo was the head Scout Master in Corfu at that time. Inspired by Lord Baden Powell, he had established the Scout movement on the island long before

Metaxas' *Neolaia* had gained a foothold. Some of the poor generally uneducated people had been seduced by the smart uniforms of the *Neolaia* and had enrolled their sons. Many people would have nothing to do with it.

One day Uncle Angelo was visited by two government officials. They instructed Uncle Angelo to attend a function that was to be held in the main square. A lectern would be placed on a podium flanked by a tall flagpole on which the Scout flag would be raised. The officials gave Uncle Angelo a speech that he was to read out, announcing the abolition of the Scouting movement and urging his Scouts to join the *Neolaia.* At the termination of the speech he was to take down the Scout flag. An official would then raise the flag of the *Neolaia* and give a welcome speech to the new members.

On reading the speech that had been prepared for him, Uncle Angelo became furious. He stamped about his house muttering angrily and slapping with the back of his hand the sheets of paper on which the speech was typed that he held in his other hand.

On the appointed day he dressed in his full Scout uniform and walked to the main square where his Scouts were standing to attention. They too had been instructed to turn out in their best. On the adjacent side of the square the boys of the *Neolaia* stood in their smart dark blue uniforms with white ties and white belts.

The Scout flag was raised. Uncle Angelo was called to the lectern. He stood there for a moment and surveyed the scene. A large number of townspeople had gathered. Others were still arriving and more kept coming until long after the appointed time for the speeches to begin.

Uncle Angelo called for silence. He took the speech from his pocket and held it above his head. "This is the speech I have been ordered to deliver," he declared. Then he tore it into small pieces and tossed them demonstratively into the air. Uncle Angelo was a small thin man, but he had enough fury to cover a giant. He gave a brief impassioned speech on the importance of individual honour and freedom, then stormed off the podium.

For a short while people stood around looking lost. Then one of the officials started to lower the Scout flag. At that moment a senior Scout – named Eric, I believe – who had been standing to attention on the podium during the proceedings, took hold of the rope to prevent the flag from coming down. A roar of approval went up from the crowd. This was a signal for the people to enter the fray. Scouts and *Neolaia* members broke ranks. The crowd pushed forward. Huge arguments in the Greek style broke out, with loud swearing and shaking of fists. A tussle around the flagpole became a tug-of-war. The primitive PA system started to misbehave and squealed loudly. A Communist flag was produced from somewhere and immediately torn down. The police tried to move in but were outnumbered and were forced to retreat. Soon the weight of the people proved too much for the temporary structure; the podium collapsed, bringing down the flagpole and scattering those on it into the square.

By the end of the afternoon the boys of the *Neolaia* and the police had left. Their flag had been torn to shreds. The Scout flag had been raised on a nearby bank building.

Police who had been ordered to arrest Uncle Angelo refused and joined the remains of the crowd at tables outside tavernas, where solutions to all the political, economic and military ills of Greece were weighted and balanced over cups of strong Greek coffee. Everyone agreed that Uncle Angelo was a hero.

After that the Scouts were abolished. The *Neolaia* continued to exist but in Corfu its numbers diminished daily by attrition. The name *Neolaia,* meaning 'new youth', could be mispronounced *Neolera*, meaning 'new filth' and that is how it came to be known. Generous funds were allocated by Metaxas in an effort to kick-start the movement but these were mostly stolen by senior *Neolaia* leaders, which did not help. Nevertheless, in many parts of mainland Greece the movement flourished for a while. It wasn't such a bad thing.

The First Act of War

One day, we arrived at the Aspiotis house anticipating an afternoon of sailing. We were surprised to find many people at the Aspiotis' Villa. Other people we knew were also visiting, including Mr and Mrs Sordinas who owned an estate in Kothoniki and were also friends of Mummy. Mr Sordinas was a kindly gentlemen; he was known in his family and among friends as Yayas, an affectionate nickname derived from John, or Ioannis in Greek.

Tea and scones had been served but no one seemed to pay them much attention. The tea became cold in the pot. The men and women were sitting together in the main sitting room. Mr Sordinas and Kostas Aspiotis dominated the animated conversation. Neville and I, instead of being sent outside to play, were ignored. We took our place on one of the divans and listened to the adults who were talking about the sinking of the Greek Battle Cruiser Elli by an Italian submarine a few days before.

"This is outrageous," said Mr Sordinas in a wounded voice. "We know it was the Italians. Why are they pretending not to know?"

"If Metaxas admits that the Italians sank the Elli then he would have no option but to declare war. Greek honour would not permit anything less," said Kostas.

We listened to the account of how the Italians had torpedoed the cruiser while she was at anchor. That was interpreted as treachery on the part of the Italians and an unprovoked act of war. Kostas seemed to know a lot about military matters and described the build-up of Italian troops in Albania.

"This can only mean one thing," he argued. "They are planning an invasion. Which Greek city will they be sacking next?" he demanded with a rhetorical flourish, alluding to the sacking of Constantinople centuries before.

Neville and I did not move. We knew that it was not our place to speak. The war in Europe, which we had heard about, seemed far away. A war against Italy seemed to be coming closer. We felt the indignation of the adults and the undercurrent of fear. We were relieved when Mummy finally told us it was time to go home. We did not go sailing that day.

The Second Act of War

On the 28th of October, the Italian invasion of Greece began on the northern border of Epirus, from Albania. This was the same date that Mussolini made his march on Rome years before. Perhaps the Italians thought it would be their lucky day.

Chapter Fourteen: The War

The Day of the Bombs

The sun shone brightly on the feast of All Saints, the first of November, 1940. Mummy told us that her father had appeared in her dream the night before. She had been close to her father and his appearance in her dreams made her happy. But not this time. He had instructed her, she said, to pack the little black suitcase with essential papers and valuables. It was a strange request, for the little black suitcase contained a luxurious set of silver handled hair and clothes brushes, mounted in leather-lined slots. It was not a travelling bag. But she put her passport and other papers into the suitcase as instructed.

Mummy did not go to church often but the Feast of All Saints was always observed. We set off for the Catholic church in town. It was a cold clear morning. People were strolling in small groups on the Garitza Promenade. Two small children ran ahead of their nanny, who was pushing a pram. We saw two aeroplanes passing overhead, moving towards the town. Someone said they were English; he could see the Union Jack painted on the sides. People squinted upwards and waved. Corfiots were pro-British and in view of the Italian incursions across the Albania border the sight of British planes was comforting.

The aeroplanes droned on until they were over the centre of town and then dropped a load of bombs.

They were Italians.

"Lie down!" Mummy shouted. Suddenly people were running in all directions, wide-eyed and waving their arms and pointing and shouting. Doors slammed. The nanny ran the wrong way with the pram bouncing like a boat on its springs. One old military man of sorts, sitting on his balcony at the time, ran inside and fetched his shotgun, which he fired into the sky.

And then it was still.

I stood up and noticed small gravely stones clinging into indentations on the palms of my hands. I brushed them away. There was dust on my dress from the street. I became aware of the smell of seaweed in the harbour. Some birds flew soundlessly away.

We returned home without going to church.

The military man, a well-known braggart, later declared that the Italians had left in confusion after he had shot the door off one of the aeroplanes. Under normal circumstances people would have laughed at him. More bombing raids followed. My teenage cousin, John Lavrano, started a diary of every bombing raid on Corfu, which he kept until the end of the war. Later he told me that there were seven raids on that day.

Chlomos

At sunset we took the little black suitcase and departed in a small boat for the Lavrano country estate at Chlomos. Neville and I sat still on the wooden bench. No one spoke. We listened to the gentle splashing of the boatman's oars and the dripping as they were lifted, and his breathing.

We reached the beach after sunset. It was a star-lit night and a thin crescent moon cast a silver gleam on the olive trees. We had no lights but we could see the outlines of this familiar place at the foot of the Chlomos property, now strangely altered by deep shadows and the unfamiliar day that seemed to have been spawned in another time.

The boatman rowed onto the beach, got out and pushed. Neville and I removed our shoes and socks and jumped into the water, ankle-deep and cold. My feet curled around the smooth pebbles as we walked up the beach. Mummy paid the boatman and picked up the little black suitcase. We watched the phosphorescent glow dripping from the oars as the boat moved away. As the boatman receded the still air became colder and the stars more numerous. Without the slightest sound the black silhouette of an owl slid past like a vanishing ghost.

This beach and rocky coastline, the little chapel and the fishermen's hut were part of the Chlomos Estate but the village and main house were quite a distance. It was too late and dark to walk up the mountain-side to the Chlomos house, so Mummy led us to the fishermen's hut. On prior visits to the beach we had wanted to look inside but it had been strictly out of bounds. The hut had one window, boarded up. A door facing the beach hung ajar on one rusty hinge. We sidled in through the black crevice and discovered a floor covered with fishing nets. We tried to make ourselves comfortable but found it hard to fall asleep. Whichever way we turned a knot or a cork would be poking out at just the wrong angle. Mummy did not lie down; she sat on the floor propped up against the wall.

I could not see into the black corners.

Then we heard a boat approaching. The sound came closer until we could hear the clunk of oars on wood and the scrape of a keel on pebbles. We heard the muffled voices of unknown men. We heard them leave the boat and walk up the beach, crunching the gravel under their leather shoes. A large hand wrenched the door revealing the silhouette of two rough-looking men against the spangled night sky. Another figure followed. Mummy coughed loudly and asked them what their business was.

The man holding the door remained silent. The second figure pushed forward and said, “We are going to our house in the village,” and he gestured in the direction of Chlomos. “They are bombing the town,” said the first man.

“Yes, we know. We were there,” said Mummy, “Please come in.” And she offered them a night’s sleep on the nets. At this point we noticed that the third figure was a woman. When she discovered that there were children and a woman in the hut she began to weep loudly and lament her fate. She cried and prayed to the saints and spoke rudely to God for having allowed this disaster to befall her. The men, who had heard it all, told her to be quiet. “We need sleep,” they said, and added, “This is the English lady from the big house with her children.” She muttered on, under her breath until we were nearly asleep and then fell silent.

For a long time everything was still but for the water lapping the pebbles. Suddenly the silence was broken by the single penetrating cry of a bird. The woman awoke and cried out in Greek, “It’s the bad hour bird: the bird of evil omen.” I sat up and saw that Neville was also awake and looking around. Mummy tried to reassure us and whispered in English that the poor woman was a superstitious frightened peasant and that birds were always good omens.

I did not sleep after that.

The peasants woke at sunrise and began to talk to each other in loud whispers. I watched as the woman produced an old canvas bag and pulled out half a loaf of bread. It was dark and looked dry and stale. She broke the bread with her hands and gave two pieces to the men folk. She offered us each a piece. I was about to refuse when Mummy leant forward, took the bread and thanked the woman kindly. We ate it. We were hungry and the bread tasted fine.

Outside the sun was shining. The peasants headed up the hill and we followed at some distance. On their way they stopped at the little chapel of Agia Pelagiá and blessed themselves. We did the same.

In the sunshine at the familiar chapel, the bombs, the war and the corks in the nets became unreal, like half-forgotten dreams. The night of poor sleep had left my mind uncommonly sharp; the colours and smells seemed brighter. I could feel the breeze in my hair and on my skin. We drew the fresh morning air into our lungs, picked flowers and strode along the uphill path.

Chaos at the House

We reached Chlomos expecting the calm and welcoming household we had known from our holidays there. Instead we found confusion. Aunty Lily was in Athens, settling Max into his new boarding school. Aunty Sappho and Aunty Emma had come for a visit but refused to return home because of the bombs. They sat in the living room, expecting to be waited upon.

Uncle Angelo had arrived the day before with Marie, his charming wife. He assumed responsibility for the survival of everyone in the house and the village beyond. He issued new orders every day. The peasants were ordered to produce bags, fill them

with sand and put them into the windows of all the houses. These had to be stained beige or brown, including the strings that held them shut, to prevent the pilots from seeing them. Nobody was to be seen in the open. We were permitted to go outside only under the trees. Nobody was allowed to wear a watch or glasses the might glint and be spotted by the pilots. Rumour had it that the Italians gunned people down for target practice.

Uncle Philip, *paterfamilias,* presided over the comings and goings when Aunty Lily was at hand. But her absence, the forceful presence of Uncle Angelo and the many untimely visitors had become too much. Uncle Philip walked about aimlessly and complained that the war had been started for his personal inconvenience by Mussolini.

Aunty Lily could not return from Athens because the ferries from the mainland to Corfu were not operating. The piano remained closed and there was no music in the house. Mummy assumed command of the household; she made sure that meals were served at proper times, beds laid and the house kept clean. She set aside time for our lessons during the day, and at bed time she read to us. We adjusted to the new routines.

John, who had just turned sixteen, seemed untouched by the commotion. He continued to observe the habits of insects, to plant and transplant plants and amuse himself reading the Larousse Dictionary, a wonderful leather-bound book with engravings of men sporting moustaches fencing and other fascinating things. The swirl of other people's affairs were quite irrelevant in his scientific world. The war did interest him, insofar as it presented another object of study. Everyday, just before the evening meal, he and Aristidis walked into the village to hear the latest news on the BBC; the only village radio was kept in the taverna. Other than that he seemed untouched by the war.

The Italians dropped no bombs on Chlomos but every day they flew over on their way to Corfu Town and other targets, usually around midday. There were no air-raid sirens at Chlomos but the donkeys brayed loudly long before we heard the drone of the aeroplane engines.

We would rise from whatever we were doing and go to the cellar, servants and all, where we would lie on the floor between the two rows of huge barrels of wine that were housed there. Everyone went down quietly, except Aunty Sappho, who lost any semblance of dignity and self control. To stop her loud cries I lay on top of her and assured her that I would be killed in her stead. At the time my mind was set on earning a Victoria Cross. Mummy did not try to stop me. She was sure that if a bomb fell on or near the cellar we would all be drowned in wine.

Uncle Angelo had his doubts about the cellar; the floor above was timber and the roof tiles were breakable terracotta. He organised a group of able youths from the village to dig a deep L-shaped trench through the best part of Aunty Lily's rose garden. This was covered with concrete slabs and the earth that had been removed was placed in a mound on top. When the trench was finished, he commanded everyone to take refuge there as soon as the donkeys raised the alarm. Much to his annoyance no-one went to

the trench, except my cousin, John, who went there, raid or not. He was fascinated by the tertiary plant fossils that had been exposed in the walls of the trench.

War News

In the Chlomos house and in the village, people talked incessantly about the war, sharing rumours and counter rumours. We heard talk of the damage and the casualties caused by the bombing. Sometimes we knew or knew of the people who had been injured or killed, and then the indignation was especially great.

The Mayor of Corfu Town, we were told, had installed a fine air raid siren on the outskirts of town in an old man's vegetable garden. The man was very old and never left home so he was always able to switch on the siren. He was nearly blind and almost deaf but in his back yard he kept a donkey.

The mayor had also constructed a wonderful air raid shelter. People said that it had an electric light in it and a tap with drinking water. The village people were amazed to hear that it had a toilet with flushing water that came from an overhead cistern that was operated by pulling a chain. The water closet had a door with a lock, for privacy. But very few people used the wonderful shelter.

People who had relatives and friends in the country moved out of town. Most had nowhere to go, so they stayed. Many went to the Church of Saint Spiridon for protection. Steps lead up to the front door of the church; the floor level is above that of the surrounding modest houses. The church was crowded, day and night. There being no pews in Greek churches, the floor was clear and people sat and lay all about. Women talked, children cried and laughed and ran around, and old people grumbled. The men came after the siren call. They scratched out their cigarettes on the walls outside, crossed themselves hastily as they entered and sat together in groups where they discussed the war. They fell silent once the bombs began to fall. There were piles of belongings and food everywhere but no one objected. Women kept the place clean, picking up orange peels and sweeping away the crumbs. At night the electric lights were not switched on because of the blackout ordinance. Tapers in front of icons gave a dull golden light.

That part of town was never bombed, so the church and the people in it survived unscathed.

Ioannis Metaxas

Metaxas, the prime minister who admired the fascist system, had taken on dictatorial powers. He was considered to be pro-German but wanted Greece to stay neutral. The Greeks had never forgiven the Venetians for the destruction of Constantinople, which had been the gem of Orthodox Christendom. Catholics, not Protestants, were the betrayers of the true faith. The folk devils, Papists and Italians, modern and ancient, were referred to as the Franks. The war was widely understood in terms of hostility to Rome. At this time, the Germans were not especially disliked. The people of Greece valued their independence and were pro-British. Metaxas, seeking appeasement, had not taken issue against the Italians over the sinking of the Elli. The people did. A song by Sophia Vembo was taken up by the people and sung loudly.

Mussolini never you mind that you sunk our Elli.
With our little navy we are going to set your bum on fire.

We heard that Metaxas had attended a party at the German embassy where the Italian ambassador and various Italian dignitaries were present. Many people described the banquet, especially the white cake with the Italian and Greek flags as centrepiece. It was spoken about as if all had seen it with their own eyes. Just as the cake was about to be cut the Italian ambassador reminded Metaxas that the Italians had successfully taken possession of Albania on the Greek northern border. Then he requested that the Italian troops should cross over into Greece to protect Greece from the British. Metaxas was riveted to his chair and his hands began to tremble. Then he stood, up looked the ambassador in the eyes and said in a loud and resonant voice for all in the room to hear *"Ochi"* which means 'no'.

The adults talked about that a lot in Chlomos.

Many years later I discovered that these events were not quite as had been rumoured. The Italian Ambassador had woken Metaxas at home before dawn and handed him the ultimatum. Metaxas responded with the words, *"Alors, c'est la guerre."* The Italian troops started moving into Greek territory about an hour later. Nevertheless, the *"Ochi"* story caught the popular imagination. Today the 28th of October is remembered as *"Ochi"* day, such is the power of rumour to displace reality.

Five Against One

At that time Italy was a country of forty million. Greece was a country of eight million. The Italians had been preparing for war for many years. They wore smart uniforms with strong boots; they had the latest guns, aeroplanes and tanks. Greece was poor and ill-prepared for a war. Many of the soldiers who were rushed to the front wore their own civilian clothes and shoes without socks. It was snowing in the rugged mountains along the Albanian border. The Italians poured in, their big tanks quite a terrifying sight. The world looked on and waited for Greece to fold the way every other country in Europe had done under the onslaught of the axis powers. But the Greeks fought ferociously. They knew the rugged terrain. Guerrilla warfare, practiced for hundreds of years against the Ottomans, was in their blood. The Italians did not have their heart in the war. They were made for good food and music. Still they poured into Greece across the northern border in their modern tanks, arrogant with the propaganda they had been fed since Mussolini had come to power.

The Greeks fired on them from behind mountain rocks with everything they had. Even ancient Turkish blunderbusses were dusted off and carried into action by local shepherds, propped with pebbles and cotton wads, and aimed at the smartly-dressed Italians. When ammunition ran out the Greek boys fought on with anything at hand. They rolled boulders down mountains. They took off their socks, filled them with stones and flung them into the tracks of Italian tanks, and when the tanks had come to a halt they jumped atop and dropped handmade petrol bombs down the hatches.

These were the heroic stories everyone was telling. Every Greek joined the war effort. In the villages women were carding wool and spinning it into strong thick strands still

heavy with the lanolin of the sheep's back. They knitted warm waterproof socks for the troops. Big households sacrificed their spare woollen mattresses. All the women at Chlomos, myself included, knitted scarves of many shapes and sizes. We made parts for the bravest and most colourful army the world had seen.

While the world watched, the Greeks defeated the Italians with terrible loss of life on both sides. The front was pushed deep into Albania. Medications and bandages were in short supply and many of the wounded were left to perish in the snow. Italians capitulated in large numbers, most of them happy to escape the war and become prisoners of the wily Greeks.

The Greek victory became known among the allies as the Greek Miracle. Later Winston Churchill said: "Up to now we said that Greeks fight as heroes. From now on we shall say: Heroes fight as Greeks."

Aunty Sappho's Cat

Aunty Sappho owned a cat named Pikkis that had become her most important companion. In the panic to leave Corfu Town she had abandoned her cat in the house without food and water. Most cats in Corfu are able to fend for themselves but this cat, we were given to understand, was different. Aunty Sappho's guilt and sorrow was too much for anyone at Chlomos to bear, so Mummy volunteered to rescue it.

There was no petrol for the Lavrano car and Aristidis, our only driver, had been called up for military service. The village bus was the alternative. It was impossible to go at night, so Mummy took the risk of going in the daytime.

In Corfu Town the houses that had not been bombed were intact; there had been no looting. She checked for mail and picked up items that the people at Chlomos required, such as winter coats and blankets.

When she reached Aunty Sappho's house, she found that the cat, like its owner, had lost every semblance of composure. It was as thin as a rake and it had a wild look in its eyes. She tried to befriend it with a saucer of water, there being no milk in the house, but the cat ran in circles and clawed its way up the green velvet curtains. Mummy could find no basket or a box to put it in. After much chasing around she caught the cat by throwing a towel over it, and secured the four corners with a large knot. The cat wriggled violently, hissing and mewing.

With this parcel in hand Mummy took a seat in the bus to Chlomos. The driver, who waited until the bus was full, departed more than half an hour late. He stopped many times along the way to pick up passengers until the bus became so full that people had to hang on outside. Mummy was not the only one with an animal in her care. There were three chickens and a goat belonging to other people. The cat was the most troublesome passenger. It hissed and struggled and managed to get one of its front paws out of the towel. It scratched Mummy and the woman sitting next to her. Fortunately, Mummy had a window seat so she held the cat in its bundle outside for the rest of the journey.

The bus creaked and squeaked under the load and made it to the village. Aunty Sappho was delighted to see her cat still alive and subdued it with love, food and a good night's sleep in bed with her. The cat was the only thing she carried to the cellar when the donkeys began to bray.

Chapter Fifteen: The Call to Athens

The Rings

Christmas came to us in Chlomos. Mummy, John, Neville and I decorated a small tree with handmade ornaments. I made Christmas cards and Mummy helped me to compose personal messages for each family member. I remember making a special card for Aphrodite. No presents were exchanged, but on Christmas Eve we gave each other the cards.

Towards the end of January the British embassy advised all British subjects to assemble in Athens and await evacuation. People foresaw that the Germans would come to finish the job that the Italians had so abysmally failed to accomplish.

Ferries travelling between Corfu and the mainland were unreliable and possibly unsafe as targets. Mummy decided that we would have to make the journey to Athens in a fishing boat. She went to the harbour to inspect the boats and interview their captains. She found a boat and captain to her liking and after the usual haggling agreed to more than the normal fare for the passage because travelling was a risky business in those times. She didn't begrudge the man his money, but a bit of haggling was necessary to establish her authority.

At home I watched Mummy collect a few essential items and put them in the little black case. She put money and important looking papers on top of the sliver dressing table set. The little case was not full, so she looked around for something else. She took some photographs she loved: one of her father in an oval silver frame and one of Neville and me in a soft leather Venetian frame embossed with gold. She stuffed the sides with spare underwear, closed the little black suitcase, and stood silently looking at it for a moment. Then she removed the Raymond signet ring with our Raymond family coat of arms from her finger and, taking my hand, placed it on mine.

"This is yours, now. You must look after it," she said.

It had an arm in chain mail and hand wielding an axe, and the words "*Patria Fidelis*".

Then Mummy unlocked a secret drawer on her bureau. She took out a small velvet-lined box containing two signet rings that had belonged to her father: one, with the Saunders coat of arms; the other, with only a bloodstone, which she remembered him wearing. She put on the bloodstone ring, which fitted perfectly. On her left hand she wore a ring with two large diamonds in a simple modern setting. The Saunders coat of arms was returned to its hiding place.

She made sure that we were all in warm clothes: two jumpers and Burberrys. Mummy donned her big fur coat and picked up a small bag of provisions.

We walked down the stairs to the front door. Mummy stopped. She asked if there was anything else we wanted to take: one item each would be all. Neville went back for his silver christening mug, which Mummy helped him attach to his belt. I already had charge of our two dachshunds. Just as we were about to leave Neville ran upstairs to and took the eiderdown from Mummy's bed. It was a soft warm light and silky eiderdown with a paisley pattern of pink peacocks, exotic flowers and berries: an eiderdown in which were wrapped many happy memories of cuddling up with Mummy for afternoon sleeps and of stories told and poems read.

Mummy turned out the lights, locked the front door and we left.

The Crossing

At the boat harbour we found our cousin, John, and a few friends waiting to say goodbye. And there was Aunty Sappho, without her cat but well prepared for the sea journey. She had equipped herself with a bucket in which to be sick, and lots of blankets.

It was a cold and blustery night. Neville and I were in high spirits and quite excited when we saw the boat waiting for us at the quay. It was one of the island's traditional fishing boats: wooden, somewhat rounded and quite simple in construction. I thought it looked like Noah's Ark, which seemed appropriate since by that time it had started to rain heavily. The deck had no shelter or safety rails. We descended through a hatch to the hold that consisted of a single dark space. A small portion of the hold had a level floor; the rest curved upward, following the shape of the ribbed hull. A trunk, which Mummy had sent ahead, was standing in the centre of the floor.

The little diesel engine started, making a loud 'put put' sound, and we felt the boat shudder as we started our journey out of the harbour.

After Aunty Sappho had been put down, near the rear of the boat, propped up between blankets and crossbeams, and the dogs put in their place at her feet, Mummy tried to settle us down for the night. It was not easy since the boat had started rocking heavily from side to side. The trunk began sliding about. Mummy put a wedge of newspaper under the trunk and assured us that we would soon be in calm waters; "In this part of the Mediterranean violent storms are short lived," she said. I saw an expression of concern on her face and we all heard Aunty Sappho groaning and clutching her bucket. Waves thudded on the sides. The boat was not riding the swell the way it should.

"I am going to see what's happening," Mummy said. "Don't worry, I will be back soon." She disappeared through the little opening that led to the deck. But she did not come back. We were worried.

On deck, the captain and his assistant were shouting and swearing at each other. They were fighting over the wheel, pulling it this way and that, and threatening each other with clenched fists. Mummy realised that the captain was not the man she had interviewed on the previous day. She discovered that he was the brother of the captain and a coachman by trade. The captain had been called up to the army, she was told.

The assistant was a young relative: also not a seaman. Fortunately, Mummy was an experienced sailor. She seized command of the boat.

The coachman and his assistant shrank away from the wheel. By that time I had climbed the ladder and saw them standing rather shame-faced, with feet apart and looking intently at the deck, which had become a great deal more stable under Mummy's expert steerage. Rain was lashing the deck and all three were drenched to the skin. I went back down the hold and sat on the floor next to Neville.

We crossed the open sea and before daybreak landed at a small sheltered harbour on the mainland where we intended to hide during the daylight hours to avoid the enemy aeroplanes.

It was good to get onto firm land. Aunty Sappho stayed on board. She was too afraid to climb the steep ladder out of the hold and Mummy agreed; she guessed that it might not have been possible to get her down again.

A beautiful day had followed the storm. We took the dogs for a walk under the trees. To our amazement we felt as though the ground were rocking under our feet. Then we sat on the grass to enjoy slices of cold *pastitzo*. Our coachman and his assistant chose to stay onboard and scrub the deck in petulant silence.

A group of old men and boys came to look us over. From about three metres away they stared at us. The women kept their distance. When Mummy greeted them in Greek, their faces broke out in smiles and the questions began. "Where are you going?" one of them asked, and; "Oh, those are your children?" "Where is your husband?" "Is he fighting in the war?" "Did they bomb your village?" "How old are you?" asked another, and they looked at us intently with eyes that gleamed friendly curiosity as they cast a net of simple inquisitive welcome about us.

They were fishermen and knew the local waters well. When they heard that we were on our way to Athens they insisted that we must go no further. "The sea is a minefield," one said, and several of the boys pointed to mines that only they could see.

"Stay with us. There is plenty of room in our village." And "We have good water," they assured us.

One of the old men agreed to take Mummy in his small wooden boat to inspect the minefield. The mines were anchored and floated in the water below the keel depth of our boat. However, the mines had been placed by the Greek Navy so many of them had broken free of their moorings and were floating on the surface. They were drifting away and no one could tell where the next one might be. Hitting one of these would have blown us up, boat and all. Mummy decided to leave immediately so that the surface mines could be seen in the daylight.

As we were about to leave, I saw a little old lady, dressed in black and carrying a white package, picking her way down the steep path from the village. She approached Mummy and handed her the package, a bowl wrapped in white linen. "Some cheese," she said, "… for your journey." She smiled and by way of explanation added, "You

are English." And without further ado, she turned to make her slow arthritic climb back to the village.

On board Mummy took charge of the tiller. The coachman and his assistant stood close behind her, nervously scanning the sea. Neville and I remained on deck, watching for mines. We passed through the Gulf of Corinth and eventually reached Piraeus, the port of Athens.

Piraeus

The sun was shining in Piraeus and we were relieved to have reached the end of our adventure. The restaurants and cafes lining the water's edge of the harbour were as we remembered them but the music and crowds of merrymakers were absent. Some old men playing with their beads sat among the vacant chairs starring listlessly at nothing in particular.

Once in the harbour, our coachman donned his brother's naval cap and strutted about the deck. He ordered his assistant to jump off and secure the boat alongside the wharf. Then he clambered on to the wharf and yelled for a taxi. Several taxis, having seen the boat arrive, were preparing to come to our assistance. An argument broke out between the drivers, each claiming to have been the first to see our boat. Paying no attention to our coachman in his magnificent captain's hat, they yelled and shook their fists at each other.

Another taxi, just arriving at the harbour, seized the opportunity and drove up to the boat. Without losing a moment the driver began to help our coachman's assistant load our trunk into the boot. The assistant found some rope on the boat to secure the boot, which would not close around the trunk.

After the deed had been done the taxi drivers who had lost the race stood about criticising the knot, predicting the certain loss of the trunk and giving advice.

Aunty Sappho, who had been calling weakly from the hold, had to be lifted up. This, it seemed, would be a major operation; many hands were called for. Even the taxi drivers began to give instructions and several of them offered their hands down the hatch. Neville, who was still in the hold, did his best by pushing her from behind. But Aunty Sappho, determined to remain every bit a lady, slowly ascended without taking any of the proffered hands.

Mummy paid the coachman the agreed sum even though she had navigated the boat and despite the coachman's request for double payment in view of the inclement weather and dangerous daylight sailing. She gave the assistant a generous tip. When it became apparent to the coachman that no amount of haggling would budge Mummy's determination, he shook hands with her like an old friend. We got into the taxi. "Go in God's care," the coachman called out as we drove away.

Athens

Athens is a beautiful ragtag place: cracked, flaking, fragrant and oozing with history. But the city that Neville and I remembered with affection had no time to greet us. The park where we had fed the ducks on prior visits was empty. The flower shops that

usually spilled out onto the pavements and filled the air with perfume had retreated behind closed doors. The crowds that we remembered strolling about in the sunshine were gone. This time the people we saw were going about in a hurry. The familiar hooting of taxi horns seemed louder and more urgent.

We left Aunty Sappho at her son's apartment and drove on to a neighbourhood of apartment blocks that seemed like skyscrapers to Neville and me, although they were only five or six storeys high.

Helen Kosmetatos, our good friend from Cephalonia, was staying in one of these buildings on the fourth floor in a spacious apartment with a view of the Acropolis in the distance. She invited us to stay until we could find a place of our own.

That evening the maid, while serving our dinner, warned us of the spies that she assured us were lurking all about. "Yes," said Helen. "You do not know whom to trust these days."

Before Neville and I went to bed, we checked in the cupboards and behind the curtains for spies.

The Lift

In Athens there were air-raid sirens to warn people of in-coming enemy aeroplanes. Most of the buildings in Athens have basements with high level slit-like windows that look out on the feet of pedestrians. The basements were put to use as shelters. Shortly after breakfast on the first day of our stay in Athens the sirens began to howl. Helen had gone out early and the maid had not yet arrived. Mummy, Neville and I set off to find our way to the basement.

A staircase, generally used by the cleaners and other staff, spiralled around a lift that serviced all the floors in the building. We pressed the button and waited at the lift door. By the time the lift came down from the floor above it was already nearly full. The people squeezed up to let us in. We stood with our backs to the others to avoid coming face to face with anyone else. No one talked.

Neville and I were fascinated by the cage-like construction of the lift, and especially by the metal Bostwick gates which unfolded to close after we had entered. There was no more room in the lift so we did not stop at the third floor. We went down slowly, passing the people who were waiting. We looked at them. They looked at us. We saw their faces and then slowly moved down to the level of their knees and calves. The floor slab was waist high when the light in the lift went out and the lift stopped with an unexpected jiggle. The electricity had been cut. We were stuck between the third and the second floors. The people who had been left behind ran down the stairs to the basement while we were held captive in our metal cage.

People in the lift became afraid. "O Lord, what will happen to us now?" one woman cried out. "This will be the end of us," said another. Mummy whispered to us in English "Don't worry. We are going to be alright." A large rotund man in the lift shouted, "That lady is a spy. She's speaking Italian to the children." Mummy told him that we were English but he would not take her word for it. He demanded proof and

Mummy duly produced her passport. He saw the words British in gold letters on the front. “There you are,” he said, holding it high and brandishing it about above his head. “Brindisi is written on the front.” There was a moment of terrible tension.

“It says British not Brindisi,” Mummy announced, and added that she had indeed spoken to us in English. The passport was passed silently around and people who could read the Roman alphabet were relieved to see that Mummy was right.

We were there for nearly an hour. When we reached the basement the air raid was over. Two of our fellow passengers apologised to Mummy on the behalf of the spy chaser.

Life in the Suburbs

About ten days later, we moved from Helen’s apartment to a house in one of the leafy suburbs of Athens. It was a modest double-storey place. We had the ground floor. Above us lived an Austrian lady, Frau Scheuch, with her young son, Anton. Above them was a roof terrace. Mummy had befriended Frau Scheuch in the past; before the war she had invited her for a holiday to Cephalonia. We understood that, being an Austrian, she was not pro-German.

In Athens everyone was preoccupied and had little time for friends and relatives. We hardly saw Frau Scheuch and Anton did not come down to play with us. We too were busy. Mummy had enrolled us in the local English Council School. Every morning the school bus picked us up at a bus stop near our house. Miss Ponsonby, a plump and kindly English lady, had the job of watching that the children behaved on the bus and got on and off at the appropriate places. Neville and I took an immediate liking to the school and marvelled that everyone there spoke English. There were only two classrooms, one for the younger and one for the older children. And there was a gravely football ground. But for us it was English and quite wonderful.

I was in the senior classroom where the headmaster, Mr Radley, taught the three Rs. On my first day there, the class was studying Cromwell and the Puritans. Mr Radley described their mode of dress in detail and then asked us to draw a picture of Cromwell. My picture was chosen as the best and from then on I was popular with Mr Radley and the rest of the class.

Mr Radley taught us old-fashioned English country dancing. We would go to the gravely football ground and dance as Mr Radley played his recorder. One day, while we were dancing and Mr Radley was enjoying his music, we heard enemy aeroplanes approaching. I looked up at the sky but could see nothing. The boy dancing next to me stepped on my shoe. Mr Radley’s music wavered, then he said, “English people are not afraid,” so we danced on and he played on.

Spies were never mentioned at our school. We listened to Churchill speak on the radio and our patriotism increased daily.

Outside the school many people were still chasing imaginary and not such imaginary spies. The maid confided to Mummy that the lady above was a spy and that she would

go to the roof terrace at night to flash torch messages to the enemy aeroplanes. Mummy thought this to be highly unlikely.

At last the day for the evacuation of British subjects was announced. Permanent Athens residents were first on the list. Many of them took furniture in addition to essential personal belongings. One family took a grand piano on board. The people from the outlying areas came next, until the ship was full. A number of people were left behind, including us. Vague promises were made about another ship that would come in due course. Mummy was neither amused nor convinced.

Churchill had promised to keep the island of Crete as an allied base. Mummy decided we would go there under our own steam. We had no grand piano and no furniture with us. The dogs, the little black suitcase, the eiderdown and a few items of clothing were all we had.

Before leaving, Mummy went upstairs to say goodbye to Frau Scheuch. She knocked on the door, which had no knocker or bell. We heard footsteps inside but the door did not open. Mummy knocked louder and called out to say who it was. The door opened a crack and then slammed shut in our faces. Mummy stood still outside the door for a while then turned. We followed her down the stairs. All she said when we reached our front door was "Oh well." Neville and I said nothing.

Chapter Sixteen: Crete

Another Journey

Among the British remaining in Athens at that time were Sidney and Katia Merlin. Uncle Sidney stood well over six feet tall with a strong build and broad shoulders. His snow-white hair and huge handlebar moustache gave him the aspect of a Teutonic god. When we were quite little Mummy had told us that Uncle Sidney was a descendant of Merlin the Wizard from the time of King Arthur. His father, Charles Merlin, had been the British Consul at Piraeus and was a manager with the British Ionian Bank, working his way up to Director at the end of his career. My great-grandfather, John Saunders, had managed the Cephalonian branch. Our families, having a professional association through the bank, had remained close friends ever since. Sidney Merlin was known in his youth as a sharp-shooter and had Olympic medals in this sport.

Aunty Katia, by birth a Greek whose aristocratic family had lived in Russia before the revolution, cut a glamorous figure. She was always immaculately turned out and made up, with never a hair out of place. Edwin, their only child, was serving in the Royal Air Force in England.

Most of the small groups of British people who remained in Athens chose to wait for the promised ship, which they believed would come to rescue them. Mummy, Sidney and Katia decided otherwise. The Merlins owned properties in Crete, and invited us to stay with them. They agreed that we would go separately by taxi down the Peloponnesus to Gythio, a small port, where we would meet and go together by ferry boat to Crete.

Finding a taxi to take us such a long distance from Athens was not easy, despite the offer of a handsome fare. The Merlins had left before we found a driver who was prepared to take us. The driver was eager to please and seemed reliable although his taxi was old and battered.

It was nearly midday by the time we left. Neville and I played guessing games to pass the time. The road was bumpy and dusty. It was quite warm in the car and we became hot and thirsty. "Just look at those wonderful mountains," Mummy said. "Greece is a magnificent place."

At lunch we stopped at a little village taverna where we ate bread and oil with cheese and tomatoes. Mummy broke with etiquette and asked our driver to join us at the table. It was a hurried lunch and we were soon on the road again.

Not far from the village we found the road blocked by a herd of goats followed by their old shepherd wearing the traditional wide trousers. Our driver hooted his horn. The goats stopped and looked at us in a bored way but did not budge. The shepherd leant on his stick and did the same. When our driver realised that hooting would not do the job he hung out of the window and shouted profanities at the goats and the shepherd. The old man must have been deaf. He doffed his cap and bowed respectfully. Whereupon, we all got out of the car and chased the goats to the side of the road. The taxi man waved his hat and Mummy clapped her hands and shouted "Shoo, shoo…" Our dachshunds barked and ran about with evident delight. Neville and I also ran about. The goats were quite big and smelly so we made sure not to get too close to them. The shepherd watched.

Further down the road we found our passage blocked again, this time by a herd of Italian soldiers. Mummy thought that there were at least three thousand Italians but perhaps there were more than this. Perhaps there were fewer. We did not count them. The Italians were looking rather scruffy and had no weapons. They were chatting happily and some were singing bits of opera, glad to be far from the front line. Behind them were three Greek soldiers holding light submachine guns and smoking cigarettes. They hardly paid attention to the prisoners of war as they chatted and sauntered down the road. Like the goats the Italians stared at us. But when our driver sounded his horn they moved to the side of the road of their own accord. Then the Italians waved and saluted cheerily as we passed by.

On the top of the next crest and out of sight of anyone or any buildings, just before our route descended to the valley below, we saw German aeroplanes coming towards us. Mummy jumped out of the car and dragged Neville into a nearby ditch. The driver ran for the cover of some bushes. I stayed in the car. I remembered Mr Radley's words, "English people are not afraid," and I was determined to remain British and lady-like. I straightened my posture. Nothing happened. Fortunately the aeroplanes were going elsewhere. Mummy was not pleased with me when she got back into the car.

Not long after that our taxi blew a tyre and the car had no spare. Mummy was obviously concerned when she saw the driver rummaging through various bits and pieces trying to find the wherewithal to fix the tyre. "Don't worry," he said. "I shall

stuff the tyre with grass." He did, using straw from a neighbouring field. Neville and I helped him gather some of the straw, which was very dry and brittle. The taxi seemed to go fine on a tyre full of grass.

Night time found us at the top of a mountain negotiating our way down the zigzag of hairpin bends on a narrow road atop a terrifying precipice. The sound of aeroplanes above us meant we had to drive without headlights. We moved very slowly and often stopped for the driver to get out and light matches to find the bend in the road. I am not sure why I was not worried by this at the time. Perhaps I slept through most of it.

We reached Gythio at early dawn. We were hungry, not having eaten anything since lunch the day before. We joined the Merlins for breakfast at a small seaside café. The grown-ups had bread and coffee. Neville and I were served eggs that tasted of garlic. Mummy asked our driver to sit at our table but this time he refused. He wanted to get home as fast as possible. Mummy thanked him and said how grateful we were; "You probably saved our lives," she said. He answered, "In God's hands."

On the wharf a small cluster of people was waiting for the ferry to Crete. We were about to board when a Greek naval officer with his family and friends arrived; He was large, and they were late and loud. The people waiting on the wharf moved aside. He pushed his entourage ahead, up the gangplank and onto the choice benches on the ferry. Even the captain was intimidated. When the officer demanded life jackets, these where handed over. With a great deal of shouting and stretching of arms, the officer's family and friends were strapped in. There were no life jackets left for the people who followed.

We took seats near the middle of the boat. I reminded myself that I could swim and the naval officer probably could not.

As we passed the rocky island of Kythria and moved onto the open sea, I thought about mines and decided that I should be the last to leave the boat in the event of an explosion. While the ferry settled into the sea I would stand beside the captain. I imagined the water lapping around my ankles and then my knees. I imagined the naval officer and his family drifting away in their life jackets and then British sailors in smart white and blue uniforms arriving in longboats to rescue the passengers.

Mummy, who could read minds, began to talk. Before the start of the war she had been to Crete on an archaeological expedition and had returned full of enthusiasm. Now she told us again about that ancient island: the palace at Knossos; the Minotaur in the labyrinth; Ariadne, the king's daughter, who fell in love with Theseus and saved his life. And how dolphins carried him away leaving Ariadne to mourn him until Dionysus came to rescue her. In Ancient Greece, she explained, dolphins were regarded as sacred animals, messengers of the gods, protectors of fishermen and beloved of Poseidon's daughters, the Nereids. She told us that legend and history were irrevocably intertwined in Crete; myths that are not true elsewhere are true on Crete. And as she spun the threads of these tales dolphins appeared in the sea beside us. They followed our small ferry and played in its wake.

Farm House

When we reached the port of Chania there was neither time nor mood for sightseeing.

Uncle Sidney owned two properties on the island. One was a fine country house set in its own park, the other a small farm in the country. The fine country house was tenanted and although the lease had expired the tenants were reluctant to leave. We had to go to the farm.

We took two taxis. Uncle Sidney's taxi lead the way, raising a huge cloud of dust that obscured our windscreen and blew into our faces. The road, often barely discernable, took us through hills and valleys until it ended in front of the small farmhouse on the side of a hill. In the valley below, masses of poplars hid a stream from our sight.

The farmhouse was typical of the better peasant houses, elegant in it's simplicity. The main building facing the road was a double-storey residence with kitchen-dining on the ground floor and two bedrooms upstairs. Sheds, a stable, storerooms and accommodation for a farmhand surrounded a small paved courtyard at the back. Chickens, goats, a donkey and a small vegetable garden appeared to be all the farm comprised. Beyond, the place looked hot and dry and too steep for cultivation. Three stately eucalyptus trees shaded the house.

We were greeted by some local people who had come to welcome us. The women brought *mezethes*, opened the shutters upstairs and laid our beds. We were tired that night and slept soundly, so soundly that we did not notice the swarms of mosquitoes or the bed bugs. No one escaped being bitten. My bites were the worst, each bite turning into a flaming red welt. I could hardly walk and for added drama I insisted on going about with a walking stick. A doctor was called and came with a big black bag full of medications and salves of many varieties. We were given ointment in jars to apply to our wounds and quinine to take for the mosquitoes. Mummy and Aunty Katia with the help of some women from the village took the infested wool filling out of the mattresses, washed it all and laid it out in the sun. Later, when the wool had dried and become soft, fluffy and clean again, the beds were made.

Uncle Sidney cut branches from the eucalyptus trees and used them in the fireplaces upstairs and downstairs. The aroma of the burning oil repelled the mosquitoes so the fires were kept burning day and night.

Life was pleasant and peaceful at the farm. Neville and I found lots to do: collecting eggs, watching the goats being milked and going for rides on the donkey. Uncle Sidney was kept busy with his fires and fixing things about the place. Aunty Katia and Mummy sat often in the kitchen talking about the war over countless cups of tea.

Captain Coots

One day a man in military uniform knocked at our door. With him was a younger man, also in uniform. The man spoke English with an accent we had never heard before. He introduced himself as Captain Coots, an Australian. The young man was his batman. Mummy and Aunty Katia invited them in for a cup of tea and Uncle Sidney joined them. Neville and I watched and listened. His unit, he told us, was

camped down the hill along the river, out of sight and well hidden by the poplars. We heard that the Captain was looking for a place from where he could send important military information to headquarters. I supposed he would be sending his messages by Morse Code using secret ciphers. He told Uncle Sidney that if he were to send his messages from the valley where the troops were camped their position could be identified by the enemy. Uncle Sidney gave him permission to use one of the upstairs rooms and we all felt happy to be helping with the war effort. After that Captain Coots and his batman came daily to send their messages. He was always polite but never stayed for tea or a friendly chat again. The two were always in a hurry.

One day Captain Coots seemed to be in more of a hurry than usual. He thanked the grown-ups for helping him and took out two gold nuggets from a small hidden pocket in his shirt. He gave one to Aunty Katia and one to Mummy. He said it was a goodbye present. That was the last we saw of Captain Coots.

Much later, after the war, Mummy decided to find out if Captain Coots had come out of Crete alive. All her enquiries came to nothing. No one had heard of Captain Coots and there were no military records of such a person. Could he have been a spy?

Bella Capina

Shortly after the Captain Coots episode Uncle Sidney's country house, Bella Capina, was vacated and we moved in. It was very large. The three-storey building had a U shape about a walled court in the centre. The court was entered through large gates. The tenants had taken good care of the place. It was clean. The walls had recently been painted white. The wooden floors were polished. Heavy locally-woven woollen rugs were in every room. Wooden chairs were simple but elegant and the cushions were embroidered with floral patterns in a traditional style. In the living room, on one of the walls, a large tapestry depicted an ancient battle. The high ceilings were supported by huge timber beams. Outside, gardeners were clipping hedges, weeding flower beds and sweeping pathways, although the pathways seemed to me to be already clean. Peacocks strutted about looking superior and displaying their magnificent plumage. Beyond the gardens, orderly olive groves stretched out across the rolling hill, down to a river nearby. We were not troubled by bed bugs or mosquitoes at Bella Capina.

I turned thirteen at Bella Capina. I do not remember any special celebrations.

King George II

One morning a man on a bicycle arrived with a telegram for Uncle Sidney. It was from the King of Greece, who was a friend of his. The telegram read:

"Arriving soon stop Request stay Bella Capina stop signed George II."

Telegrams were always short like that in those days. We were delighted and more cleaning, polishing and clipping of hedges took place. Some goats in the olive groves were moved to fields lower down in the valley. Uncle Sidney and Mummy took the whole affair in their stride, while Aunty Katia became busy delegating preparations to the household staff.

And then the King arrived with a retinue of military and civilian personnel. The King did not arrive in an open parade car, as I had expected, but in a dark unmarked car preceded and followed by members of his party in similar vehicles. We watched him come out of the car and say a few words to the chauffeur, who was holding the door for him. I thought that he looked very handsome and regal in his military uniform although he did not look quite as resplendent as in his official photographs. A large barrel-shaped military man in a more magnificent uniform approached from one of the other vehicles and bowed slightly. Uncle Sydney walked down to greet the King and the two men embraced. The rest of our household lined the entry steps to welcome him. He stopped and spoke to each person individually. When he came to Neville and me he asked our names and spoke to us, first in Greek and then in English. His English was perfect. He had spent many years in exile in England.

Once inside the house he sat down for a cup of coffee and a chat with Uncle Sidney. His entourage bustled about the place organising things and moving into their appointed rooms. From that day on we saw them only at meal times. Bella Capina was so large that a whole wing was given over to the King and his entourage, and meeting rooms were set up for the war cabinet. They spent most of their time behind closed doors in meetings or listening to the radio. The news of the war in Greece was always bad.

Every morning after breakfast the King took a walk around the garden before joining the meetings. He admired the hedges and the peacocks, and spoke to the gardeners. One morning the King had a soccer ball. Neville and he kicked the ball about, and the King laughed. I do not think the rest of the party noticed the garden or the peacocks. They certainly never noticed Neville and me.

At mealtimes various attachés and occasionally the Prime Minister of Greece, Mr Tsouderos, would be present. The large barrel-shaped man, Colonel Dimitrios Levidis, Master of Ceremonies and Grand Marshal of the Court, we later learned, always accompanied the King at table. The Colonel was the most impressive of them but it seemed he had little to say. This is all the more remarkable as the Colonel was Greek.

Mummy had presumed that Neville and I would take our evening meals before the adults in a neighbouring room. The King decided otherwise; meals would be more pleasant if the children were present, he said. The main table was occupied by the grown-ups so a small table was brought in for Neville and me. On the King's insistence the small table was placed next to him. We were, of course, on our best behaviour and instructed not to speak unless spoken to. The King often spoke to us; he also taught me how to waggle my ears.

The Battle of Crete

One evening the King met privately with Uncle Sidney and Mummy. Reluctantly he broke the news that he and his group would have to prepare for evacuation from Crete. Messages had been intercepted and a German invasion by air was expected at any time. This, he assured them, was reliable top-secret information. Churchill's promise to defend Crete had become uncertain, in view of the war in the Egyptian

Western Desert. The King and the rest of the entourage would leave at night to a safe house and then escape from Greece to set up a government in exile abroad. We would follow later, but for the time being we should stay behind and keep the house open and functioning as if the King were still there. The Germans, who regularly flew over taking photographs, should not know that he had left.

The next morning swarms of aeroplanes flew in across the island from the north, droning across the sky like wild bees drumming their way in. I went out to have a look and saw so many aeroplanes that there seemed no room in the sky for more. The parachutes began to fall all over the northern side of the island. Later, an aeroplane load of Germans landed in the orchard just outside Bella Capina. New Zealand troops, who had remained near the house after the King's departure, fired on them as they came down, letting off a sound like strings of firecrackers popping.

This continued all day. Most of the action was taking place further away. We could see plumes of smoke rising from the town. At night we could hear the cannon fire. The following day, new waves of paratroopers fell from the sky. For many days a big gun sounded like a giant clock ticking away at regular intervals throughout the night. German aeroplanes bombed the town and harbour incessantly. The bombs had whistles on them to strike fear into the people below.

I saw it all but I did not feel afraid. The war seemed to be something taking place outside our house. I observed and accepted these events with the eyes of an innocent child; it was what it was. Mummy gave us courage by her confident assertion that we would be alright. She protected us that way.

After a few days of fighting the Fourth Field Ambulance commandeered Bella Capina to set up a field hospital. The main hospital, we were told, had been bombed by the Germans who had ignored the giant red cross marking on the ground and the roof. Mummy and Aunty Katia did their best to help with the wounded who were brought in on stretchers. Neville and I were not allowed to go to the hospital area where the wounded were being treated. A trench was dug in the garden and we moved in there during the day time. A beautiful lantana bush hung over the trench and we huddled under its shade. Mummy installed a small wooden carving of Our Lady on a makeshift shelf in the trench and many of the soldiers prayed with the rest of us.

Whenever aeroplanes flew over or bombs were dropped or cannon fire was heard the peacocks let out a terrible screech. The peacocks were screeching most of the time.

Mummy spent many hours with the wounded and dying, giving them drinks and moral support. There were two badly wounded Germans on stretchers and she was helping one of them to drink some water when a senior officer came by. "Look after our boys. Don't waste any time on them," he said. She replied, "They're all boys to me."

Chapter Seventeen: Withdrawal

On the Road to Sphakia

One week after the invasion had started, orders arrived to withdraw. The men of the Fourth Field Ambulance and the walking wounded left Bella Capina that afternoon. We went with them. The dying and the stretcher cases were left behind. One young orderly volunteered to stay. The rest of us left on foot.

We walked and walked. We walked on the road that crossed Crete to Sphakia in the south where, we were told, ships of the Royal Navy would be waiting to evacuate us.

Mummy carried the little black suitcase and held the dogs' leads. I carried a small canvas bag with personal essentials and Neville carried his eiderdown and silver christening mug. Aunty Katia carried her handbag and looked as though she was going to a smart tea party. Uncle Sidney did the carrying for the two of them; he looked like something out *Die Walküre*, a tall strong god-like Teutonic figure with a wide white handlebar moustache.

The road was packed with dispirited troops walking in the same direction. We were the only civilians. And as we moved the mass of people swelled into a river of men so tightly packed that we were at times literally swept along, unable to walk faster or slower than the others: pushed forward if we slowed down, stepping on ankles in front of us if we were not careful.

I was surprised to see that the English Pommies were not all tall and handsome. Prior to this, I had met only officers and gentlemen of statuesque bearing. Many of the troops on the road were short, pale and scrawny, and they spoke accents of English I had not heard before and could hardly understand. But they were being as brave as they could. I noticed that many New Zealanders had false teeth. The Australians were the good lookers: large and suntanned and freckled. Everyone was tired and hungry and above all thirsty. They were decent blokes. If they had a ration of Maconochie's hard tack biscuits and bully beef with vegetables they shared it with us. "Look after the English children," they said. M & V, the rations were called: meat and vegetables.

Jip and Joke, our dogs with their short little legs, gamely kept up with us. When Aunty Lily had given us the dogs as pups we had agreed to always speak German to them and this had become a habit, hard to break under any circumstances. Mummy took control of the dogs to prevent us from making that mistake.

On the first day of the walk, we saw Theodore Stephanides, whom we had last seen in Corfu. He was travelling in the opposite direction, towards the front line, in an open topped car with military markings. He seemed to be very uncomfortable in the back seat, high up as if sitting on something. He might have been sitting on a box of scientific equipment or medical supplies. From this position his upright posture gave the impression that he was leading the charge although he was not driving the car.

He did not see us. We had only been walking for half a day, but by this time we were already too tired to run after the car or even to call out and wave. "Quite

extraordinary," said Uncle Sidney. "I suppose he is on his way to explain to the Germans the impossibility of their military *perpetuum mobile*."

Some time after this the road became steep and winding as we approached the White Mountain. We were getting more and more tired and the burdens we were carrying seemed to become heavier. Mummy was finding the little black suitcase heavy, indeed. She stopped by the side of the road and threw out most of its contents, including the silver brushes, but even so it was heavy. Along the road were items discarded by others: weapons, gas masks, clothing, cases and kitbags. Papers blew about, rattling against our ankles. Photographs and letters were trampled into the ground. Nearby a truck had run into a ditch and been abandoned with its hood open as if it were gaping in disbelief and unable to cry out. Further up the mountain we ran into many abandoned vehicles. Often they were burned out and badly damaged from being shot at from the air. The road was under constant attack from German aeroplanes that came in waves of four or five at a time. Usually they would be shooting and bombing targets ahead of us or behind us along the road.

Attack

A clear blue sky gave a lone German aeroplane an advantage and it dived directly at us with an electrifying scream. We dashed at rocks under the scant cover of olive trees. Some of the soldiers, weakened by wounds, no longer had the strength to run; they stumbled and fell near the edge of the road or crumpled onto hard rocks. One soldier in the middle of the road trudged on with odd mechanical steps, staring straight ahead and shaking his head 'no, no, no' nodding as cannon shot spattered the ground about him. And then he fell in a lurch, forwards onto the road coughing with cannon shot and vanished under a rising shroud of smoke and dust. The backwash from the aeroplane, speeding away, drew the shroud thin and quivering against the ground. Some small stones that had leapt angrily into the air fell clattering through the olive tree behind me.

And then my ears became filled with the sounds of thunderous silence. And Neville's eyes became large and round.

Mummy took a hold of Neville's hand, picked up the eiderdown that he had let fall into the dust, and as the river of men reassembled we fell into line and walked on with the rest of them. Behind us some people pulled the body to the side of the road and put some stones on it. No one spoke. Everyone was thirsty.

Later, one of the soldiers came up and offered to look after the dogs. Mummy agreed, expecting him to walk alongside us. However, we soon lost sight of him and we never saw the man or the dogs again; they vanished into the crowd and into the twilight. Some of the men had not eaten for days.

We were not able to feel sad about the dogs. The horror, the heat, our hunger and our thirst had anesthetised our minds. There was too much happening that was horrific beyond our capacity to take in. We did not mourn our loss until months later.

We walked through the night in the river of men lit by the stars. There was no moon although the sky was clear. It became very cold. The aeroplanes did not attack us in the dark that night.

The Cave

Before dawn an order was passed down by word of mouth from somewhere ahead. We were to leave the road and disperse during the daylight hours to avoid enemy attention. To the left of our road the mountainside dropped steeply into the valley of Askifou. To the right, a steep ascent presented a rocky uninviting aspect. Dark shades that looked like trees seemed the only hiding places on the dry mountainside. Uncle Sidney said we would be sure to find caves that would provide shelter somewhere up the mountain. We were followed by a group of army boys and made slow progress on the rocky terrain, often stumbling as we went. At dawn we had not found any caves. We became worried and some of the men grumbled. Uncle Sidney walked ahead of us, all the time looking up the mountain. "I can see cliffs," he turned and shouted; "The caves will be there." And there they were: enough caves to absorb us all.

We picked a cave with a wider opening than most and entered, followed by a number of army chaps. The sun was rising by that time but the cave was dark inside. We could hardly see but as our eyes adjusted we were amazed to find a big brass bed standing up against the rocky side of the space we had entered. The bed was covered with a spotless white embroidered quilt. Seeing nobody around who could own the bed, Neville and I sat on it. The bed was soft and comfortable. Mummy said we could sit there but not lie down as the owner might come at any moment. From our vantage point we watched our cave fill with troops. Most of the men moved into the dark recesses and lay down to sleep.

Suddenly I felt savage bites on the back of my calves. Neville was also bitten and drew his legs up. I looked down to see what sort of creature it could be and saw a bony hand pinching my legs. We quickly jumped off the bed. A wild-looking woman crawled out after us. She started to attack people, pinching, kicking and shouting that we should move out, that this was her cave. Her streaked grey hair was unkempt and stood up wildly around her face. I thought she was a witch.

Uncle Sidney commended her to calm down. "We shall not leave until nightfall whether you like it or not," he boomed, his powerful voice amplified by the resonance in the cave.

I heard Aunty Katia saying over and over again, "Look at what the Germans have done to us. We have become troglodytes." For the first time she looked quite distraught. Uncle Sidney took her in his arms and comforted her. She cried.

Mummy had no one to comfort her so she comforted everyone else in the cave. She even tried to reassure the mad witch and helped her to get under her bed again. No one sat on the bed after that. Uncle Sidney took off his coat and made a place for Aunty Katia to sit down. The rest of us sat on the earth floor. When we leaned back sharp rocks poked into our backs.

Water

It was hard to be without food but harder to be without water. Someone said that we should have gone to the valley below for there would surely be water there. Uncle Sidney looked out but could see no water in the valley. He saw a small village on the side of the mountain below the road. Aunty Katia, who could read his mind, said, "You are not going down there. You are such a big man the Germans are sure to spot you. I'd rather die of thirst than let you go."

The troops could not go either for they would certainly have betrayed our hiding place. Some were wounded and needed the rest. They were very thirsty, the wounded ones especially. I remembered the lines, "Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee." Mummy had read it to us once. Besides, the Victoria Cross was still in my mind so I volunteered. Mummy allowed me to go with strict instructions that I should hide if I heard aeroplanes approaching. Sorties were flying over approximately every half hour, looking for targets. Mummy stayed with Neville and prayed.

German aeroplanes had been bombing small villages on either side of the road. We had seen villages, often no more than a few peasant houses clustered around a well, with their roofs fallen in and burning. This village did not appear to have been bombed.

Going down the mountain was easier than going up to the cave and I was soon in the village. I found a well but there was no rope and bucket to draw water. I knocked on the door of a nearby house but no one answered. I tried other houses but found nobody. For a while I stood, perplexed and still, listening for the sound of voices. I turned around searching the casements for any sign of movement. The pulsing of my heart entered my ears like bare feet running on soft sand. Then I heard a door slam. I made myself walk boldly up to the door. It was partly open and it creaked as I pushed it. "Is anybody there?" I called in Greek with a voice louder than I had intended. A bird flew off the roof above my head and winged away. No one answered my call. Only the ghosts of those who'd fled seemed to hang in the air.

I walked into the house and looked around. On the window sill was a terracotta pitcher, a kind of water pitcher called boti in Greek. These are shaped like small Roman amphorae with flattened bottoms. These pitchers are porous and so the water is kept cool and fresh; they are commonly used for holding drinking water. The boti was full with about three litres of water.

At that moment I heard an aeroplane fly over. I squatted under a solid wooden table and waited. When the aeroplane had gone I took the boti and made my way up to the cave. Boti do not have handles. The neck at the top was narrow enough to grasp with one hand while supporting the boti from underneath with the other hand. Walking up the craggy mountain like this, with no freedom of movement in my arms to keep balance, was difficult. I noticed that the soles of my shoes had been worn paper thin by the trek. I knew that I could be seen for many miles around; there were no trees to hide behind and the boulders were not larger than big sheep. I went slowly and did not spill any water on the way up.

We shared the water. There was not much more than a mouthful for each person.

One soldier, with wounds that had pierced his side, was too weak to hold the boti. A mate of his held it for him. The wounded soldier looked at me with large grey eyes full of thirsty fear, straight at me like arrows flying, and the water he tried to sip dribbled down his chin and then he leaned back against the rock and his whole body sagged as if the air were being let out of an inflated bag and he died there with his eyes still open.

The boti was passed on. One of the soldiers gave Neville and me some chocolate.

Down the Mountain

At dusk, people came out of the caves and up from the valley and we continued the march along the road under the darkened sky. A message came from up front to move fast because a ship was waiting for us and the first in would be the lucky ones. The ship would be gone before sunrise. We walked as fast as we could, all except the walking wounded who were staggering along.

I saw a tall man standing at the side of the road leaning on a rough stick. He was badly wounded in his right leg and looked as though he were about to give up. It seemed that his kneecap had been shot off. I had seen other men who had given up. Their hunger and thirst and fatigue and wounds had become too much; they lay down on the side of the road, many falling asleep instantly and some dying on the spot. Without asking for permission I walked up to him. “Lean on my shoulder and walk with me.” I was tall for my age. He put his left hand on my shoulder and we walked. Mummy later told me that he was a major and a Maori. I could not see his face in the dark and he said not a word. He must have been in great pain. He was heavy although he tried not to be. At that time I was not thinking of bravery or awards. I simply did what was necessary. And so we kept walking.

Along the way Uncle Sidney found a German helmet, probably from one of the paratroopers. He picked it up and put it on his head for protection. Mummy ordered him to take it off immediately or else he would likely be shot by our own people. An Australian soldier shouted; “Take that bloody thing off mate or you’ll be sorry.” Uncle Sidney took the helmet off and reluctantly threw it away.

At about this time we noticed that the road was going down hill. There was a feeling that we were coming to the end of our journey. At every turn we hoped to see the sea. Again and again we were disappointed. My Maori companion became heavier.

At last we rounded a ridge in the mountains and saw the sea below us. The little beach of Sphakia was just discernable and beyond it the dark outline of our ship. Although we were directly above our destination the descent was lengthy with the road zigzagging down the mountain. A convoy of trucks had started the descent prior to our arrival. They had been spotted by the German aeroplanes and riddled with cannon fire. The trucks had been abandoned. Some were still smoking. We saw drivers slumped dead over their steering wheels. One of the trucks had caught alight and the burning body of the dead driver seemed to move. I could not watch.

For fear of being left behind, some of the troops had started running down the mountain road. In the dark the burned out trucks seemed like the blackened skulls of extinct creatures grinning down upon the flight of defeated men.

Then we heard German aeroplanes and flares began to fall from the sky. By the light of the flares they were able to gun us down more accurately. The sky lit up with fireworks and explosions of all kinds. Blades of tracer cut the air with whistling shrieks. The ship responded with heavy anti-aircraft fire, spewing pompoms that mushroomed in the sky and obscured the stars. And for all the noise and flashing light the sky became blacker and blacker. The aeroplanes screamed past, firing into the endless procession of humanity moving along the road. Now and again deep thudding bombs fell into the water near the ship throwing ghostly plumes into the air.

Uncle Sidney realized that we were unlikely to reach the bottom of the mountain alive if we stayed on the road. He decided that we should take a short cut, nearly vertically down the mountain. Mummy, Neville and Aunty Katia obeyed immediately. I knew that my wounded companion could not possibly make it down that steep slope. I saw Mummy holding Neville's hand and calling me to follow. Then I heard the Maori speak for the first time. "Go." He spoke in a voice, deep and resonant, expecting to be obeyed. He took his hand off my shoulder. I went and I did not look back. And pillars of black smoke rising darkened more of the sky.

Further down, the descent became very steep. Uncle Sidney spoke, "Get on your arses and slide down." I knew what arses meant but never thought that I would hear a respectable adult say this word. I began to laugh and soon we were all convulsed with infectious laughter. It was a crazy laughter, amid so much death and abandonment. Like lunatics, with faces flashing under the apocalyptic sky, we laughed until tears were pouring down our cheeks: tears of absolute terror and of absurd comedy. And we half slid and half tumbled down the cliff and rolled onto the beach. And aeroplanes screamed and rattled, and above us more people died, and loose stones clattered down behind us.

Evacuation

On the beach preparations were being made for embarkation of the men. Walking wounded got into position at the front. All about, groups of men were being organised into lines, as if on a makeshift parade ground. Everything seemed very orderly. It was not certain that we, the only civilians on the beach, would get a place. Mummy strode up to a tall man who seemed to be in command. He immediately agreed and cleared us for embarkation. Friendly hands helped us to board the landing craft and we were soon onboard the flotilla D7, on HMAS Napier. It was an Australian ship serving with the British Fleet.

When the captain was told that an English family with two children had been brought on board he ordered that we use his quarters. We were so tired that we lay down on the floor with relief and exhaustion. Then there came a knock on the door and a sailor entered with a tray of the best food I have ever eaten: Fresh white bread sandwiches with butter and corned beef and a glass jug full of water. A cup of tea for the grown-ups followed.

We never saw the captain. He was on the bridge, fending off aeroplanes and dropping depth charges to deter submarines. So the noise continued all the way across the Mediterranean to Egypt. We slept through most of it and felt safe although we were not.

While we were asleep Uncle Sidney asked a sailor to show him the escape route from the cabin to the nearest lifeboat. He wanted to be prepared in the event of a torpedo attack. The sailor laughed; "No worries," the Australian replied, "We've got so much ammo on board, if we get hit we'd be blown clean out of the water, mate. Won't be any time for lifeboats."

Chapter Eighteen: Egypt

Alexandria

On the morning of the 29th of May, 1941, we went out on deck and watched our approach to Egypt. The Port of Alexandria was busy and crowded with people. Many of them were refugees from the Eastern Mediterranean and some from as far north as Poland and Russia. After our ship moored we walked down the gangway to the quay: first Aunty Katia then Neville with his christening mug attached to his belt followed by me, Mummy and Uncle Sidney. A reporter from the *Middle East Parade* photographed our arrival.

We were directed to a building about a mile away. We walked next to a Greek lady from Cyprus. After a while I noticed that we had lost sight of the Merlins. It was an interesting walk down a street shaded by palm trees and flanked by attractive double-storey houses. A half window opened as we walked past and a black man dressed in a white galabia and red fez with a black tassel leaned out and looked curiously at us. Then he smiled broadly, his white teeth gleaming. He was the first black man I had ever seen. The lady from Cyprus said in a loud voice, "Look at that black man. If I saw him in the middle of the night I would die of fright." I didn't think he was frightening. He appeared friendly and handsome to me.

At our destination we encountered a long queue in front of a pompous building in the British colonial style. The queue moved slowly. By the time we reached the entrance most of the morning had passed. Inside the building we saw an official sitting at a desk interviewing the people ahead of us. Mummy told Neville and me to wait on a pew-like wooden bench that ran along the wall next to the official's desk.

We shared the bench with a thin sad man, sitting with his elbows on his knees and his face cupped in his hands. He sat up and looked at us. He looked for a long time and we felt uncomfortable. Then he turned and looked at the bedraggled people in the queue.

When Mummy had reached the official at the desk the thin sad man turned his attention to her. We heard the official ask Mummy for her passport and then to open her little black suitcase. He looked at the Greek money and told her that it was valueless. The Greek shares too were valueless. The American shares in the Singer Sewing Machine Company could not be traded and would not yield dividends

because the company was making munitions for the war. The only thing of any value was the oval silver frame containing her father's photograph. He told her that destitute people like us would be sent to a refugee camp in Cairo on the next train.

Mummy turned towards us with a look of desperation on her face. The man next to us stood up and walked towards her. We saw that he was tall and so thin that his clothes hung on him like limp sails. He bowed to her, took her by the arm and led her to our bench. He asked her to sit down and sat down beside her. He introduced himself as Sol Lipschitz, a watchmaker from Innsbruck, and told her that the Germans had killed his entire family: his parents, brothers and sisters, wife and his two children. He had nothing to live for. All he had were some American dollars and he didn't want them anymore. He held an envelope full of the dollars and pressed it on Mummy. But she refused.

"As hard as it is, you must go on living," she said. "You need that money. It will help you build a new life. Keep it."

"You have two beautiful children and you can make better use of the money," he argued.

But Mummy firmly refused. She pushed the envelope back into his hand and looked him straight in the eye. We parted and never saw the tall sad man again.

On the train to Cairo Mummy regained her composure. She told us that she had always wanted to see the Pyramids of Giza and that now was the chance of a lifetime. She told us that we were quite penniless, that the only possession we had was in the little black suitcase, the frame with her father's picture. But she also told us that her father had been with us every step of the way and that we would survive. We believed her and felt safe.

The Camp in Cairo

Many other refugees were on the train but Aunty Katia and Uncle Sidney were not among them. In Cairo we were transferred to a bus that transported us to the refugee camp surrounded by a high wire fence. The bus stopped in front of a gate guarded by soldiers. An official directed us to our quarters.

Mummy looked around and turned to us. "Well," she said, "We are Raymond de Toulouse; to lose everything." She smiled, satisfied with her joke. I liked the camp. We were not being shot at, the fence seemed there to protect us and I felt safe. Once, when we were in Italy years before, a friend of Mummy had said "Your daughter is very beautiful, but unfortunately, her eyes are much too big." Perhaps she said that so that I would not get swollen headed; she had glanced at me and winked at Mummy as she spoke. For a some time after that I walked around with my eyes half closed, but I had long since got over that and I looked around the camp with big owl eyes, taking it all in.

We were fortunate to get our own tent. Inside were three camp beds, each with a rolled-up blanket and small blue bag given by the Red Cross. The bag contained soap, toothpaste, a toothbrush and a face cloth. A toilet block was not far from our tent.

There were communal showers for women and separate showers for men. We had no towels with which to dry ourselves so we washed as well as we could with our new face cloths. A canteen provided meals in relays as there was insufficient seating for all to dine at the same time. At night we used our blankets for pillows. It was hot.

The following morning we were woken by yelling, shrieking and the sound of children crying. Something terrible was happening. I pushed open a small peephole at the front of our tent and, to my horror, I saw women and children being frog-marched by soldiers to a big central tent. Mummy went out to see what the commotion was all about. She discovered that the big tent was being used as a makeshift medical centre. People were being taken there to be vaccinated. Many of them knew nothing of vaccinations and feared for their lives. Entreaties and explanations did not help. Most of the refugees could not speak English.

Mummy took it upon herself to speak to the reluctant patients. She assured them in French and in Greek that they were not about to be exterminated. This did not meet with much success so she decided to give a demonstration. Neville and I were called out of the tent in which we were hiding. “Be brave and follow me!” Mummy instructed.

We walked up to the nurses in the big tent and looked away while we were being vaccinated. I had understood that I was now being called upon to do my duty and I decided that I would not grimace while the nurse cut my upper arm with a little knife; they did not use syringes. We each received a sweet from the nurses for our bravery. After that the people did not resist as strenuously as before. When the women and children had been vaccinated the men came forward reluctantly.

That afternoon we were called to the big tent again. The medical personnel had left and in their place was a mountain of second-hand clothes, which had been collected by the Red Cross. Various kindly-looking ladies with indulgent smiles stood around watching as the refugees fell upon the clothes. We were amazed by the wild behaviour. People grabbed armfuls of clothes. Some even fought for the possession of items that appealed to them. One tug of war resulted in a fine evening jacket parting at the seams.

Mummy held back. The three of us stood together and watched, I with eyes like saucers open wider than usual.

When nearly everything was taken one of the kindly ladies came up to Mummy and urged her to take something. We walked up to the remnants and Mummy picked up a pair of rubber wading shoes for me and a very short pair of shorts. I thought I looked quite special in these and imagined them to be quite fashionable. Neville got a short-sleeved silk navy shirt that was a bit tight on him. Mummy did not take anything for herself.

We were delighted when Uncle Sidney and Uncle Katia arrived at the camp the next day. Uncle Sidney had been trying to bypass the refugee camp but to no avail. He set about to find pen and paper to write to the Embassy. He protested that, as British subjects, we should not be in a refugee camp. But pen and paper were not available.

Mummy spoke to one of the guards at the gate, a New Zealander, and asked him to contact the British Embassy on our behalf. She promised to give him her diamond ring if we got out of the camp through his intervention. We heard nothing from the guard or the Embassy for some time. A few weeks later an impressive official car with a small Union Jack in front turned up for us.

Mummy found the New Zealander and brought him the ring. He thanked her, but refused to accept it.

Luna Park

We laughed all the way into Cairo. An invisible skin that had clad us thickly had been shed. Uncle Sidney was in great form. The driver told us that we were going to a Hotel called Luna Park where we had been billeted. Uncle Sidney exclaimed, "I dare say, any place called palace, castle or park is sure to be quite terrible."

He was right. We had to enter the hotel, a somewhat rundown-looking building, from the pavement through a large double door leading into the bar, and wend our way through crowds of drunken soldiers to reach the stairs at the far side of the bar. Our rooms were upstairs.

The concierge asked us for our luggage and we told him that it would come later.

Our bedroom was satisfactory with clean linen and towels. The only window opened onto a narrow light-well. We could see straight into the room on the other side of the well. We observed a man in a military uniform on the other side and watched as he staggered to the window in a drunken stupor. Mummy closed our window firmly, tightened the latch and drew the curtains. "Any drunk could put up a plank and walk across," she said.

Neville and I were unaccustomed to crowds of loud and rowdy drinkers. We had never seen anyone staggering under the influence of alcohol before.

After we had taken possession of our rooms, the five of us decided to take a walk before turning in. We sidled past the drunken soldiers on the ground floor to find the city in near darkness. Cars were travelling with parking lights only switched on. We could see enough to keep off the road.

We were laughing and celebrating our freedom when one of the crowns of Mummy's front teeth flew out. It had been screwed on for cosmetic reasons in Paris when she was a young girl. This was a precious item and had to be found. Uncle Sidney produced some matches and we set to searching. Some of the soldiers from the bar joined us in the quest to find the missing tooth. They were drunk, but they were good people. When they saw a woman and two children they were reminded of home, and despite various degrees of inebriation became friendly. They laughed and lit more matches and spilt some of their drinks on the sidewalk when they lost their balance. But they were helpful. The tooth was found, washed in a brandy shot, and screwed on again.

In this way we discovered that the soldiers at the bar were not dangerous, as we had imagined. Over the following days we observed that they were rather desperately

trying to be merry and were often drunk, but they remained respectful of the British mother with her children and sometimes became over friendly.

The following morning when we went down to breakfast no drunken soldiers were hanging around the bar. We were surprised to see Lawrence Durrell at a small tin table drinking coffee. It was good to see someone we knew. We discovered that he too had been lodged in the Luna Park Hotel at the expense of the British Embassy. Lawrence got up to greet Mummy with hugs and kisses and excessively flamboyant gestures, and insisted we sit at a little table next to his. Three chairs at his table were awaiting the arrival of some other friends.

We ordered our breakfast, which consisted of black coffee and crusty bread with large air bubbles in the middle. In front of Lawrence were the remains of a similar breakfast, accompanied by a bottle of gin and a glass. An ashtray with cigarette butts was in the centre of the table. Lawrence wanted to know the details of our escape from Crete, and we listened with interest to his story. He described a trip on a sputtering caïque loaded to the waterline with a motley cargo of refugees. Their captain had no idea of how to sail in the deeper waters on the Southern Mediterranean and their little craft had rolled and wallowed all the way to Alexandria, everyone desperately hoping that they would not be spotted by German or Italian aircraft.

While Lawrence was performing, Nancy came down. She sat at a table some distance from us and remained silent: watching. She had, it seemed, taken on the aspect of Greek peasant wives: shadows hovering behind boasting husbands. A little while later she left noiselessly. No one noticed.

Neville was hungry and wanted more breakfast but seconds were not served. Mummy had bought me a small cheap exercise book and an HB pencil. With this in my hand, a second helping of breakfast held little interest for me. I looked around for something to sketch. Lawrence noticed me clutching the little book and wanted to know if I kept a diary, presuming that I too was an aspiring writer.

“No. I do not,” I answered. I looked at the early morning gin and the smouldering cigarette in his hand. I hoped that the matter was thereby closed.

Mummy took my copybook from me and showed Lawrence a sketch I had drawn on the first page. The subject was gruesome: a dead man lying under a tree on the edge of a downhill slope. I had written 'DEAD MAN'S TREE' in capital letters under the drawing. To my surprise Lawrence was quite enthusiastic about my drawing. He asked if I had sketched it during the escape from Crete. I looked straight at him sitting there. He averted his eyes, sucked again on his cigarette and then looked back at me.

I thought the question to be ridiculous. We had been unable to carry food to eat or water to drink. How on earth could he think I would be carrying a sketchbook? The aeroplanes were shooting to kill. What would he have done; sat on the road and composed poems? Good people were bleeding to death all around us and drivers immolated in their cabins. I nearly asked him if he had been writing his book on the sputtering caïque but my greater desire not to speak to him prevented me. “Of course not,” I said curtly.

Mummy looked at me sternly. Everyone waited. Then I told him that I had drawn it at Luna Park.

Lawrence flipped through the pages of my book without asking permission and gushed over my drawing. In his enthusiasm he told Mummy that he would like me to illustrate his book. He had not asked me. I immediately thought the proposition to be ridiculous. My drawings I knew to be no masterpieces. Besides, was not his wife an artist, I asked myself. I remembered the painting of Adam and Eve in the bathtub. Above all, his book, I was sure, would not be a suitable subject for my drawings.

A few days later the Durrells left the hotel and we never heard from them again.

Many years later I discovered that Lawrence Durrell had written four volumes, The Alexandria Quartet, about self-absorbed people perpetually analysing themselves in lieu of having relationships, notwithstanding their serial infidelities: people who made love without loving; sported cleverness without wisdom; suffered pain without purpose. Their centrifugal affairs reminded me of Nancy sitting at the edge of the room, a distant satellite about to be flung out of her orbit, expended. The book is impossible to read: Every paragraph is constipated with thick clotted metaphors too clever by half but that do not serve the needs of the narrative or the readers' imaginations.

How I knew all that at the age of thirteen I cannot fathom.

During our stay at Luna Park the British government paid our hotel costs and provided us with a modest stipend. It was measured against a ration of cigarettes. Mummy had no inclination to smoke in our circumstances so the money was used for small essentials and an occasional ice cream treat.

We did a lot of sightseeing in Cairo. We looked in shop windows and we looked at people sitting at the sidewalk cafes drinking coffee, eating, talking and smoking. There was an atmosphere of laidback inaction under the dazzling heat of the empty Egyptian skies. And there was something sleazy about the characters we saw. People seemed to glance sideways without turning their heads. I could not put my finger on it, but felt things not to be quite right. Everything was new to us and fascinating but I did not like the feelings.

Some of the people we passed, I was sure, would slit our throats to steal our pennies. In an alleyway, I saw an old man sit down on the ground. He was very old and very thin. He slowly toppled over and laid himself out on the ground against the wall. I thought it was a strange place for someone to go to sleep. Later, as we walked past, I saw flies crawling on his open eyes and I understood that he had died there. There was something merciless about Egypt: a desperation that banished the natural pride of simple people. The threads that might have bound the tribes of the nation had been torn asunder, as if some primordial curse uttered by unknown pharaohs had been visited upon the people.

One day we walked past a swanky hotel with a grand entrance and smart porters carrying luggage. Luxury cars came and went. In front of the hotel we could see a spacious outdoor sitting area that was accessible only to hotel patrons. Uncle John

Saunders was sitting there, reading a newspaper and sipping a drink. He had left Athens before us and gone straight to Egypt from where he had been able to continue operating his agency for Lloyds of London. We waved and called out. He invited us in and treated Neville and me to iced coffee topped with ice cream. He ordered a gin sling for Mummy. We exchanged stories of our escape from Greece.

The King of Greece was in Cairo and invited us to visit him. He sent his car with a Greek flag on it to pick us up of from the hotel. He had been concerned about us after we had parted and said that it was a miracle our party had come through the battle of Crete unscathed. Before we left he gave me a formal signed photograph in a cream leather frame of himself in military uniform. I have that picture still. Our paths did not cross after that but I will always remember him as a brave, humorous, regal yet modest man.

First Job

In Cairo, Mummy got her first job. She spoke five languages with the fluency of native speakers. This was a sought-after talent. The censorship office employed her to read the letters to and from Italian and German prisoners of war. She was to search for strategic information and coded messages. At the beginning she found it hard to decipher difficult and sometimes illiterate handwritings. With practice she became an expert. She discovered some useful information but most of the letters were quite innocent.

Letters to and from prisoners were sent via the Red Cross and often took a long time to reach their destination. In one case Mummy was tracking the letters between a woman writing from Italy and a prisoner of war in Egypt. She wrote something like, “Cacavatti said ‘hello’.” He answered, “Good for Cacavatti.” The next time she wrote, “Cacavatti said ‘yes’.” Again he answered with one or two words. This went on for several exchanges. Senior Military Intelligence executives were consulted. Mummy was put in charge of intercepting these letters and conferring with the authorities. Eventually it was discovered that Cacavatti was a parrot. This was the only story we heard from her. Serious information was not spoken about. Mummy kept these secrets with her even after the war.

Maadi

After Mummy got her job our life changed for the better. We moved from the city to Maadi, a pleasant suburb with palm trees and lawns that were kept green by allowing the Nile to flood the lawn areas at certain times. There was an English sports club, an English school and an Anglican church. Many British expatriates lived there.

We moved into a furnished house about 20 minutes walk west from the centre of Maadi. The ground floor was occupied by an English couple, Mr and Mrs Rice. They were artists and gave drawing lessons to the children of King Farouk. We hardly ever saw them. They kept to themselves. Their apartment opened on to a garden surrounded by a thick stone wall. We never saw inside the garden.

We occupied the first floor and the roof terrace above. Our apartment was simple, comprising four rooms. Bats lived with us. They hung from a corner of the sitting

room ceiling and flew in and out of the nearest window. Mummy said, "These bats have been here longer than we have. It is their home. Don't disturb them." We ignored them after that.

We had come to Egypt carrying memories of the crystalline waters of Greece. We knew of the French colour *'vert Nile'* and presumed that the Nile would be turquoise or emerald, or at least green. The Nile is majestic in its width and the volume of water it carries; it is graced with palm trees standing like rows of tall soldiers in feathered hats, rustling their fronds at the fertile market gardens lining the river banks below; the water stretched all the way from the south horizon to the north of the land; it is populated with feluccas bearing single triangular sails, gliding about in all directions. And the river moves constantly onward, swirling in places, with a strength that speaks of ancient primordial forces. But the Nile is the colour of mud.

On the distant western banks we could see the pyramids of Giza: majestic, heavy, silent and still. They belonged to other peoples and other times.

After the withdrawal across Crete, Neville had remained reluctant to speak. At home he stared for hours without moving. Outside he glanced around with hyper-vigilant eyes. Once, when we were out walking, he veered off the sidewalk into the path of a passing trolley bus; Mummy tightened her grip and pulled him off the road. From her first pay, she bought a box camera for Neville. At first he carried it around and took no pictures. Sometimes he would walk around looking through the viewfinder, nearly bumping into things. Later, he started to take photographs. He surprised us with the beauty of the compositions he made. Most were pictures of palm trees, the Nile and the boats. One, I remember, was taken at sunset and framed a passing felucca in palm trees; the pyramids beyond were in silhouette.

Neville began to enjoy life again.

Payday came once a month. We celebrated every time. Mummy paid all our bills immediately, including the Greek grocer where she had an account for goods bought and for money borrowed. Then the fun began. We went to Cairo on the suburban train. First stop was the Bata shoe shop for a foot massage. Fashionable ladies in Cairo were fat in those days and often wore shoes that were too small. *Il faut souffrir pour être belle.* Foot massages for ladies were a necessity. The Bata shop was only for the best of the best.

Then we went on for a treat at Groppy's: iced coffees all round. After that we hired a carriage, preferably with a white horse. We went to museums, the zoo and the pyramids where we rode on camels' bumpy backs. At the Cairo Zoo we visited the snake section. We were puzzled to find a cage full of white mice. When Neville and I realized that the mice were going to be fed to the snakes we opened the cage when no one was looking and let the mice go. They ran everywhere. We ran away.

On one of our outings Mummy bought me a wide-brimmed straw hat and Neville a topee. Apart from that we did not buy much else.

After the outings it was back to strict economy. Mummy had to worry about every penny we spent. But she did not allow worry to take over her life. When things got

really bad, she would say, “Think of the lilies of the valley, they neither spin nor do they reap.”

Mummy was not a Bible reader. She knew the stories that she had been taught as a child and remembered them when it suited her. At school, one day, I heard our clergyman read Matthew 6:28. It spoke of the flowers of the field, not the lilies of the valley. I asked him about this and he informed me that lilies do not grow wild in Palestine. Jesus was more likely to have seen anemones and other wild flowers. At dinner that evening I told Mummy about the wild flowers in place of the lilies. Mummy listened to what I had to say, in silence. It was a long silence broken when she finally said, “Don't be such a pedant.”

After that she continued referring to the flowers of the fields as the lilies of the valley.

Servants

Mummy’s budgeting skills were unusual, to say the least. She considered it better to do without things than without servants. Our houseboy, Mohammed, kept the place clean and cooked. Our washerwoman, Oma Hanna Fee, came once a week for our laundry.

We sent the ironing to a shop in a place in Maadi rather like a bazaar on the sidewalk where merchants of many varieties plied their trade. The shops, behind the merchants, functioned more like back-room storehouses while the action took place outside. I saw the clean clothes being steam-ironed by mouth. The man ironing filled his mouth with water and blew at the clothes. I told Mummy about it and she said, “We won’t think about that just now.”

Oma Hanna, which means ‘Mother of Hanna’, was a modest person fully covered in a black burkha. We could not even see her face.

A small washhouse stood in the corner of the roof terrace of our apartment. This was locked, except on washdays. Neville and I were on the roof terrace one morning when we noticed the washroom door ajar. It was washday. We could not yet speak any Arabic at that time, so we opened the door to greet Oma Hanna with an English hello. We were stopped speechless in our tracks. Oma Hanna was ankle deep in a large stone bath, stamping on the soapy clothes. She was entirely naked. And as she stamped, her breasts swung from left to right in the rhythm of her footwork. She began to yell and wrapped a wet towel around her ample frame. We kept staring until she rushed at us yelling, and pushed us out of the door. We kept away from her after that.

School in Maadi

We went to Mrs Purvis’ English School. Mrs Purvis was tall, slim and ladylike. She seemed to be dislocated in her movement. She wobbled along rather more than walked. But she was kindly to the children and never raised her voice. With her honey-coloured hair and English complexion she looked young at times although she was in her mid-forties. Women in those days liked to be middle-aged; it conferred an air of authority and wisdom. Mrs Purvis did not wear makeup except on special

occasions, when she put on lipstick without looking in a mirror. Sometimes her lipstick landed in the wrong place. She wore pearls, floral dresses, sensible shoes and stockings even when it was hot.

There were 18 children in the school. Neville was the youngest at ten years, and Kadria was the oldest at 15. Kadria was not English like the rest of us. She was Egyptian and was betrothed to a man she did not know. We all thought this was very romantic.

Our school was in Mrs Purvis' house where she taught all subjects to all the children. She was a Cambridge graduate. She had won the tripod, a top award for mathematics, and was proud of this. She taught us addition and subtraction, multiplication and division, but nothing more advanced. Mrs Purvis also taught literature and geography. She was an acquaintance of Enid Blyton, author of many well-loved children's books. We were encouraged to read these books; I remember *The Enchanted Wood* and *The Magic Faraway Tree.*

Our school fielded two hockey teams. All the children were expected to play. We went to the Maadi Sporting Club for our games. Neville, the youngest, was our star player. Mrs Purvis loved Neville for it.

At morning break, we were served scones and tea on the veranda. Lunch was served in the formal dining room. The children whose mothers worked stayed for lunch; the others went home. It was never a big lunch. During the meal Mrs Purvis played classical music on her record player and we had to listen. At these times she would get a faraway look on her face. Once she began to conduct between mouthfuls. She became embarrassed and stopped when she noticed us watching.

While we were at lunch one day, Major Purvis came home on short leave from the front. He entered the room unannounced, walked unsteadily up to his wife who was sitting at the head of the table, kissed her on the cheek and then, holding on to the back of her chair, he said hello to us. Mrs Purvis got up and helped him out of the room. We could see that he was drunk. For the next few days Mrs Purvis wore lipstick and did not dine with us. The Major soon went back to the front.

The Carriage Adventure

One day in Cairo we hired a carriage at Sharia Malika Farida, just outside the New Zealand Forces Club. The Sharia Malika Farida is an avenue named after the young Queen, King Farouk's wife. It was a smart area and we hired a smart carriage drawn by a white horse. The coachman asked us where we wanted to go. Mummy told him that we had no destination in mind, but would like a guided tour of the city for a set price and a set time. The coachman could not speak much English so we consulted a map. Mummy was not much good at reading maps. After a futile effort to locate our whereabouts we just sat back in comfort to enjoy the ride.

Cairo was a cosmopolitan town. We could watch people from all over the Middle East going about their business. British, New Zealand and Australian soldiers were also to be seen.

One Australian soldier, a tall young man, ran out in front of our carriage. Holding his arms in the air, he blocked our way. The white horse panicked and reared up, its forelegs in the air, nearly tipping the carriage. The coachman was speechless with terror. The Australian jumped up next to him and grabbed his whip and the reigns. The soldier's mates cheered wildly at the side of the road. We took off at break-neck speed, driving people, cars and carriages before us. The Australian whooped at the top of his voice.

Mummy called out, "Come and sit with us my boy and tell me all about it." The young man looked back and saw that we were his kind of people, not the foreigners he had expected. He reined the horses, looked at Mummy and said, "Sorry lady, sorry lady, sorry lady," again and again.

"Come down here my boy and sit next to me and tell me all about it," Mummy said once more.

He looked undecided for a moment. Then he stood up, handed the whip and reins back to the coachman and climbed down. He sat next to Mummy. She put her arm around his shoulders and he began to cry like a little boy. He covered his face with his hands and sobbed and shook all over. I looked away in order not to embarrass him. Then, without saying another word, he got up and jumped out of the moving carriage.

He must have been a good horseman back home.

Short Breaks from the Front

In Maadi life seemed peaceful. And yet only a few miles away a terrible war was raging. I had seen enough in Crete and knew that in the hot unforgiving desert, young men on both sides were being killed.

The English, Australian and New Zealanders fought side by side with contingents of Poles, Jews and other European nationals, including Greeks. The Australian and New Zealand troops were volunteers. They had left their homes to fight for King and Empire. Most of them had no idea what war would be like. Bravado and a sense of adventure dressed up as patriotism had fuelled their courage. But now, exhausted from the battle of Crete and without respite, many were sent to the Western Desert to fight a sophisticated well-equipped German army under Field Marshall Rommel. At intervals our lads, as we called them, were given short breaks to rest and recuperate in Cairo.

Service organisations, clubs and church bodies offered leisure activities and other forms of relaxation for our troops. Many, however, preferred the bars and houses of ill-repute where they caused much trouble to themselves and everyone else. The military police had their hands full. In Maadi the British Sports Club was open to commissioned officers and in special cases to lower ranks. Ioannis Damaskinos, the son of one of Mummy's Corfiot friends and a pilot in the RAF, came to Maadi for a break. Neville and I called him John and he took us when he went to the club intending to join. His Greek name became a problem. The club official had never come across a pilot in the RAF with a foreign name. The official said he would refer the matter to higher authorities and would be in touch in due course. He was refused

entry. As we left I suggested that we write an anonymous letter to the club reporting the official. John replied, “Decent people do not write anonymous letters.” That made sense to me, so I took it on and made it my own.

John went shopping and bought himself a monocle and fashionable cane. Wearing the monocle, he returned to the club where, using his anglicised name, he was cordially received. John invited us to be his guests at the club. We swam in the pool and had a good time. But his stay did not last long. He went back to duty and we never saw him again.

The Tent

In Maadi, the resident English ladies installed a spacious marquee: The Tent, as it was named. Doughnuts and afternoon tea were served to the troops by the ladies every Sunday. Neville and I went with Mummy to work at the tent. I was considered old enough to help with the serving and occasionally to enjoy a doughnut; they were homemade and delicious. The ladies provided chairs but no tables for the troops. The soldiers did not seem too uncomfortable balancing their cups while they ate their doughnuts.

At about five pm the ladies washed up and put everything away in boxes. The men stayed on their chairs waiting for an invitation to dine at someone’s home. Invariably the ladies selected one or two of the most presentable young men and invited them. The best looking were the first to go. Mummy noticed this and made a point of waiting to the last. “Come for potluck,” she would say.

After dinner at our home they stayed around and talked for a while and then caught a cab and left.

Norman Robertson, a boy of 18, was one of our visitors. He had lied about his age when he had joined the army the previous year. Robby, as his mates called him, seemed quite normal when he came and relaxed in our home. Mummy invited him to stay the night; he was younger than most of our guests and seemed vulnerable. That night we did not sleep. Robby yelled all night long. He was having terrible nightmares.

Major van Slijk, a New Zealander, was a regular guest. He was a dignified gentleman who spoke lovingly of his home and family. He showed us photographs of his two daughters, one riding a horse. “New Zealand is God’s own country,” he said. “There are no snakes, mosquitoes or anything that can harm you there.”

Lieutenant Jack Reeves, another regular visitor, was in a New Zealand tank unit. He was quite a daredevil and carried a mischievous glint in his eye. He had achieved some incredible feats in the desert, and had a reputation for reckless bravery among his mates. He did not tell us anything about the war, but spoke often about his fiancé at home.

He asked us to go to one of the smart shops in Cairo with him to buy a wedding dress in preparation for his return to the girl he loved. There was a whole floor of wedding dresses in the shop. All the dresses looked beautiful to me. Jack chose one and asked

me to try it on so that he could see if from all sides. I was about the same size as his fiancé. Mummy, who to my knowledge was not superstitious, said, "No. She can't try it on."

"Why not?" said Jack.

"If she tries it on, she'll never get married herself."

And so Jack just held the dress up to my shoulders and looked at it that way. He had the dress beautifully boxed and sent off right away.

Jack was the most exciting person who came to our place. He would jump up and down and joke. And he would sing. We all loved him. He was later killed standing up in his tank, half out of the turret. That was just like Jack Reeves. He didn't really believe that he could be killed. He had stood up to watch the action.

We heard all about it from his mates. One of them was crying.

Other Visitors

Apart from the soldiers Mummy salvaged from The Tent, our visitors were few. The twenty-minute walk from the centre of Maadi in the heat was too far for many people and most could not afford a taxi. We liked our house with its view of the Nile. We didn't mind the walk to and from town. We were accustomed to long walks. At home we were always busy. When Mummy was at work we were at school. And when Mummy was free we went out exploring.

Mrs Williams, a woman from England whom Mummy had met at work, visited us from time to time. She wore floral shirts and heavy woollen skirts, more suited to the British climate than the Egyptian. She had permanent waves put into her hair, which made it somewhat curly in an unnatural way. Her lipstick was always just a little too bright.

She had two girls. The eldest, Lavinia, was about my age. The woman had little in common with Mummy and her daughters had little in common with us. We sat and listened to the grown-ups talk and eat cake and drink tea. We did not take our guests to the roof terrace. I did not play with Lavinia. I tried to talk to her once, about the flooding of the lawns, which I found interesting. The Nile was permitted to overflow into the lawns to ankle depth, twice a week; this both watered and fertilised these British-looking lawns upon which cricket could be played. She looked at me stupidly with her mouth gaping, but had nothing to say. She seemed only to be interested in the cake that was to be served. I did enjoy the cake, which we did not get every day.

Neville and I were walking home from school one day when we met Mrs Williams and the girls. I was feeling particularly happy that afternoon and greeted them with enthusiasm. I said, "Do come to tea soon. We would love to see you." I was lying, of course, but I thought it was the proper thing to say. Much to my surprise, Mrs Williams was furious. She told me that I was an impertinent child to be so patronising to a grown-up lady. I did not think she was a lady at all, and I prayed that she would never visit us again.

But she came. She told Mummy all about it. I watched to see Mummy's reaction and hoped that she would not be annoyed. Her face remained quite impassive. She continued pouring the tea. "I am quite sure Iris did not intend to be rude," she said. I apologised to Mrs Williams and decided that she was definitely not the kind of person that we would have been friends with in Greece.

I knew that some people were referred to as 'women' and others as 'ladies', not to mention the distinction between 'men' and 'gentlemen'. There was nothing derogatory about calling someone a woman: a peasant woman, for example. All ladies are women, but not all women are ladies. In those days calling someone a lady implied education, culture and a good family background; well bred, as one said. The division between women and ladies was sometimes blurred. Among the ladies some did not deserve the epithet. Among the women were many who did.

I remember a time in Corfu when I was strolling with Aunty Lily in the town square. There we met Lady Aulderson, a distant relative of ours whom everyone in the family was happy to claim. There was a feeling that she was important in some way. She was not just any lady, but titled: Lady Aulderson. Aunty Lily and Lady Aulderson had a short conversation, with Lady Aulderson talking as if she were addressing a large gathering. Then they parted and continued our stroll. Aunty Lily said, "That was Lady Aulderson."

"She is very loud for a Lady," I replied. I was about six years old.

I have known many people who did not presume to be a lady or a gentleman, or even to know the distinction. They were just people. Good people. Like Erminia, Fotis and his family, Vangelis, Aphrodite and many more. In Chlomos, the people of the village, including those whom we did not know personally, carried themselves with a simple dignity that Mrs Williams would not have recognised. As I watched Mrs Williams help herself to another slice of cake, and talk with her mouth full, I realised that my love for these simple people was alive in my heart. It is they who had made my childhood happy and safe.

I stood up quietly, went to the window and looked out at nothing in particular. The war had rolled down upon us from the north like a giant wave driving everything before it. It had washed us away from our homes and the people we loved. It had torn the many threads that bound us. I was thinking of Erminia, whom I had never thought to thank and I realised, at that moment, that I would not see her again. I stood very still while the full burden of this knowledge born down upon me, blurring my vision. And tears tapped the floor at my feet. No one noticed. Behind me, Mrs Williams stirred her tea, clinking her spoon much too loudly inside the cup and talking emphatically about unimportant things.

The Night Visitor

Neville and I were asleep. Mummy was in bed reading when she heard creaking outside. It seemed that someone was walking slowly up the stairs.

The main entrance at the back of the house served both the ground floor and our floor, above. We locked this door at night but the artists downstairs were sometimes

negligent. A flight of stairs from the entrance led up to a landing on our level with elaborate timber handrails. Three doors opened onto this landing: our kitchen, our living room and our bedroom. All were locked.

And then I, too, heard the creaking and woke up. We listened in silence. Then Mummy put on her dressing gown and strode out onto the landing. I followed her. We saw an Arab in long robes near the top of the stairs. He wore a curved dagger at his belt and was coming towards us. "What are you doing here, my man?" Mummy demanded, "Get out, at once. Out! Out!" she called, waving her arms.

The man probably could not understand but he must have realised that this woman, although small, was formidable. Then, to my amazement, Mummy pushed him down the stairs towards the exit, shoving and ordering him all the way. She closed and locked the door behind him. We were both shaking.

"You cannot even trust artists anymore," she said.

Meals by Mohammed

Mohammed's idea of a good meal was different from ours, but he tried his best and was keen to please. Before Christmas, Mummy had gone to a lot of trouble to find suet for our plum pudding. She explained to Mohammed the suet was to be kept for the Christmas pudding. When she was at work the next day, our cook set about to make a pleasant surprise. He whipped up the suet, added various spices and chopped dates and put it to set in the ice chest. Mummy was horrified when she came home; it was quite inedible. We had a plum pudding that year without suet.

Sixpenny coins were added to the pudding mixture. The ones we had in Greece were silver and had been bought at Harrods on one of Mummy's London shopping trips. It was a game to see who would win a coin in their slice of cake. The coins we bought in Egypt were smaller, not silver and not from Harrods. On Christmas day, we invited some of our soldier friends to dinner. Everyone enjoyed the meal including the pudding. The embarrassed guests detected hard objects in their pudding and swallowed politely. The small coins vanished.

After dinner Mummy provided pencils and airmail cards for our guests to write home.

Mohammed worked in the kitchen when we were at home. He needed supervision. Vegetables and fruit had to be washed in Condy's crystal solution to avoid the prevalent bilharzias. Drinking water also had to be boiled and set aside to cool. The milk was also boiled. Milk in Egypt was neither pasteurised nor homogenised. It separated into layers of cream and whey.

Mummy told us a story she had read in the local English paper about a milkman and his wife. Many people spoke of the wife's beauty even though they only saw her eyes behind her chador. In a land of enticing eyes, hers were the best. She uncovered herself for her husband only. After the milkman's deliveries were done he would sit with his friends and boast about his wife. She was not only beautiful, but good; she made tasty dishes for him and obeyed his every command. One day the milkman heard that bathing in milk, as the ancient pharaohs had done, preserved a woman's

beauty. Thereupon, he installed a bath in his house. Every evening, he filled the bath with milk for his wife to lie in. Early in the morning, he bottled the bath milk and delivered it to his customers. The milkman boasted of this to his friends. The authorities heard about it and an end was put to the milk baths.

After that, Mummy did not trust the milk unless she had boiled it herself. Often the milk would boil over and make a big mess on the stove.

The Bath Towels.

The lady who owned the house we lived in fancied herself to be an art photographer. She had decorated every room with her black and white photographs of fashionable society figures in ostensibly candid poses. Ladies in slim-line dresses stood with slightly cocked hips and holding cigarettes in long holders from which smoke curled suggestively upwards. Flappers, they were called. The women.

The apartment was fully furnished including crockery, cutlery and linen. Everything was quite satisfactory with the exception of the bath towels, which had become grey with age and threadbare. Mummy enjoyed long hot baths, after which only the best of towels would do. She organised a shopping expedition to Cairo for new towels. In a department store we found fluffy white Egyptian cotton towels. We chose four bath towels and four matching hand towels. A keen shop assistant pressed Mummy to buy more than we could afford. “Don’t buy anything,” Neville said. “We will have to leave them behind when we run away again.” But Mummy explained that we would not always be running away and paid for the towels.

Chapter Nineteen: On the Move Again

Unknown Destination

Neville was right. Less than a fortnight later we were on the move again. The Germans were getting the upper hand in the desert and moving towards Alexandria. It was decided that women and children would be evacuated from Egypt. We were given the choice of going to India or South Africa. Mummy foresaw that there would a struggle for independence going on in India. General Smuts was Prime Minister in South Africa and she thought well of him. She chose South Africa.

From Cairo we were driven in a tired bus through the desert to Port Tewfik on the Red Sea. A converted Dutch passenger liner, the New Amsterdam, was waiting to take us away. The ship was so full of civilians and soldiers that its prior grandeur was hardly recognisable.

The movement of ships was a well-kept secret during the war. We did not know where our voyage would take us or where we might go after that.

Travelling at sea was dangerous but people on board ate and drank and sang and convinced each other that they had no cares in the world. We put thoughts of U boats out of our minds. Neville and I knew nothing about South Africa. We were heading into the unknown. It was a very peculiar feeling.

We walked up and down on the crowded decks in the sun, making the best of our circumstances. I saw a young woman we had met at the refugee camp in Cairo. She was lying on the wooden deck next to a soldier. They were covered with a blanket. This did not seem to me to be proper. I looked the other way and did not greet her.

After dinner there was dancing in the dining room and one evening a group of young Dutch sailors sang. I took a fancy to one of them and was thrilled when he winked at me and said "Hallo Joodje." I thought him to be handsome. Later I discovered that Joodje meant little Jew. I took it to be a compliment. Perhaps the sailors thought that all refugees were Jews. Perhaps it was not meant to be a compliment but I was unaware of these possibilities.

One morning we woke up to the sound of people bustling in the halls and on the decks. Outside we found crowds of people pointing and talking with unsuppressed excitement and relief. "Yes, its Durban," I heard one of the soldiers saying to a young lady. "It must be." People were pointing shoreward and everyone seemed to be in high spirits.

Durban to Knysna

On disembarking we and other evacuees were directed to a waiting bus. We were seated with belongings wedged into every vacant space. Our bus driver, a big friendly man with a strong Afrikaans accent, told us that our bus was leaving Durban for Knysna situated in the Cape province; it would be a long ride.

We moved through magnificent and varied scenery: up the escarpment to a dry desert-like plateaus crossed by straight dusty roads; green tropical forests covering mountains and nestled in deep river valleys traversed by serpentine roads cut into rocky edges. A stately backdrop of great mountain ranges rose to our right for most of our trip. Jewel-like lakes fed by rivers and mountain streams descended from the ranges on the north-west. We saw forests of indigenous trees rising from lush green undergrowth and outbursts of spectacular flowers of such colour and magnitude as we had never seen before; it was a jungle in every meaning of the word. To the east and below we could see a rocky coastline with fishing villages and small harbours, interspersed with long runs of sandy beaches facing a wild ocean of white-capped waves clawing at the shoreline. It was enormous. Huge. We had never seen a landscape of such magnitude before.

Leisure Island

We reached Knysna in the late afternoon. From our elevated approach we looked down on an estuarine lake or lagoon fed with fresh mountain water tinged with the tea-coloured tannin of the trees and the fragrance of the forests. Tall rocky cliffs known as The Heads stood guard over the opening to the Indian Ocean. We could see that the water was running into the lagoon through The Heads, as if the river were flowing backwards. There had been no movement of tides in Greece and I was puzzled by this. I wondered if it might have been a huge *katavothra* inlet and accepted it as part of the magic of this strange magnificent world.

Before the war the Leisure Island had been a popular holiday resort but was now empty most of the year. This island was known for its well-kept golf course and the Leisure Island Hotel. Apart from that there were a small number of private houses unobtrusively tucked away beyond the golf course.

The government authorities had billeted us in the hotel. We could not believe our luck. It was the main building on the island with sitting and dining areas, and wide verandas under one roof. Bedroom accommodation was provided in separate small round buildings. These had thatched roofs and were modelled on the picturesque native huts called rondavels. Each rondavel had its own front door, a small window and beds for one or two guests. We had a third bed squeezed in which made it rather cosy. It was good to be together and not have to share with strangers. Mummy had insisted on this.

Toilets and bathrooms were outside and quite primitive. Going to the toilet at night was a challenge, especially as we had no torch and the external lights were switched off at ten pm every evening.

On the morning of our first day we explored the island and the Knysna village. We walked down the well nigh deserted main street. We passed tearooms, a souvenir shop and a pharmacy. We did not enter any of these until we came to a small second-hand bookshop. A few well-used books were laid out on a table outside the shop. Mummy walked in and we followed. The shop consisted of one small room with bookshelves of various sizes and conditions, filled with unrelated books. A lady with spectacles sat by the window knitting. She greeted us but did not rise. Apart from us she was the only person in the shop. Taking her time, Mummy selected four books and laid them on the counter. The lady with the spectacles rose, added up the prices, which were not marked, and was about to wrap the books in brown paper when Mummy said that she had changed her mind. She would only take one book, and return later for the rest. Mummy paid and the lady with the spectacles gave her the book but without brown paper.

The book was *Jock of the Bushveld* by Percy Fitzpatrick. It is a true story, and a South African classic about the author's youthful adventures with his Staffordshire bull-terrier. Jock, the runt of a litter, was a mischievous puppy at the beginning and grew up to be a faithful and fiercely brave companion. Together the two roamed the Bushveld, which they learned to know and respect. Every night in our rondavel Mummy read to us from this wonderful book.

On the Veranda

There were no holiday guests at the Leisure Island Hotel, only the women who had come on the bus with us. Day in and day out they sat on the spacious hotel verandas staring into space. Many of them could barely speak English. Mummy always greeted the women and they acknowledged her but took no notice of Neville and me. We understood that curtseying and bowing was not necessary here, so we took no notice of them. We were the only children in the hotel.

Occasionally, when we were not out exploring, Mummy took an afternoon cup of tea on the veranda with a lady from Cyprus who spoke English, Greek and French. She was an attractive educated woman. She often interjected French words into both English and Greek. Neville and I referred to her as 'the lipstick lady' because she wore the brightest of bright red lipsticks applied in a haphazard way. We guessed she had no mirror in the little cosmetic case that was always with her.

Unfortunately, the lipstick lady became ill and was taken to hospital. We went to visit her and took a bunch of flowers that we had picked along the way. Mummy took the little cosmetic case, which had been left in her rondavel. When we entered her room at the hospital the lipstick lady was lying in bed looking frail. Her face lit up when she saw the cosmetic case. She reached for it with trembling hands, took out her lipstick and applied it in her usual way. She thanked Mummy and said she felt naked without lipstick.

After we left the hospital, Mummy was silent for a long time. We did not interrupt her silence. Then she told us that we had just visited a very brave woman.

Golf

Great swathes of green lawn were not part of the scenery in Greece. The well-tended golf course next to our hotel was new for us and the source of much pleasure. When no golfers were present we enjoyed walking along the soft grass carpet. When play was in progress, we watched with interest from the side. Neville especially enjoyed watching the men play. He said they were better than the women, except the three ladies who came every Wednesday, whom he watched keenly. These three, always dressed for the part, wore tweed skirts, practical flat-soled shoes and white gloves. The youngest of the three sported a pink twin-set. To us, they looked like elderly ladies. Mummy said white hair did not make a person elderly.

One morning, when the three ladies appeared Neville offered to carry their clubs. The lady in the twin-set asked him what he would charge. He said he would do it just for the fun of watching them play. Neville was handsome, well-spoken and tall for his age; he was eleven years old. The ladies liked him immediately and accepted his offer. It was a beautiful sunny day with no hint of breeze. They set off with Neville carrying a golf bag strapped over his shoulder.

At the last tee, the lady in the twin-set asked Neville if he would like to have a shot. He immediately accepted. She handed him the appropriate club and offered some last minute advice. He did not need advice. He had observed and taken note of every move on the golf course. He swung the club above the ball as he had seen it done. Then, arching his body like a professional, he struck the ball with such precision and vigour that it landed on the final green. The three ladies looked on in disbelief for a few moments and then gave Neville a lady-like clap. I was watching from the side with amazement as the ball seemed to disappear into the distance and then became a tiny white dot on the patch of green far away.

Later, I told everyone that Neville had achieved a hole-in-one. People looked at me in disbelief and I had to change my story to a hole-in-two. That too, might have been an exaggeration. Mummy said that Neville was a natural sportsman and she was right.

The Preachers

When the gong announcing meal times was heard, the veranda-sitters left at once in unseemly haste for the dining room. They went via the hotel sitting room, which abutted the veranda and was separated from it by glazed French doors. The sitting room was not much used by the residents during the day. Occasionally it was let out to local groups for meetings and social gatherings. At these times the sitting room was out of bounds and we entered the dining room via the veranda.

One day we were amazed to see a group of severe-looking men dressed in black, converging on the sitting room. They entered by the main door on the far side of the room. Chairs had been neatly arranged in rows awaiting their arrival. Some of the men sat down immediately; others walked over to the closed French doors and stared at us on the veranda. We looked back, embarrassed. No one spoke. Some of the men pointed and said things to each other that we could not hear. Then they turned and went to their chairs, all but one man with a chubby face. He smiled and waved at Neville and me. Then he too went to his seat. Later we were told that these men were Dutch Reform preachers.

The Magic Forrest

Beetroot must have been in season during our stay at the Leisure Island Hotel. It was on the menu for all meals, including the cut lunches that we ordered for our picnics. With a beetroot sandwich and a piece of fruit each, we regularly set out to explore the island and the countryside. We usually did not venture far afield as there was much to enjoy close by.

One day we heard about a magic forest in the foothills of the Outeniqua Mountains above the Knysna lagoon. The locals told stories of adventures there and of the much sought-after stinkwood timber that was harvested in the area. We were told about the little train that went up the hill empty in the morning and that came back at the end of the day loaded with precious wood for the timber yards in the harbour, below.

Neville and I decided we had to visit this wonderful forest and Mummy willingly agreed. Our first adventure was to look for the rail tracks: no easy task as they were rusty and old and hidden from sight by tall grass that grew on both sides. Grass even grew between the rails.

Mummy had been told that if we walked along the tracks we would not get lost and besides, with a bit of luck, we might be offered a ride on the train. We had walked far before the train came hooting and screeching behind us. The train was rusty and old, like the tracks. When the engine driver saw us he hooted and slowed down to a walking pace. “If you want a ride, jump on,” he called. Mummy accepted but asked him to stop for us as she had not perfected the art of jumping onto moving trains.

The train stopped. We slid and rolled onto one of the open flatbed carriages. There were no closed wagons.

After a somewhat uncomfortable ride we reached the edge of the forest. The driver slowed the train, and pointed to a rough unpaved path leading away from the tracks. We jumped off.

As the train moved on the driver called out "I'll be back later." We were not sure what time later would be but that did not worry Neville and me. We knew that Mummy was in charge and everything would be alright.

In the forest, we found ourselves surrounded by tall trees that seemed to be reaching for the sky, much taller than anything we knew from Greece. Lacy tropical ferns of many sizes and shapes grew at their feet. Mushrooms and toadstools grew there too.

We walked, we ran, we played hide and seek and we jumped out at each other from hidden places. At lunch time we found a clearing where the sun shone through and sat down to have our picnic cut lunch. Then we lay down on the soft forest floor. We looked up at the tree branches above and watched the busy animals and birds that lived there. After they had taken a cursory glance at us they carried on as busily as before.

We lay very still for a while, on our backs looking up, and we listened to the forest fill with the sounds of little creatures: branches rattling, leaves rustling and other sounds we could not name. We wanted to explore further into the forest but Mummy said not to. She had heard that higher in the mountains there were baboons, possibly elephants and perhaps other dangerous things. Baboons have big teeth, like lions. We noticed the shadows lengthen and we felt the air begin to chill. Neville and I wanted to stay longer – it was such an adventure – but Mummy was keen to get back to the rail track, hoping that we had not missed our ride.

It was a relief to hear the hissing and hooting of the train once again and to hear the driver's call. This time the train was loaded with mighty logs, chained in place on the flatbed carriages. Mummy was invited into the engine area. Neville and I rode astride the logs.

That evening, back in our rondavel, I thought about the little creatures in the trees. And when I closed my eyes I thought I saw the glowing green leaves moving about above me.

Mr and Mrs Wilds

Mr and Mrs Wilds lived on Leisure Island. They owned one of the few private houses on the island. Walter Gilbert Wilds was a well-known landscape artist. When we went out on our walks we often saw Mrs Wilds pottering in her garden. She was a little woman with a ready smile and a cheerful face. We greeted her and she and Mummy would exchange a few words, mostly about the weather or the unusual flowers that grew on the island. One day Mrs Wilds invited us to visit for afternoon tea.

We arrived on the day at the appointed time and were welcomed with small cucumber sandwiches without crusts and a plain cake still warm from the oven. Mr Wilds was

not there; he was out painting. Mrs Wilds and Mummy talked and we listened. We felt quite at home. The grown-ups were comfortable in each other's company.

After that day Mrs Wilds sometimes came for a walk with us. She pointed out things of interest and told us stories about the history of local people and places. We heard about the Duthies, one of the foremost families in the area, and of George Rex, who was rumoured to be a descendent of the king of England. We also heard that a certain family had 'a touch of the tar brush.' Neville and I wondered what that meant and why it was talked about in a conspiratorial tone. Later we found out that one of the ancestors of this family was of African descent. This was in no way evident, nevertheless, the family lived in fear that there would be a throwback and one of the new generation would betray this by the colour of their skin.

We noticed that Mrs Wilds had a coloured maid. 'Coloured' in South Africa referred to people of mixed blood. The maids and other menial workers at the hotel were coloured. White people did not do that kind of work. We did not notice this to talk about it or to draw conclusions, but we slowly absorbed what we saw around us and we questioned nothing. We were outsiders and everything was new and strange for us.

On one of our walks we came upon Mr Wilds sitting on a rock sketching, the sea lapping at his boots. Later, he invited us into his studio. We found ourselves surrounded by magnificent seascapes, paintings that only someone who loved the sea and knew all its moods intimately would know to paint. Neville, who had drawn old sailing ships ever since he could hold a pencil, fell in love with what he saw. After that he often went out with Mr Wilds on his painting trips. He would sit for hours and watch the artist at work. According to Neville, Mr Wilds invariably chose the most uncomfortable rocks to sit on.

The friendship between the artist and the young boy who silently watched grew strong. After we had left Knysna, Neville was twice invited to spend his school holidays with the Wilds. Perhaps Neville was a substitute for the old man's boys who were fighting in the desert.

Problems in Paradise.

On arrival at the Leisure Island Hotel, we had been well received by the manageress who was pleased to see a busload of new guests. The hotel was not in much demand because of the war. The government had negotiated out-of-season rates for us; a full house was assured for the hotel. As time passed the manageress realised that her new guests were different from the pre-war holiday crowds. We noticed deteriorating services. The guests' complaints went nowhere.

The first problem was the reduced dinner menu that included beetroot at all meals. The bathrooms, one for men and the other for women and children, grew shabbier by the day. Only one bathmat per day was issued, so it was advisable to bathe early in the morning, which we did. Some of the guests did not use the bathrooms at all and may never have used bathrooms before. Mummy bought a bottle of Dettol and we scrubbed the bath with vigour before our morning dips.

One day at breakfast the manageress came into the dining room shouting at all of us. The coloured servants with aprons and porridge bowls shrank into the corners of the room. Everyone put down their cutlery and sat as still as could be. Someone, the manageress screeched, had left a wet bathmat on the floor. The culprit had better own up, she insisted. No one did. Then she stormed away, shaking the floorboards with her stamping. The servants retreated quickly into the kitchen. They had never seen a white person yelling at other white people like that before, and were bracing themselves.

An army officer came once a fortnight to fill in various forms and distribute money to the residents. The officer sat at a makeshift desk where he studied his lists. Everyone had to wait while he called out the names in alphabetical order. Raymond was among the last to be called. We saw the officer put the money into the palm of Mummy's hand: no envelope, no gracious words.

Mummy had told us, "Something is better than nothing and we are lucky to be here at all." But one day, still clutching the money, Mummy left the room in silence and we followed. We walked a long way without talking until we stopped at a place at the end of the island. There, Mummy spoke to me seriously, the way one does to adults. "It is time to move on," she said.

Mummy had discovered that George Crowe from Patras, whom she knew, was in Cape Town. The Crowe family, like us, was British. The family business, Crowe & Stephen, was centred in Patras and owned a great deal of property in that town. George Crowe had followed the British exodus through Crete to Africa. He had worked for the military censorship office in Cairo and was now the head of censorship in Cape Town. Mummy anticipated that George Crowe would be able to offer her some work.

I was taken aback when she asked me what I thought we should do. I had never been consulted like this before.

"I don't know," I offered. "You must decide."

Mummy was disappointed. "You are always so positive," she said, "So why not today?"

I felt a bit scared and thought it was beyond me to make a decision. Mummy had always taken care of us and I presumed she always would. Many years later I would think about the worries she had bravely carried by herself while we continued our carefree existence. But at that moment, on the edge of Leisure Island, I knew that I had let her down because I knew not what should be done.

The next day we left Knysna on the train for Cape Town.

Chapter Twenty: Cape Town

Arrival

Table Mountain, with the town and port at its feet, was more impressive than any of the postcards we had seen. But we did not have time for sightseeing. Mummy had to secure a job and find a place for us to live. Mrs Wilds had recommended a residential hotel just out of the town centre. We walked there carrying the little black suitcase with our possessions. Rundown boarding houses and residential hotels proliferated in this area, serving people who could not afford any better. Many were the families who had lost their breadwinners during the war.

We followed the rough map drawn by Mrs Wilds and presented ourselves at the reception area where we were told the place was full, except for a room in the attic with space for two only. We took this. Neville had to sleep under the stairs, outside in the hallway.

George Crowe received Mummy the day we arrived and offered her the job she wanted. Soon we were able to leave the cramped quarters and move to better accommodation. Mummy chose Rondebosch because it was a 'good address,' which she considered essential. Rondebosch nestles on the foothills of Table Mountain, just below Devil's Peak; it is the old historical centre of the cape colony where many stately mansions built in the Cape Dutch style and the University of Cape Town are located. The schools there were good and it was a pleasant place to live.

We moved into Mrs Holding's boarding house, Braemar, one step down from a residential hotel but comfortable. The house must have been her family home before the war. Mrs Holding had only one relative, her brother, whom she kept in a shed at the bottom of the back garden. No one saw him, but we heard coughing coming from the shed. Mrs. Holding insisted that her brother had 'but a touch of catarrh.' Her husband must have been dead already.

When Mrs Holding was told that Mummy had a good job at the Post Office, she gave us the best bedroom in the house with a bay window overlooking the front garden. There was plenty of room for three beds. A table, four chairs, a dressing table and a wardrobe added to our comfort.

At mealtimes all the residents sat at a single long table in the dining room. Mummy asked for our own table in the bay window at one end of the dining room. Mrs Holding agreed because of Mummy's job and because we were 'different from the others' and she thought we might not fit in. The people at the big table hardly spoke to each other.

School Uniforms

The day after we arrived at Rondebosch, Mummy enrolled Neville at Rondebosch Boys School and me at Rustenburg Girls School. Uniforms were compulsory for all pupils. The Rondebosch Boys uniform consisted of shorts, shirt, school tie, knee-high socks and a blazer with the school crest, in navy blue and gold, displayed on the pocket.

The girls at Rustenburg wore a navy blue pleated tunic over a white blouse. Black stockings and baggy black bloomers also had to be worn. If, by jumping too vigorously or bending over too far, a gap between stockings and bloomers appeared, our teachers' sensibilities would be offended. It was referred to as a smile. Wearing a smile was a punishable offence.

Neville and I were both fitted with second-hand uniforms. Neville looked rather smart in his; mine was much too big and quite unbecoming. Even the black lace-up shoes were too big and had to be stuffed with cotton wool. My route to school passed a Christian Brothers College. In the mornings, boys hung around the fence. One day I heard a boy call out, "Here comes Frankenstein." And after that they continued with this taunt every day. I pretended not to hear and blamed it on the uniform. With my head down I walked past as fast as I could, until the day I boldly walked up to the fence, staring the loudest boy straight in the eye and saying nothing. All the boys ran away. I had no more trouble.

The Headmistress

Mummy went to interview the head mistress of Rustenburg to assure herself that the quality of education would be satisfactory. The headmistress, however, thought she was interviewing Mummy about a daughter who did not fit into a usual mould. She asked about my past education and why my studies had been interrupted during the Battle of Crete. Obviously she had never been in a war zone. She did not speak to me at all. The interview was not long.

The headmistress quickly decided my future at the school: I would attend the Junior Certificate class in the second year of the two-year course. She predicted that I would fail, owing to my unusual educational background. I would then have to repeat the year. My general knowledge, she conjectured, could prove to be an advantage. In the days to come I tried hard to see where I could apply my 'general knowledge' but I found no such subject on the curriculum. I quickly discovered that knowing too much about too many things was not helpful. Speaking German, French, Italian and Greek better than the language teachers, and knowing the history, art and literature of the countries where these languages are spoken, merely offended people. I put my general knowledge away in order to become educated in the proper manner.

Schooling

Schooling in South Africa was different from the tutoring we had been given in Greece. In addition, there were many new subjects: algebra, geometry, chemistry, biology and South African history. There was no reference to English or European history and little about black South Africa.

Literature was taught in a most unfamiliar way. Mummy had started our literary education when we were still too young to read for ourselves. She read us Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott and George Henty in English. She read us Johanna Spyri and Selma Lagerlöf in German. She read many others, and placed the authors in their time and country with an overview of the periods and places. Erminia read us children's storybooks, including Carlo Collodi's *Adventures of Pinocchio* in Italian.

In the South African Junior Certificate standard we read a limited number of books and memorised short passages to quote in the exams. Mummy was horrified by the narrowness of the approach. But I enjoyed my English literature lessons because I liked the English teacher.

As refugees, we were allowed to study French instead of Afrikaans. Our teacher could not speak French and mispronounced most words. She was good at grammar, however. I enjoyed biology because it entailed a lot of drawing.

My favourite teacher was Miss Heart, the maths teacher. She made it all seem to be such fun. I especially enjoyed her geometry lessons. One day, during one of these lessons, I thought I had discovered something new. I was so excited that I stood up without the usual formalities and joyfully announced that I had invented a new theorem. The class burst into loud laughter, but Miss Heart took it quite seriously. She silenced the laughter with a glance and walked over to my desk. She looked at what I had worked out. I explained. "Yes," she said, "You have invented a theorem. Pythagoras also invented it, long ago. We are going to do that next week." After that she spoke to the girls about the famous Greek mathematicians and told them that I too was born in Greece. This was a breakthrough for me because until then I had been at pains to hide details of my unusual past, but now it was something of which to be most proud and the girls accepted that.

Miss Heart was a podgy lady with a ruddy complexion. Her dark hair was pulled back in a bun. Her eyebrows were thick and black, and she had a slight moustache, but I thought she was beautiful.

I enjoyed my time at Rustenburg and worked hard. At the end of a year I passed all subjects, albeit without especially high marks except for art and mathematics at which I excelled.

This success gave me confidence. I told Mummy that I wanted to leave Rustenburg and find a place where I could study the two years leading to matriculation in one year. I had heard about such cram schools. I had to argue hard to convince her. We made an appointment to see the head mistress and told her of my plans. She was not at all impressed and insisted that Mummy stop me from 'ruining my life.' But Mummy stood firmly by me. So I left Rustenburg under a cloud of official disapproval.

Summer Holidays

In the summer holidays that followed, Neville and I explored the beaches skirting the bay just south of Cape Town. We swam at Fish Hoek, Clovelly and Muisenberg beaches and explored other places.

Muizenberg was an exclusive beach, frequented by members of the Cape Town Jewish community. Some Afrikaners referred to it as Jewsenberg, and they didn't go there. One day at Muizenberg I saw a man struggling in the rip tide. You could see the water, a different colour, pulling him out to sea. The man kept swimming and staying in the same place and he was clearly getting tired. Neville, who had become a good swimmer, said, "That chap's caught in the rip. He doesn't know how to swim out of

it." And before I could say anything he jumped in and swam out to the man. I saw the two of them change direction and swim together to another part of the beach. The man was so tired that he sat down on the sand where the waves were still splashing over his legs.

Once the man had recovered from his near drowning he offered Neville the money that he had hidden under his towel. Neville refused.

The next week, we found an advertisement in the *Cape Argus*, the main newspaper for Cape Town. The man wanted the person who had saved his life to come forward so that he could thank him personally. Neville said, "Anyone would do what I did. I am not going to make a fuss of it." And he didn't answer the advertisement.

On weekends, Mummy was not at work. She joined us to explore the beaches and climb the slopes of Table Mountain. We visited the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Park where fields of Barberton Daisies, bushes of Proteas and many other native species grew in abundance. A delightful tearoom, with a thatched roof and an open fire in winter, catered for visitors. Mummy, who always had a book with her where ever she went, ensconced herself in a comfortable chair on the terrace of the tearoom while Neville and I took to the labyrinth of paths and to the steeper slopes beyond.

As the weeks went by finances improved somewhat and we were able to rent a flat at Rooikop not far from Mrs Holding's boarding house. Two black Scotty dogs had been left there by the previous tenants. The two gave us a right royal welcome and immediately became part of our family.

The flat was on the first floor above the ground level. It consisted of a living room, bedroom and an enclosed veranda, which became Neville's room. I shared a room with Mummy. Furniture was typical of that era and quite dreadful. The kitchen was primitive. But Neville and I could not have been more pleased, not even if it had been a palace.

Mummy felt that a table in the kitchen for informal meals would be desirable. She gave Neville the task of making a table and three stools. Mummy said, "Men do this kind of thing," although, to be honest, she did not know any men who did. Neville was somewhat daunted by the job and said that he had no tools and no wood.

"Well find some," Mummy said. "Where there is a will, there is a way."

So Neville bought nails and borrowed tools from the Malay man at the corner store that always smelt of spices. For wood he procured some peach boxes and he got to work. The next day we planned a breakfast at this unusual setting. The seats creaked as we sat down and creaked some more while we were seated and then collapsed altogether. Then, with toast and marmalade all over the floor and the three of us lying on our backs, we laughed our heads off.

Back to School

At the end of the holidays Neville went back to Rondebosch Boys. I took the train to Cape Town, to a college specialising in one-year preparation for the matriculation examinations.

The daily trip into the city was quite an adventure. On the first day I noticed that I was the only child among the adults and I was somewhat apprehensive. At fifteen years, I still wore my hair in pigtails and looked young for my age. But everyone on the train at that early hour was going somewhere with a purpose and no one seemed to notice me. The bustle, energy and determination in the crowds were invigorating.

Most of the students at the college were boys of mixed ages who had failed the examinations previously and were having a second go. They appeared to be uncouth, loud-mouthed show offs: not my kind. Others were postal delivery boys who needed their matriculation to rise in rank at the Post Office, and they were doing their simple best. I became accustomed to them with time; they provided our class with lots of laughs. Marague Stewart and I were the only girls. She was the daughter of missionaries in the Transkie. We became friends. Marague was a better speller than I.

Most lecturers at the College were past their prime and found it hard to connect with the students. Sometimes they appeared to be talking to themselves and not to the students, who paid little attention. I tried my hardest to listen and the lecturers treated me accordingly. I studied seven subjects for the examinations, as required.

At home I studied a lot but still found time to have fun with Neville on weekends.

Fun with Neville on Weekends

Mummy bought us a second-hand gramophone with a horn, as seen in His Masters Voice advertisements. A pile of records came with the gramophone, old 78s, most of which were too scratched for use. The Italian operas were less used and still playable. We listened with pleasure to the famous arias, all of which were already familiar to us.

Neville had a strong tenor voice and I was a quite respectable soprano. We sang the duets and played the music so loudly that Mummy would threaten to put socks in the horn. On another occasion, Mummy bought me some floral seersucker material with which to make a skirt. We did not own a scissors, so we cut the fabric with a razor blade. I sewed all the seams by hand. Neville found some rope and made me a pair of matching sandals with rope-soles; the straps were made of remnants of the seersucker skirt material. We were proud of our handiwork and proceeded to take a stroll in the local park, with me clad in the new outfit. Unfortunately, the sandals fell apart before we had got far. Neville insisted on carrying me and we laughed all the way home.

Abigail

Although we had no money for a scissors or kitchen furniture, there was enough for essentials. We had Abigail who came to clean, wash and iron on a regular basis. She was a short thin coloured woman with a shrill voice. So thin was she that her bones seemed to be visible through her sand-coloured skin.

Abigail had a boy of about two or three years old whom she sometimes brought with her when she could find nowhere else to leave him. Mummy told us that Abigail had another four children living with various relatives. She had no husband and each child had a different father. I asked if Abigail was a bad person because of her situation.

Mummy answered, "Bad women don't have babies; only the good ones do." I was not sure what she meant by this, but did not ask any further.

After Mummy had worked at the censorship office for one year it was time for a holiday. She hired a small house at Fish Hoek right next to the beach and arranged for Abigail and her baby to come with us. Mummy thought that a change of air, good food and the sea would do Abigail and her little one the world of good. So Abigail got a place in the house and the promise that she was our guest and would not have to do any work on the holiday.

In South Africa at that time it was not done to associate with coloured people. Later, during the apartheid days, it became a criminal offence. Mummy took no notice of this. Abigail sat with us on the beach and played with her little one in the shallows. But she refused to sit at table with us and took her meals in the kitchen. The dogs also came on our holiday and no one objected to them. They ate with us in the dining room.

When our seaside holiday was over, we returned to our usual routines: Mummy to work, Neville to Rondebosch Boys, I to tech, and Abigail to cleaning, washing and ironing.

The Headmaster's Prediction

One memorable Tuesday morning, in term time, Mummy received a note from Neville's school listing the subjects chosen for his future studies. She was horrified to find no Latin, no classical Greek and no European history. In her opinion, these subjects were essential for a gentleman's education.

Taking time off from her work to speak to the headmaster was not permitted. A medical certificate as evidence of serious illness or the death of a close relative provided the only exceptions. I was sent to see the headmaster to explain Mummy's point of view to him in no uncertain terms. She lent me a pair of high-heeled shoes and clothing that should have made me look older than I was. My pigtails were coiled and pinned up on the top of my head.

The headmaster, a kindly man who did not sneer at my contrived appearance, listened to what I had to say and responded in a reassuring manner. "Tell your mother," he said, not answering me directly, "that she should not worry about Neville. He is a gifted athlete and jolly good sport. He has a fine sense of humour and is an all round decent chap. Above all, he is one of the most popular boys in the school. I predict that he will be a millionaire before he turns twenty one."

Nothing further was said about the classics and history lessons. Neville was picked for the school's first eleven and we were very proud.

After a year at the technical college, I passed the matriculation exams and won a scholarship to the University of Cape Town. I studied architecture for the next five and a half years and graduated with distinction. After graduating I wrote a thesis for the British Institute of Architects, the equivalent of a Masters Degree, and obtained

my membership a year later. I also became a member of the South African Institute of Architects.

The Chicken Farm

I was working at the University's School of Architecture studio when news arrived of the war's end. No work was done for the rest of the day. We left our drawing-boards and walked about from studio to studio; students shook hands with people they hardly knew, and everyone was talking excitedly despite the fact that many had hardly felt the impact of the war.

Families whose boys who had enlisted waited for their sons to return. Others were not so lucky.

The end of the war brought the end of censorship and the end of Mummy's job. There was little prospect of finding another; her classical education and knowledge of languages were not marketable skills in South Africa at that time. So, Mummy bought a small chicken farm with money she had obtained from the sale of our big pink house in Cephalonia. It had been damaged in the war and was no longer habitable. The Germans, who had used the house as a command centre, had taken most of the valuables, including Persian carpets and antiques. An empty hulk remained, for which only £1000 was paid, but it was enough to get us started.

The farm was at Ottery on the Cape Flats, an unattractive sandy area. We were surrounded by bigger and better chicken farms owned by Afrikaans people of Dutch descent. They silently watched our every move and saw that we knew nothing about raising chickens. When we looked at them, they turned sideways and pretended not to have been watching us. If we walked past their houses during the day and turned to look at their windows, we would see the curtains swaying as they fell back into position and sometimes catch a glimpse of the peering eyes before they were covered.

The Ottery Farm consisted of various chicken runs, an incubator and a small homestead with a friendly stoep, our front veranda. From there we could see a small swamp across the road. We found a dog swimming in the swamp; it seemed to belong nowhere, so we adopted him and called him Sailor. He was big and proved to be a good watchdog.

We had hardly any furniture and knew little about chickens, but that did not deter Mummy. She bought poultry farming books and subscribed to agricultural magazines, which Neville had to study.

We visited a second-hand furniture store owned by a Jewish man. I succeeded in beating down the price of a lounge suite, two wardrobes, a dining setting and a very big sideboard. The shop owner approved of my haggling and told Mummy that I was a credit to her.

We bought fabric to cover the lounge suite. Although I knew next to nothing of sewing, Mummy told me to make the covers. I sewed them by hand. This time I cut the fabric with a scissors. We thought the work was wonderful and we congratulated

ourselves, but whether my work had really improved the sight of that large ugly thing I am now not so sure. We were pleased with the things we did.

Mummy had a way of making a place become a home. She put a pot of flowers here and a book there, and as naturally as breathing we made ourselves a comfortable and friendly place to live.

Mummy set out to find a suitable farm hand. She contacted the Abbot of a monastery where the monks ran a reformatory for coloured boys. Mummy believed that after these lads had been punished for their misdemeanours they deserved a second chance. The Abbot chose a coloured boy named Felix and drove him to our place. He arrived in a large practical car. With his full white beard and flowing brown robes the Abbot was a most impressive man. He floated about as if on a cloud with robes billowing, and inspected the out-house where Felix would live. He approved.

Mummy told us that the Abbot was a very important person in his community, and a humble and good Christian man to care so much for his charges that he came all the way to Ottery to settle Felix into his first job.

Mummy did her best to make Felix comfortable. She gave him a metal bed with springs, a mattress, some blankets and a pillow: more than he would have received from a South African farmer. The next day, to our surprise, Felix ran back to the reformatory. The Abbot returned with Felix and told Mummy that these young fellows had been in the reformatory for many years that it had become their home. Felix remained with us in Ottery after that, but on his weekends off he visited his friends at the reformatory.

Mummy also employed a maid. Eileen was a pretty coloured girl who came daily to do the housework. She came by bus early in the morning and left after dinner at night. Eileen was not interested in Felix, because the colour of his skin was somewhat darker than hers.

One day the Abbot came unexpectedly. We presumed that he had come to visit Felix, but he had other agenda. He told Mummy of a man from Malta, a certain Mr Costigan, who had migrated to South Africa, hoping to save enough to pay the fare for his family to follow. But his income barely covered his own expenses. The Abbot suggested that Mr Costigan should stay with us and save money. He must have taken Mummy for an easy target, despite knowing that we were hardly making ends meet. But as the Abbot well knew, it was the widow's mite that counted and could be counted on in this case.

The Abbot told us that Mr Costigan had seven children, which struck us as a huge family.

Then the Abbot requested that Mummy attend Sunday Mass more regularly than she did. She answered, "The spirit is willing but the flesh is terribly busy at present." The Abbot knew not to argue.

Mr Costigan

Neville went to the bus stop on the main road to meet Mr Costigan and carry his things. Mr Costigan had one suitcase. Neville was big and strong, and had no difficulty carrying the suitcase. Together they walked along the unsealed road leading to our place and made small talk.

Mr Costigan looked respectable in a dark suit, pale blue shirt and a rather bright striped tie. Before ringing the doorbell, he took a comb from his top pocket and adjusted his hair, which had already been stuck down with Brylcreem. He than brushed the dust off his shoes with a large handkerchief, flapped it clean and folded it neatly into his pocket so that a triangular corner was just visible and then patted it. He looked about in a satisfied way, flapped his hands at Neville indicating that he should put the suitcase down and then pressed the doorbell.

No one in the house heard the bell because it had ceased to ring some weeks before. Neville opened the door and called, "Mummy! Hello! We're here."

Mummy came and made Mr Costigan welcome with a tall glass of homemade lemonade. "You poor man. You must be hot," she said.

"Not at all," he replied. But we could see that he was.

Then Mummy showed him the room that he was to share with Neville. Neville brought his suitcase in and pushed it under Mr Costigan's bed.

After dinner that night, Mr Costigan proudly passed around photographs of his family. In those days people had professional photographs taken of their families at regular intervals. His photographs were professionally taken black and white pictures with the name of the firm on the back, embossed in cursive gold leaf letters. He was equally proud of that name; it was a firm of standing in his hometown, he gave us to understand.

Neville was in bed asleep before we had finished looking at the photos. Later that evening after we had retired for the night, Neville woke with a start to find his bedroom filled with a terrible odour. Half asleep, he imagined that the Germans had landed and were gassing the area. Then he thought that some wild animal was hiding under his bed. Fortunately it was neither of these. Mr Costigan was taking off his shoes for the night.

The next morning Neville insisted that he would not share a room with Mr Costigan. He moved to the back veranda, closer to the chicken manure.

As Mr Costigan got to know us and our ways, he relaxed and began to tell many interesting stories about Malta: its history and the bravery of its people. His special subject was politics. He lectured us on the subject at dinner and after dinner every night. "There will be cows all over Europe if the Communists have their way," he said.

I imagined a map of Europe with cows dotted all over the place. I could imagine them in most European countries, even in the cities, but not in Greece. There the mountains are steep and craggy and only goats and mules are able to find a firm footing. Corfu

would be an exception because it is soft and green like Italy. “Who would milk all the cows? Would the Communists do the milking?” I asked. He looked at me briefly and without answering continued his warnings. We were all puzzled until we discovered that Mr Costigan had been trying to say “chaos.”

Our dining room, where most of these lectures took place, was a cosy little space in the middle of the house with doors to the kitchen, back veranda, Mr Costigan's room, the front entry hall and the bathroom. Every evening after dinner, Neville or I would say, “I ran a bath for myself, but I have no time for a second since I’ve already had one this morning. Would someone like to take advantage of this?”

We hoped that Mr Costigan would volunteer, but he usually replied, “I'm suffering from a slight cold. And it would be unsafe to take a bath under these circumstances.” Or some similar excuse. He never bathed.

One day Mummy said, “Come on Mr Costigan. It really is your turn, you know.” But even this did not work. Mr Costigan was half Maltese and half Irish.

Mr Crowe's Request

George Crowe, Mummy's old friend and former boss at the censorship office, came to visit us late one afternoon. He told Mummy that his marriage had broken down, and that he would be returning to his pre-war home in Patras. He wanted to take stock of his properties there. The German U boats had sunk many of the family’s merchant fleet during the war and it was not certain if the locals had left anything of the Crowe and Stevens landed properties.

Mummy had heard of his marriage breakdown but did not refer to it.

In his youth Crowe had been an eligible bachelor, not for his good looks or sparkling wit, but for his position and wealth. Like other Englishmen in Greece, he was expected to look for a suitable young lady in England or one of British stock in Greece, or perhaps even a beautiful Greek girl from good family. Crowe was slow to move.

An English nanny employed by an Athenian family set her sights on him. Crowe fell madly in love and married her. Rumour had it that he gave her breakfast in bed every day. He carried the tray himself, and would not allow the maid to do so. The British community in Patras, and elsewhere in Greece, was incensed. She was not a scullery maid, but a nanny was not seen to be much higher. She was a gold digger, they said, and should not have set her sights on a respectable person like Crowe. The tremors of indignation were felt as far away as Cephalonia, where we lived at the time.

After having left Greece during the war, George Crowe continued serving his wife breakfast before leaving for the office in the morning. George Crowe was unaccustomed to early starts. In Greece he had been used to a different pace of life. Once at the office he would drink strong coffee, read the newspaper if it had arrived, consult his partners, and talk to some of his employees. Then he would return home for lunch and an afternoon sleep. He felt ready for work after that.

Desmond was the only son of this union. Unlike his father before him, he did little to impress. He liked to play football with the peasant boys in the square and loved his old nanny who told him stories and gave him sweet things to eat after he had brushed his teeth at night. When he was seven, Desmond was sent to boarding school in England: Stowe in Buckingham, where his father and grandfather had gone before him. When war was declared, Desmond joined the army in England.

In South Africa, Mrs Crowe discovered a richer and perhaps more exciting man than George, and quickly made the swap.

Crowe told Mummy that his son, Desmond, would be back in South Africa soon. "Will you look after my boy," he asked, with tears in his eyes.

"Yes, of course I will," she replied.

"Teach him some proper manners, like you have taught your children. Teach him loyalty. Teach him patience. Teach him self control," he urged.

Mummy gave Crowe a hug before he left, which was unusual for people of her station in those days. It was considered very bad manners to touch people when talking to them.

George Crowe departed for Greece where he committed suicide.

We inherited Desmond.

Desmond and his Grandfather

After his discharge, Desmond arranged to visit his grandfather before leaving for South Africa. His grandfather, Alfred Crowe, lived in the West End of London and moved in the best of circles. Desmond, coming from the other side of town, walked all the way. It was a lovely English summer day with only a slight drizzle; small patches of blue sky appeared occasionally between the clouds. He reached his grandfather's house a few minutes late and rang the bell. The door was promptly opened by a maid, followed by his grandfather coming to greet him with open arms and a broad grin.

"My dear Desmond," he called, as he hurried past the maid to greet his beloved grandson; the grandson who had helped to win the war and had come home unscathed; the boy for whom he had planned a hero's welcome. But something stopped the old man in his tracks. It was the vision of anything but a military hero. There was no smartly-pressed uniform, no rows of medals, no cap or officer's whip. Desmond was wearing a yellow plastic rain jacket over a pair of khaki shorts and a short-sleeved shirt. He wore knee-high textured grey socks under open leather sandals. The grandfather was lost for words.

"Where are you shoes? Where are your spats, my boy?" he asked.

At lunch, surrounded by his grandfather's friends, Desmond told stories of his wartime experiences, of how he had worked in an office and not seen any action. He told, proudly, of the field latrines he helped to design. Some of his stories must have been very funny, because the servants who were working in the scullery basement and

serving through a dumb waiter, said they had heard loud laughter coming from the dining room.

One of his stories, which Desmond later told us, was about the night when he had been doing a bit of sightseeing. A nice young woman approached him and suggested that if he were tired he should rest at her place. She offered him a bed. He lay down to doze on top of the covers. Desmond was in his military uniform. The nice young woman sat on the floor beside the bed.

Desmond was dozing off when something hard struck him. It was a shoe flung by the nice young woman. More shoes followed until he reluctantly gave up the idea of sleeping. The nice young woman demanded that he undress.

"No thank you!" he said politely and left in a hurry.

When Desmond told us this story in Ottery, I was amazed and could not understand why a nice young woman would behave like that. Mummy had never told us anything about sex. I was very naïve.

"When the time is ripe, all that kind of thing comes naturally," she had once said.

Desmond and the Harley Davidson

Desmond came to Ottery in a long pink American convertible, the sort one saw in the Hollywood films of the day. He had bought it from a wreckers yard for next to nothing and intended to fix it in his spare time. Neville had made room for him on the back veranda, which the two shared. Anyone else would have been horrified, but Desmond thinking that to be the most natural thing in the world, immediately tossed his army knapsack over the railing, and looking about in a satisfied way, and said simply, "Yes. Very good."

Neville and I took an immediate liking to Desmond. We felt as though he had always been part of our family. We proudly showed him the chicken runs, the laying boxes, the ingeniously-arranged perches held together with fencing wire and the incubator. We were able to show him a caged area made of the great new-fangled invention, chicken wire. He was fascinated.

"How could they make that?" he asked. "The wire spools would get tangled …" He stood there for a while musing on the possible method of manufacture. Then, with a look of satisfaction he said, "Ah, I see. The alternate helices take opposite directions. The person who invented this must be very rich." I had no idea what he was talking about.

Later he studied Mummy's chicken rearing magazines, which Neville had been struggling with for some time. He and Neville spent many hours discussing rearrangements of the chicken hatchery and planning new runs.

Desmond had a huge appetite. He often raided the fridge before meal times and at night, an American habit that had been unknown to us until then. Meals were still formal affairs at table with laid cutlery and the maid attending; servants might have

eaten from the fridge in the scullery, or so we presumed, but not us. Mummy didn't mind, saying that this was his only fault.

Desmond enrolled at the university to study engineering. He bought himself a huge splendid Harley Davidson motorbike: a black one with chrome trim, very fashionable white-wall tires, and a large hand-stitched leather pillion with chrome handles for the passenger.

"It has more than 50 horse power," he declared proudly, and he started talking about knuckles. Neville pretended to understand and I was completely baffled. I could not see what on the bike might have been knuckles.

He invited me to ride with him to university. I reluctantly accepted, a little worried after I heard him telling Neville about a 'suicide clutch.' No better transport was available. And so it was that I went daily on the back of the Harley Davidson. I could see that I was much admired because of it and came to love every minute on the pillion seat.

"Don't hold on to me!" Desmond commanded when I tried to take a hold of his belt. He taught me how to hold on to the front handle with my right hand and the rear handle, behind me, with my left. I learned how to keep a watch for turns, and to lean into the turns to keep my 'centrifugal centre of balance,' as Desmond instructed.

Helmets were not required at that time; instead, we wore goggles to keep the wind out of our eyes on days when the Cape South Easter blew its hardest, and in winter we wore scarves around our necks. On windy days the Cape South Easter just about blew the motorbike off the road. I always felt safe with Desmond and the bike had a reassuring rhythm, as if a strong heart were beating within its mechanical works.

At university, being in a class with 30 young men and only one other girl, I was very much sought-after and often invited out. On occasions like these, girls made sure they looked their best in pretty dresses, with elaborate hairstyles, lipstick and nail-polish. The dress code was modest by today's standards; dresses did not expose our knees.

I was no exception in most respects but I had one unique feature; my hair was very long, in the Greek style, and plaited into a tail long enough to sit on. Other than that, I looked rather like Audrey Hepburn with Latin colouring.

Desmond had to wait his turn to ask me out. For our entertainment he had chosen a cowboy film and intended to get us to the cinema in the Harley Davidson. I refused and insisted on going by train. Desmond did not dress up for the occasion, which I found most embarrassing. While we waited on the platform Desmond started talking to a group of ex-army boys who were also waiting for the train. To make matters worse Desmond leaned on a lamp-post. I moved away and pretended not to know him.

Mummy's Friends

Mummy's many friends came to visit often. Miss Egan, an Irish lady, came regularly for pot-luck.

"I do so enjoy the country air," she would say, as if this was needed to justify her arrival.

Pot-luck meant staying for dinner unannounced; the soup would get an extra cup of water and the casserole extra vegetables tossed in at the last moment.

Miss Egan had been engaged to an army major, who had been killed in the early days of the war. She carried his photograph with her wherever she went and considered herself his widow. She would not look at any other men. However, this did not dent her joy of living.

She had come to South Africa on her doctor's orders for a change of air and liked it there. Miss Egan spoke with a charming Irish lilt, sang beautifully and could dance a jig. Neville and I were quite amazed by her familiarity with the saints. She called them by name and ordered them to do various errands for her.

"Oh where have I put my purse. Oh St Anthony, show me now. Where is it St Anthony? Now! Quick! Show me now!" she would call, while she flustered about seeking the purse that was on the table nearby.

St Jude is the patron of lost causes. He was called on to help her in many other circumstances. She did this with a huge sense of humour.

One day, while we were sitting on the front porch looking at the scenery, our dog, Sailor, and an unknown bitch from elsewhere, could be seen copulating near the swamp. Mummy seized control of the situation and called for hoses and buckets of water with which to dampen the canine spirits.

"Oh St Jude, help me and save me," Miss Egan ejaculated when she realised what was going on. "I am quite unaccustomed to this kind of thing!" she said as she ran into house covering her eyes.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul," she repeated again and again at the slightest agitation, a phrase that I also learnt to use. Indeed, many years later, to my children's occasional embarrassment, I still say "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, help us and save us," at any pressing sign of need.

Miss Egan lived near the university in a rather smart flat. I sometimes went there to visit her in my free time. In the entrance hall I saw a portrait of her major. He was young and handsome, and wore an elegant moustache. On her dressing table I saw a picture of Miss Egan and her major leaning over the railings of a wooden bridge and smiling at each other.

Also on her dressing table was a small plaster statue of Our Lady dressed in her usual blue and white. Over the little statue's head were Miss Egan's hairnets. I was shocked! In Greek homes, icons were treated with reverent familiarity. These precious images had been in family homes for generations and had become intimate family members. People attributed to them the living presence of the depicted saints. Votive oil lamps would be kept burning before them. They were magnificent items, with inlaid gold and other precious attributes, quite different from the garishly-painted plaster cast that Miss Egan employed in such a cavalier fashion. And yet, I later understood, Miss

Egan was just as devout as the Greeks. Hers was different mode of expressing belief and in her jolly Irish way, just as valid. I suppose.

Miss MacPhairson

Miss MacPhairson, a nurse by profession, was short and sturdy, had astonishingly large calf muscles and carried herself with an air of command. She could well have been a hospital matron in the old country, or a Sergeant Major in the Highland Guards. She must have been the pride of her family.

Since her earliest youth she had dreamed of adventures in faraway and exotic places. The time came to make a move; despite the concern and unsolicited advice of relatives and friends, she left Scotland and the security of her job for the great beyond. Her travels began in Europe, traversed the Levant and ended with a long hot journey through the heart of Africa.

War had been declared by the time she reached the Cape of Good Hope and she had been forced to remain in Cape Town for the duration. There, she indulged in minor adventures such as working part time for the war effort, playing golf and attending expatriate highland gatherings. Visiting Ottery was one of her adventures. She came often, stayed for pot-luck and told us stories about black savages. She sang Scottish songs and played the bagpipes, sans pipes. One of her best was 'MacPhairson for a Feud' and she sang it with gusto.

> MacPhairson swore a feud
> Gains'ta clan MacTavish
> Marched into their lands
> To murder and to ravish,
> Wi' four-and-twenty man,
> And five-and-thirty pipers.

The words would be interspersed with long pipe music voluntaries, which she produced by droning wordlessly while striking the front of her throat with the side of her hand. She called these 'musical' renditions 'The Home Pipes'. I was her eager pupil for this form of musical expression. In Greece we would most likely not have met Miss MacPhairson or heard her wonderful Home Pipes.

The Komlósi Couple

Reverend Komlósi, a Church of England clergyman despite his foreign-sounding name, often came to visit with his wife. They rarely stayed for pot-luck. The Reverend was always in a hurry 'doing the rounds.' A cup of tea was all he required. Mrs Komlósi made up for her husband's haste with extended good-byes and longing glances at the kitchen, from where delicious aromas sprang.

The Komlósis had two daughters: Chrystal, who was studying medicine, and Angela, architecture. Angela was in third year when I began my first year. She was enthusiastic about the course and influenced me in my choice of career. When I was at university she got me involved in student council politics, the carnival float preparations and the university drama society. Through her I was chosen to play the

part of Helen of Troy, which I fitted because of my rather foreign looks. I had few lines and mostly walked about the stage in an attractive outfit designed by Mr Ioannis Evangelidis, a Greek fashion designer living in Cape Town. He gave me the outfit that had won him an international prize.

I also went on the floats. Angela was a gifted organiser but it was I who did well in architecture.

Mrs van Niekerk's advice

The people in the surrounding farms had become less suspicious of us and occasionally came to give Mummy advice on poultry farming. Mrs van Niekerk, our nearest neighbour, was particularly helpful. Our little farm was making a very modest living for us and our various hangers-on solely by the sale of eggs. Chickens were not slaughtered at our place, not even if they were unwell. They were taken to die in peace at an isolated compound. This was considered folly by our neighbours who feared this spread of disease. Our chickens lived in open runs. Mummy wanted them to enjoy life. Eggs were frequently laid in unexpected places. Often Felix had to search hard to find them.

One young chicken was particularly favoured by Mummy for her independent attitude. She called the chicken Jemima.

Jemima was fearless and ran about everywhere, including on the back veranda. One evening she ventured into Felix's house where she fell into his toilet. Her legs were in the toilet all night long. When Mummy found her Jemima could hardly walk. I was given the task of rubbing her legs with Dencorub when I came back from varsity each day. Jemima regained her strength and to our surprise grew into a fine-looking cock.

One day Mrs van Niekerk came over to tell Mummy that it was time to slaughter the chickens for Christmas. She spoke with conviction but Mummy would have none of it. Christmas came and went and no chickens were slaughtered.

Neville's Progress

Neville went straight from school to his first job at the Surveyor General's office in Cape Town, working while I was at university. There, he excelled at cartography. He soon realised that the prospects for advancement were limited in the government office, where regulations made it impossible for anyone but a qualified surveyor to move to the top. He left and took a job in a service station owned by a jovial Greek South African.

Neville liked his contact with the regular customers. He discovered that the owner was diluting the petrol with cheaper fractions and cheating the customers in any way that opportunity presented. Neville wanted nothing to do with these practices. He spoke to the man about the matter and left. He was ready for something new when Christopher Lavrano, our cousin from Corfu, appeared in Cape Town with a wonderful offer for Neville.

Chapter 21: Johannesburg

Christopher Lavrano

During the war we had lost touch with most things and people familiar to us in Greece, including our extended family. Christopher Lavrano had joined the Greek Navy at the outbreak of hostilities, and served as gunnery officer on the Pindos, a Greek destroyer based in Alexandria. Later, because of his impeccable English, he was seconded to the British Mediterranean fleet as the Greek aide-de-camp to the British Admiral.

Shortly before the end of the war there was a mutiny in the Greek Navy. The Royalists versus the Communists split the forces. This eventually led to the civil war of 1946-49, during which more Greeks were killed by Greeks than had been killed or died during the German occupation.

Christopher volunteered to read the King's proclamation to the mutineers on each ship in turn. There was a good chance of him being shot at this. He read the proclamation from a 60-foot motor pinnace standing on the bow, with the helmsman at the other end of the boat. He had to read it to each ship twice. Apart from a lot of shouting and ribald insults, and a few solid items that splashed into the water about the pinnace, he got through it unscathed.

Christopher was later invited to a reception where he would meet Prince Phillip and be thanked for his bravery. Ironically, they had never met even though Prince Phillip and Christopher had grown up within a few hundred meters of each other, and with their parents inhabiting the same social circles. Prince Phillip had acquired Christopher’s nanny. On hearing that Prince Phillip didn't speak Greek, however, Christopher declined the invitation.

I thought this was rather strange. Why should Prince Phillip speak Greek, anyway? He was a Dane, and is now married to the Queen of England. He was born in Corfu, but those people can only have bad memories of that period, with its regular exiles and Greek political complications.

In 1942, while on leave in Alexandria, Christopher had married Fanny Assimacopoulos, a young girl with a considerable dowry. Fanny came from a wealthy Greek family of cotton merchants who resided in Egypt. They were shrewd business people, more respected for their money than their class. Christopher and Fanny moved to Johannesburg in search of new opportunities, where Christopher soon squandered Fanny's dowry along with a great deal of the Lavrano family money, more by ineptitude than by malice. The marriage was not a success for the two had little in common and Fanny returned to her family nine years later. The only child of the union, Angelo, named after his paternal grandfather, was eight years old at the time and remained with Christopher.

Christopher visited us in Cape Town and invited Mummy to come to Johannesburg to help raise Angelo in the Greek tradition that he valued. At the same time he offered Neville a job in his construction company.

We accepted. The Ottery farm was sold and we moved to Christopher's place, a large house in the suburb of Linden, surrounded by peach tree orchards on an acre of land. Mummy soon turned Christopher's house into a warm welcoming home. Angelo was loved, read to, given birthday parties and his friends were invited to come and play.

On one of the birthdays, Mummy had ordered an ice-cream cake at Christopher's suggestion. When the cake arrived it was placed on the table with aplomb. But the solid frozen cake proved impossible to slice with a knife. To the great amusement of the children, the cake had to be cut into slices using a large carpentry saw taken from Christopher's tool shed. Two servants held the rock-solid cake in place while another worked the saw backwards and forwards.

Neville started at the bottom of Christopher's construction business. He learned to lay parquetry floors and tiles, he mastered roofing, he learned joinery and fitting and more. He worked his way through the trades. Later, after watching a draftsman designing houses, Neville declared, "I can do that." To everyone's amazement Neville turned out a respectable set of drawings for the design of a new house. Neville, it seemed, had a natural flair for the building trade. Christopher proved to be just the right person at just the right time to open the opportunity for Neville to excel in this line of work. Neville was always grateful for this.

My First Job

In Johannesburg I had my first full-time job, working for Clifford Kallenbach, Architect.

Clifford Kallenbach was an ex-serviceman and regularly involved with ex-service activities. These took place mostly at the local pub. The office was on the fourth floor of a multi-storey building and the pub was across the road at street level. Kallenbach was in the office at 8:45 each day when I arrived; he gave me some instructions and left soon after. The office was then left in my inexperienced care. I drew, I typed and answered the telephone as well as I could. My typing was done with one finger and with an open dictionary by my side. Sometimes clients came in to see Kallenbach, with or without appointments. I would sit them down in a small office and tell them that the boss was running late. Then I would make a dash downstairs to call him. He always came up looking unruffled and in charge of the situation.

One day, during my time at Kallenbach's office, feeling myself a woman of the modern world, I decided to acquire a more fashionable appearance. So, I invested in a new hairstyle called Italian Boy. My long glossy hair, which I had worn in a plaited tail to my waist during my student days, was cut off and replaced by a short frizzy style. The next day I went into the office thinking that I looked absolutely marvellous.

Kallenbach was at his desk preparing my instructions when I arrived. He turned to say his usual hello and turned back to the drawing board as he always did. He appeared not to have noticed my Italian Boy. But then he rapidly swivelled his chair again and looked at me in amazement.

"What have you done to yourself?" he said, frowning. "I employed you because of your looks and your beautiful hair. Now look at you! You just look like everyone else."

He thought about this for a little while. I remained standing. Then he said, "I was so busy looking at you, I never checked any of your work. I think I had better check everything you have done. Take out your drawings and put them on the table."

After I had taken out all the drawings of my work from the previous three months, and organised them on the spread table, where he usually showed work to his clients, Kallenbach promptly left for the pub. He never did check any of my drawings, and I continued typing with one finger.

Killing Albertina

One day we were sitting in the garden at Christopher's place, having our usual afternoon tea, when a tall African man high on daha and home-brewed beer entered the property and approached us ominously brandishing a large knife and chanting threats in a high pitched voice. Christopher, retaining his composure, calmly asked him what he wanted.

"Albertina!" the African shouted. "I have come to kill Albertina." Christopher put down his teacup, rose to his full height and said in his finest English, "We shall have none of that here, my good man. Now please go away."

Christopher was impressive in his white tailored outfit that resembled an Admiral's uniform. The African hesitated, but only for a moment. He then turned and made off in the direction of the servants' quarters still waving the knife and uttering loud threats.

Christopher was furious. "Get him!" He shouted. Neville, who was rugby-player large, leapt from his chair and took off after the African. Angelo, still only 11 years old, followed squeaking threateningly. Christopher, standing on the spot and directing the chase with great authority called to Sailor who had been watching the affair with an uninterested air. "Get him!" he commanded at the dog and pointed towards the receding African. Sailor promptly bit Christopher in the leg.

Not only had his pristine trousers become stained with blood, but his monocle had been dislodged and in the fracas the tea had been spilled. "Disgraceful!" he declared, and with a theatrical sweep brushed Sailor from his leg. Neville returned to soothe Sailor. Mummy called for a bucket of water. Albertina, whose life had been spared by her duties in the kitchen, emerged from the house with a bucket. She was soon helping Mummy wash Christopher's wounds and assuring him that his trousers would be as good as new in due course.

"Aunt Alice, you really must train your dogs better in the future," Christopher remanded. Then Albertina headed off towards the servants' quarters to fetch some white linen cloth to be used as a bandage. We were so preoccupied by the scratches on Christopher's leg that no one though to warn her of the murderous African.

Meanwhile, however, the African, having failed to find Albertina at the servants' quarters, had proceeded to the house and charged into the kitchen brandishing his knife. He encountered the houseboy who promptly fled in terror. Not finding Albertina in the kitchen or any other room, he launched himself out of the house, leaping over the veranda, in our direction. At about this time the full effect of the daha and alcohol kicked in; he stumbled and fell on the lawn, stabbing himself with his knife as he as he crumpled semi-conscious to the ground.

Shortly thereafter Albertina returned from her quarters with the linen bandages. By this time Sailor had been adequately pacified. Christopher had taken his seat and was pouring himself another cup of tea. Seeing the wounded African groaning on the lawn, Albertina went to tend to his injuries. The last we saw of the African was Albertina leading him on unsteady legs to her quarters, there the better to nurse him back to his proper fighting spirits.

At dinnertime Albertina served at table and appeared in fine form.

Christopher's Business

Christopher was brilliant, a true intellectual with an extensive knowledge of history, literature, the sciences and engineering. He was a voracious reader, usually having two or three books on the go at any time. But he was, like so many people who are exceptionally gifted in theoretical matters, a poor judge of character and impractical in matters of business. He had assembled a menagerie of unsuitable Greek partners and associates. The former director of the Bank of Athens, who arranged overdrafts for the business, was on the board. Greek accountants combined their incompetence and wily ways to concoct creative balance sheets that did not relate to the facts of trade, but which brought in more loans that they siphoned off and helped to dig a deeper hole. They were colourful eccentric people who frequently fought among themselves.

The board meetings were like a bar brawls: they would yell at each other in Greek and wave their hands in the air. People waiting outside did not understand what was going on. Neville tried to cover up and explained that they were just "Greeks having a friendly chat in the traditional manner." Cyril Lewis, a very astute Jewish manager, their buyer and one of the few strong points in the business, found this very strange. He did not accept the explanation and eventually abandoned the company.

Neville confronted Christopher and suggested some changes. First, all unnecessary extravagances had to be cut back. Christopher's Bentley, for example, should be replaced by a more modest car. Secondly, Christopher should start work early in the morning, as Neville did; his mid-afternoon appearances gave the impression of a slovenly attitude that was infectious. Finally, various ineffective pen pushers in the office had to be retrenched and the accountants replaced with British professionals who know how to keep their hands out of the honey pot.

Christopher, a perfect gentleman, was offended to find a mere boy telling him what to do. At that time his business was actually growing at a stellar pace and the impending disaster was not apparent to the casual observer; Christopher had huge contracts to

build mining towns with all the amenities: shops, schools and civic centres, in places as far away as Klerksdorp. And, although Christopher would make his appearance late in the day, he was a hard worker who carried on furiously late into the night. It was his style not to be seen to be working, but to lead by virtue of natural and inherited authority manifest in his perfectly tailored suits. He told Mummy that Neville was a young idealist with no knowledge of the ways of the world. Mummy disagreed and urged him to consider some of Neville's suggestions.

Instead, he announced contrary measures: he would smarten up the appearance of the office in order to inspire confidence among his customers. In addition to a paint job he proposed to purchase enough Persian carpets to cover the entire building, not merely the reception area.

“Of course, I shall purchase only genuine Persian carpets: no imitations.” he informed us.

“Why?” asked Mummy. “Your customers wouldn’t know the difference.”

Against Mummy's and Neville's advice, the carpets were bought at a great cost. Neville resigned.

The Bentley was replaced by a 1950 Ford Mercury and Christopher’s business continued for a number of years. However, in 1958 the firm finally folded. Christopher had over-extended himself; he had diversified into roads and heavy infrastructure too quickly. Added to this were mismanagement, creative accounting and outright theft by the Greek accountants. It was a large operation with a big turnover. Some contracts were for several hundred houses each. The collapse was sudden and traumatic for many people.

One subcontractor, who had been ruined, connected a hose from the exhaust to the cabin of his car. His wife and two small children joined him for a ride, and all died.

To give him his due, Christopher was resourceful and brave about the affair. He reminded everyone of his credentials in the Corfiot aristocracy and his family registration in the *Libro d’Oro*, the book of Venetian aristocracy. A while later he married Veronica Griva Calvocoressi, an independently wealthy woman.

Throughout all his travails Christopher remained a brilliant but eccentric figure. For a time he translated and read the news on a Greek immigrant program, in Greek. He took to competing in televised general knowledge quizzes in English, in which, it was said, no question phased him. Again and again he won the competitions. One South African quizmaster devised a question that he presumed would stump even Christopher Lavrano. “What,” he asked, “were the decorations, medals and ribbons, that Lord Nelson was wearing at the battle of Trafalgar?” Christopher knew them all, including medals that Nelson had obtained from obscure Italian principalities that are generally unknown. He was even able to describe the buttons on Nelson’s uniform. Finally he was banned from competing in quiz shows.

Getting On

After leaving Christopher's establishment, Neville went to work for an rival construction firm that was run in a businesslike way. The two owners had been friends for a long time. Neville proved a valuable employee at the new firm and quickly rose to the top. Within a few years had become a partner in the business. Sadly, this led to some bad blood between Neville and Christopher, who had thought himself to be the de facto father figure betrayed.

Neville married Lisa Skanavi, his beautiful 18-year-old sweetheart. Both families approved of the match. Mummy was especially pleased with Lisa's family background; they were a well-respected and very old Greek family. Neville and Lisa had much in common, including their love of dogs. Lisa had been sent to a finishing school in Athens, a year before their engagement was announced, in order to cool their passions and test the resolve of the two young lovers. Her engagement gift from Neville was a pedigree Cocker Spaniel pup and a modest diamond ring. This marriage was made in heaven, blessed with consistency and love every step of the way.

After the retirement of his remaining partner Neville became the sole owner of the enterprise. He amalgamated with the biggest construction company in South Africa, and went public. His hard work had paid off; at 40 he was able to retire.

Neville's financial success brought many comforts to Mummy's life. Commercial success had not been part of her experience. She once said, "I don't know where Neville gets his money sense from. We don't have people like that in our family." It was as though she were apologising to the ancestors for this ostensible anomaly. It was a strange thing to say, since many of our ancestors had been successful businessmen: Andrew Lowson, Ernest Augustus Toole and James Saunders. It was very much in the family.

Postscript

Back to Greece

Promise

Neville and I had promised each other that we would visit Greece together one day. He and his wife, Lisa, had been to Greece quite often but somehow I had always been too busy to join them.

After graduating I had married a fellow architect from the University of Cape Town and we had many good years together. After periods of living in Rhodesia, Canada and the USA, we settled in Australia. When we separated, I gave up being a housewife and started a career as an architect and principal of my own practice, specialising in schools, hospitals and churches. Before my retirement I was awarded a life fellowship of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects.

Neville continued living in South Africa. He and his wife retired to Plettenberg Bay, a beautiful part of the country not far from Knysna where we had started our life in South Africa as refugees. Despite the physical distance between my brother and me, we remained close. He used to say, “If you ever need me, just call out. I am just across the pond.”

In 1972 we finally got around to fulfilling our promise. Neville, Lisa and I began our Greek holiday in Athens. We visited Lisa's aunt, Arigiro Pattarigopoulo, who lived in Kolonaki, a good neighbourhood of Athens near Lykabettus Hill. She had been the personal assistant to the Frederica of Hanover, Queen of the Hellenes, but that was long in the past. She was older than I had expected. Her life-long maid appeared to be looking after her as a daughter would care for an aging parent.

We had just finished our greetings and were starting to exchange family stories when the maid entered the room. She said that a young couple had appeared at the door, the daughter of Moira Shearer and a young man. Apparently the girl at the door was under the impression that her mother had made an arrangement for her to visit.

Arigiro Pattarigopoulo said, “Well, they didn't drop their card. Tell them that I have other visitors and they had better come back at another time. Please take their card.” I was taken aback by her reaction. Living in Australia, I had become accustomed to the open doors we have into our homes. I would have gone to the door myself and said “Please come in. How nice to see you. Would you like to join us for dinner?” And the young couple, I knew, were unlikely to have a card. They would have made appointments among their peers by telephone and may have been in the habit of casually dropping in on each other. But at the same time I recognised with affection and understanding the reactions of someone from a past era. She reminded me more of my grandmother than of Lisa. It was a pleasure to witness this living anachronism,

practising a way of life long since vanished from all of Europe. Perhaps it survives in small pockets elsewhere, as it did here in Kolonaki, in the best of houses.

Restaurant

That evening we had supper in a small restaurant at the foot of Lykabettus Hill. When the owner of the restaurant realised that we were returning after many years in foreign lands, he shook Neville's hand and put another hand on Neville's shoulder and told him what a fine man he was and asked him how many children he had, and their names and ages, and wanted to know why they had not been brought back to Greece too. He ushered us to a larger table in the centre of the restaurant and made such a fuss that other patrons noticed. Turning to another table, he said, "Returning to Greece a rich man," a fact that he could not have known. The other patrons nodded their approval and smiled at us. He fussed about and brought extra water to the table. The cook, his brother, came out to greet us and assure us that the meal would be the best he had ever prepared. His daughter brought a basket of freshly-baked bread and stayed to watch us eating, smiling all the while. One of his sons insisted on pouring wine into our glasses from their 'best barrel'. Younger children just came and stared. The old grandmother appeared at the door, smiling approvingly at the scene, but kept her distance. The connection was with Neville. That class of person only look to the man of the family; there was little connection with unimportant people like the women in the group. We were spoken about as if we were children who could not understand what was being said.

We were told that the vegetables served at that restaurant came from the family garden in their village, not too far away. Neville called for a tomato to be brought: just one ripe tomato. He wanted me to taste it. I bit into it expecting something special, for I remembered the food of my childhood being delicious. But I was not prepared for the explosion of magnificent flavour that the tomato yielded. It had been picked red and ripe, and brought to the restaurant on a donkey's back from the surrounding hills just that morning. Things were still done like that in Athens, at that time. In Europe, in North America and in Australia today, tomatoes are plucked green from the vines, kept in cool houses for days, trucked to markets far away and then pumped with chemical gasses to make them turn red; this is called ripening. These tomatoes taste like cellulose packets of water, salted slightly by the artificial fertiliser that had been sprayed on them. In all the years that I have lived in other countries I had forgotten what tomatoes really taste like. It is worth making a trip to Greece just to taste the tomatoes.

When we had finished the owner protested that we should not pay for the meal but Neville insisted and paid the man handsomely. He accepted it and swore that we would be friends for life. He hoped that we would have many more meals in his restaurant.

On our way back to the Hilton Hotel, where we spent the night, Lisa kept telling us that she could smell the aroma of Athens. It triggered memories of her life as a young girl. I could smell roses. Buckets and tins of roses seemed to have tumbled out of the

many flower shops onto the pavements. Neville said something sarcastic about the stink of Athens that annoyed us both.

Captain and Crew

The following morning we went down to Piraeus, to the yacht that Neville had chartered for our trip around Greece. It was one of the better looking yachts in the harbour. Neville and Lisa occupied the stateroom with its private *en suite*. I had a separate bedroom. The crew lived on a lower deck. On the upper deck was a luxurious indoor lounge. Further to the rear was and a wide deck with a chair for each of us.

The Captain in full naval regalia and cap appeared to greet us. Greeks love caps. A crew of three brought our luggage on board and stowed the supplies we would need for the next few days of cruising. They began to load creates of champagne and other imported drinks. Neville intercepted them and explained that we drank only water and fresh fruit juice. Neville and I had agreed to try the famous Cephalonian Robola that had made John Augustus Toole much of his fortune. One bottle would be enough, Neville told the Captain. Later, when we tried the Robola, we found that it had turned and were glad that we had not ordered more. Retsina, the Greek wine of the mainland, had not been part of our Ionian experience. I had tried it once; it tasted of turpentine and seemed to be something that might better be used to degrease a tractor engine. We ordered none of that. Much to the amazement of our crew, we drank water and freshly-squeezed orange juice throughout the trip.

As our yacht was preparing to leave, I stood at the railing gazing at the harbour I knew so well from my childhood. The familiar coffee-shops and old men with their beads were there, but it was not the same. New shops had been opened, stocked with cheap Greek souvenirs made in China. The harbour-side was overrun by tourists, who spoke loudly and looked out of place. Shop owners were bidding for their custom in loud voices to match the tourist noise.

One of our crew members was at work. His lithe body, with muscles that rippled as he swept the deck, was alive with masculine energy. His golden skin, black hair and eyebrows, handsome face and intense brown eyes gave him the aspect of an Apollonian hero. He had the build and fill of a boy who had lived well, yet was accustomed to hard physical labour.

A woman in black, probably about 50 years old, came to the edge of the wharf. She carried a parcel of figs. She had a solid build and stood tall. Her face and bearing had the statuesque beauty that I had seen before in the peasants at Chlomos. The handsome crewman waved to her and called her ‘Mother’ as he reached over and took the parcel of figs. The boat had already started moving away and he had to stretch to take them. He stood looking at her, but the noise of the engine and the growing distance prevented any conversation.

As we moved out into the harbour, I turned to the young man and said, “Your mother must have been very beautiful when she was young.”

He looked at me with innocent surprise. “When she was young? She is beautiful now.”

I felt ashamed for my thoughtless comment. I thought of all the young women who are considered beautiful in our globalised Western culture: thin girls with hair dyed blond and eyebrows plucked; skin painted; artificial; all the same; looking about for some quick satisfaction, and as they get older, chasing the phantom of eternal youth. None of them have the heroic beauty possessed by the peasant women of Greece of any age. Why had I forgotten that?

Yachting Trip

From Piraeus we sailed east past the islands of Aegina and Gios Georgios, in a world where the land floats between the sea and the sky. We avoided the known tourist spots and sought out places of archaeological and historical interest. We approached the rocky island of Monemvasia, a thumb of rock pushing upward out of the sea, pressing into the sky. Rough vertical cliffs surround the island's high plateau. The eastern and northern aspects of the island plunge directly into the sea; a few narrow beaches appear there. To the west and south, a skirt of sloping lowland leans against the lower edges of the cliffs. There is a village on the skirt, at the end of the island. Its houses are piled up on the slopes and against the edge of the cliff. The narrow village lanes are steep and often stepped. It is a small simple place, built of the local rock and topped with the old style terracotta tiles.

We walked through the village. Unlike some of the tourist-infested parts of Greece it was clean. Relaxed expressions on the faces of the people mirrored their unhurried movements. The clack of donkey's hooves could be heard echoing from the walls of houses. A long zigzagging walkway, steep in many places, leads to the top of the island. We took this path through the village, through old crumbling fortifications and to the old village centre lying in ruins near the ridge at the top of the island. In times past piracy made it necessary to build towns at the high points. These are often deserted today.

On a rocky outcrop at the end of the island, the Church of Aghia Sophia looks down at the sea on one side and at the village, far below, on the other. We were quite breathless by the time we had reached the top. The climb was too steep and too long for anyone else and we found ourselves alone. Neville, Lisa and I fell silent, as we gazed at the magnificent spectacle. We felt ourselves giddy, as if flying. It is here neither landscape nor seascape nor skyscape. It is all of these. It is a magical place where heaven seems to rest lightly on the shoulders of a land floating in its own universe. Miracles happen in places like these. And, as if on cue, the shadow under an old tree clasping the walls of the church began to move. An old priest dressed in black appeared as if out of nothing, and shuffled towards us.

His long braided hair was coiled into a bun on the back of his head. He had a white beard. The old priest looked straight at each of us and told us we were welcome in a quiet unhurried voice. His eyes smiled and we knew that he had spoken from his heart. Then he sat down in the shade and turned again towards the sea. It seemed that he lived here on his own, a solitary monk who had become one with the serenity of this place, as if floating on the edge of a sacred dimension in a region outside of time.

On our way down through the village I heard two old women talking about the priest.

"There is nothing special about him," one said. "But he is a good old man, and gives us a beautiful liturgy."

They did not mention that he had a warm welcome for strangers, or that he was at peace in that wonderful place. Her turn of phrase, however, told us that she understood more than she knew. She had not said that the old priest 'performed' beautiful liturgy, but that he 'gives it to them'.

From Monemvasia we moved south along the east coast of the Peloponnesus. We anchored in small bays along the way and took taxis to places of interest further inland.

Neville and I thought of Mummy and her history lessons often and communicated that wordlessly. In Sparta, as we walked along the remains of the ancient city, Neville pointed to some low walls of stone and said with an air of recognition, "Ah, look! Here it is. The Sanctuary of Artemis." Lisa looked at him with a puzzled expression, but I knew exactly what he was saying: Here is the temple that Mummy told us so much about, the one she visited when archaeologists from Britain were excavating.

On this trip, Neville and I did not often speak explicitly about Mummy. Yet, at a certain level, this trip was all about her.

The privileged world of the Ionian island gentry, embodying a tradition that had its origins in the Venetian Empire, rejuvenated during the period of the British Protectorate, furnished Neville and me with an idyllic childhood. That world and its conventions had become an anachronism long before we were born. As the substance of family power and wealth evaporated, the forms became elevated: We learned good table manners; not to speak until spoken to; when and how to curtsy and to bow. These forms were the shadows of past necessities, rituals that no longer had the power to change the world. We, like many of our contemporaries, found ourselves living in grand houses without the means for their upkeep. After the turmoil of the great depression, the winds of war were sufficient to sweep the remnants away.

Mummy had always been adventurous, progressive and unconventional. She had loved the roaring twenties, she had broken taboos, she had travelled alone in a time when women were chaperoned. Nevertheless she retained her British Edwardian, if not Victorian, values to the end. By the time we started to make our own way Neville and I understood that our success depended on performance of a different kind in a new faster-moving world, but neither of us jettisoned the values that had defined the intellectual and moral contours of our childhood. This meant imbibing a sense of honour and duty, acquiring habits of restraint and self discipline, and willingness to take responsibility for leadership when it was called for. These served us well during the war; we survived the physical dangers and came through with our integrity as individuals and as a family intact. These values served us well all our lives. None of this would have been possible without the strength, love and belief in ourselves that Mummy had given us. She was not physically present, but her presence was palpable for Neville and me.

On the yacht, our Captain and crew looked after us well; we were served coffee and toast without marmalade for breakfast and delicious Greek food for all other meals. But the Captain had a loud radio that he turned on far too often. The music reminded me of Apergis' bathhouses. One morning, when he turned it on again, I muttered to myself, *"Kakochronasis."*

"What?" said Lisa, shocked. She had never expected to hear me cursing.

Neville could not hold back the laugh that had taken over his whole face. We had to explain.

One morning instead of the usual noise on the radio we heard the chanting of Greek church music interspersed with prayers. These were recited so fast that we could hardly follow them. On the 15th of August, the Great Feast of the Assumption, all profane music was silenced for three days throughout Greece. At a certain point in the liturgy the chanting stopped and the celebrant addressed the listeners with the desiderata of that year. In former times, the defeat of the Turks might have been called for, or liberation from the German occupation. In 1972, the celebrant implored, "Preserve us from the morals of the tourists."

Cephalonia

Arrival on Cephalonia was not the happy homecoming I had dreamed of. Our house had been vandalised and looted by Germans at the close of the war. Helen Kosmetatos had found them rolling up the Persian carpets and packing valuable objects into crates to ship back to Germany. She demanded that they leave the items where they had found them. But one Greek woman against the German war machine could not prevent the pillage and many treasures vanished. Later, we were told, the house had been shelled or bombed after the Germans had left. In one version of the story we were told that the house had been filled with prisoners of the Italian Acqui Mountain Division, then dynamited, killing them. Another account has it that the killing of about 2000 prisoners of war by machinegun took place on Maitland Square. In any case, it seems, the house was left without a roof. It stood like that for almost a decade.

In 1953 a great earthquake levelled the town, finishing what the Germans had started. The British Fleet came to aid the stricken town. Trying to be helpful, the British landed heavy equipment and bulldozed the rubble into the sea and with it the bodies of many hundreds who had perished, and countless treasures. Many people were outraged, but in the face of Greek inaction they cannot be blamed. The stench was terrible and disease threatened.

By the time we arrived nothing remained of our house. An outline of a stony foundation was visible on the ground. Under the vault of the clear blue sky it looked so small. So small. It seemed then that the whole of our lives as children had shrunk to this sketchy outline and levelled into the ground.

The old buildings of Venetian and British days had not survived. After the earthquake, some had been replaced by temporary structures. Crude concrete boxes were going up on the once familiar streets. They were earthquake resistant but had

little else to recommend them. Some tourist-orientated development was taking place but for the most part the town was empty and level.

The Kosmetatos house had survived partially intact; the top floors had collapsed and had been cleared away. As far as we could tell, it was the only building of the old town that had survived. We went to visit Marino and Helen, and were shocked to find a guide leading a group of tourists through the place. He was pointing out the old icons, the family portraits and the shining marble floor.

Marino had become the mayor of Argostoli. We visited him at his office. Marino gave us a happy welcome and urged us to stay longer than our schedule permitted. When we took our leave, he hugged me and, with tears in his eyes, said, “You look just like Alice, but unfortunately you are thinner.”

We were unable to find any other people we had known. In the evening thumping amplified music emanated from a disco somewhere and tourists began to cluster about the bars that now served drinks for spirited evenings. I wanted to leave as quickly as possible. The new ugliness of the place and the absence of so many people whom I loved were depressing. I will never go back to Argostoli.

Passing Scorpios

We sailed around the southern tip of Cephalonia and along the west coast of Greece, on our way to Corfu.

As we approached the town of Lefkada, with the island to the starboard and the mainland to the portside, Lisa told us to look out for the island of Scorpios. Lisa’s family had owned the island but had sold it some years before to Aristotle Onassis, the shipping Magnate. Onassis had married Jacqueline Kennedy, the widow of President John F. Kennedy, and it was said that he had given her the island. Neville rose from his deck chair, picked up his binoculars and called for one of the young crew members.

“There it is.”

The young crewman pointed at the island, which was heavily guarded to prevent the approach of uninvited guests. It was truly a rich man's paradise with trees to ensure privacy and a business-like harbour. Two smart yachts, which made ours look insignificant, were moored there. Lisa and I joined Neville and the young crewman to get a better look at the place. I heard Neville say to the young man, “How would you like to own a place like this?”

“I already do. I own everything. I go where I want. I am free!” he answered without a second of hesitation.

I looked again at the handsome youth with the beautiful mother. He was not merely calling the grapes sour, as one unfamiliar with the Greek imagination might mistakenly presume. He was, as Greeks instinctively do, taking responsibility for his actions and his place in the world. From time to time, these Greeks – who presume to have inherited the philosophical genius of their ancient forefathers but who often do not get beyond empty boasting and confident pontificating on subjects they know

nothing of – will surprise you with sparkling gems of wisdom. Why, indeed, should he wish to buy himself a prison!

Neville, who was wealthy enough to have purchased an island, had instead purchased a vast property on the edge of the Kruger National Park. In co-operation with the Park the boundary fences were removed to permit the movement of elephant herds and other migratory animals. The property was enlarged with financial contributions from some business associates. It is now an independent privately-owned park dedicated to maintaining the integrity of ancient migratory routes of many wild species.

Corfu

Corfu was still as beautiful as ever. Even the tourists there were better behaved than most, probably because it was more expensive in Corfu than at most other places on the islands. Among them were Shakespearian actors, retired writers, movie producers and plenty of super rich. The new misbehaviour on this island seemed to be mostly the doing of the Corfiots. Development here meant despoiling some of the most magnificent spots of the island with hastily constructed tourist accommodation.

Despite her age and the fact that she was confined to a wheelchair, Aunty Lily was full of fun. She was a knowledgeable person and had strong opinions on many subjects: The Aztecs in South America, the Dictators in Athens, the role of the King in the future of Greece and more. Max and his wife Evelyn were at Chlomos. John was riding a camel in the Sarah desert, searching for as yet unknown species of xerophytes. We were told that twenty species discovered by him had been named in his honour.

We decided to go to Chlomos. Neville and Lily Condi, Max's ex-wife who had been showing us around that day, left to find a suitable vehicle. Lisa and I were strolling along and came across a rental business that looked professional to us. We enquired and were immediately ushered into the main office. The proprietor took a seat behind his desk. Behind him, the wall was covered with photographs of various important people such as Jacqueline Kennedy, Sir Lawrence Olivier and other celebrities. The proprietor could be seen standing nearby or shaking hands with the VIP in each. In the middle of this display I saw a large black and white portrait of Uncle Angelo in his Scout uniform; hat, scarf and all. This picture dominated the display; Uncle Angelo's portrait was life-size, while the others were not.

“Oh look, that's Uncle Angelo!” I said to Lisa.

“You know this man?” asked the proprietor, looking up from his papers.

“Yes, he is my uncle. I knew him well when I was a child at Chlomos.”

The man immediately got out of his chair, came around and started kissed my hand. “Ah, you are from the Island. You have come home! Welcome home. This is such an honour to have you here.” His enthusiasm was quite overwhelming.

“Angelo is a true hero! This island would not be the same place without Angelo.” he continued as if Uncle Angelo were still alive, and then he promised to rent us his best conveyance at half price.

Lisa and I were not the ones to sign the contract. We told him so but he prepared the papers nevertheless, telling us all the while that his cars were the best on the island and assuring us that his special deal was unbeatable. “Just for you, at half the price. I cannot make any profit. It is a gift.” He went on and on.

At that moment Lily Condi saw us through the window and ran breathlessly into the shop. “No, no, no! Don't sign anything!” She said, “Come, come!” she beckoned. We followed her out of the shop. She led us to another rental agent a few streets away where exactly the same model of car was for hire at half the ‘special price.’

Neville phoned Max, who was now the master of the family estate in Chlomos. But Max, who had business in the morning, said he would not be able to meet until, perhaps, later.

“Lisa, Iris and I have come halfway around the world to see you. What is this business that cannot wait?” Neville said with mock annoyance into the telephone, winking at me and Lisa.

Neville knew that Max had ceased to work the grape, wine and olive industries on the estate and was leading the life of the idle not-so-rich. We all knew that Max had been eating up the family capital in order not to work. After a short conversation, Max was persuaded to meet us in town that morning and return with us to Chlomos for lunch. Neville, he agreed, could come with him to the bank.

Max had, indeed, business. He had to sign a cheque. One cheque. That is all. It was not even a cheque for a large amount, but was a routine monthly payment of some kind. Unaccustomed to doing anything, this was a big deal for Max. Neville had to laugh. After this big deal, we set off.

The road to Chlomos was just as we remembered it, dusty and potholed. Neville parked the car where Aristidis used to leave the Lavrano car. A crowd had gathered at the village square to view our arrival; the rumour had preceded us. The men congratulated Neville on his height and his beautiful Greek wife. I searched the crowd for Aphrodite. She was not there. I saw a woman all in black standing on the steps outside her house. Her eyes were searching the crowd and I realised that it was she. As we walked towards each other the people of the village stood aside to let us through. Age had not taken away Aphrodite’s beauty and I told her so. She hugged me and said “You look just like Mrs Alice, the blessed one.”

Then Neville, Lisa and I walked to the iron gates of the estate. Evelyn, Max's second wife, had taken care of the house beautifully. She is a gifted artist and has a fine sense of composition and balance. The house had been prepared as if ready to be photographed for *Vogue* magazine. Uncle Philip was gone and the farm had ceased to be a going concern. Aunty Lily was not there and so the piano remained closed. I walked through the familiar living area, past the table where Uncle Philip had once played cards with his sisters. My footsteps on the waxed wooden floor made an unfamiliar echo, as loud as the place was empty. The main area now gave a sterile empty feeling.

Max had been selling off bits of the Chlomos property to support his leisured way of life. He had even sold the Agia Pelagiá with the family graves of five centuries. Servants no longer worked at the house, although a cleaner came on some days.

Evelyn had placed a large coloured umbrella on the cobbled walkway just outside the kitchen entrance. Tables and chairs gave a sense of place to this outdoor dining area. We sat there for the lunch that Evelyn brought from the kitchen. Max went into Philip's wine cellar to get a bottle. The entire room was covered in dust and the bottles were strung together with cobwebs.

"I have no idea where the good wines are," Max remarked as he pulled a bottle randomly from the racks and dusted it off. We opened it, but the wine had turned and was undrinkable.

After lunch we headed back to Corfu Town.

The Old Shepherd

Many of the small islands that we passed on our trip appeared to be uninhabited, too small and rocky to support life. On our way back to Piraeus we stopped at one of these islands and anchored in a protected bay. To our surprise, we saw an old man push a boat across the pebbly beach and row towards us.

"I have come to welcome you because you fly two flags, a Greek flag and an English flag. Thank God you are not Germans," he said, "They come here because it is secluded, and swim in the nude." He gestured towards the beach.

The old man had brought us an offering of homemade mizithra cheese. After this had been passed to us the questions began. He spoke to Neville, man to man.

"Which is your wife?" he asked. Neville pointed out Lisa. "She looks English," he said to Neville, probably because Lisa is a blond.

"And what about the Greek one?" He asked, pointing at me.

Neville told him that I was his sister.

"Is she married? Does she have any children?" Neville told him I had nine children, and the old man was visibly taken aback. "In that case, where is her husband? Is he working?" Neville knew that it would have been too much of a shock to tell him that my husband and I were divorced. He said, "My sister has lost her husband."

Neville invited the old man to come on board. But the old man refused, saying that he had to get back to his goats. He had brought his goats and the goats belonging to other people in his village to graze on the small meadows between the steep rock faces. His grandson brought him here with the goats when the season was right. He invited the three of us to come to his hut. Lisa refused. Neville teased her and said in English that she was an 'Athenian Lady' unaccustomed to mixing with common peasants. Lisa, used to teasing, laughed. Neville opted to remain with her. I went with the old man.

On shore, after we had secured the boat, we began our ascent to the old man's hut. Out of propriety he did not take my hand to help me up the slope. Instead, he offered me

his elbow. I could have done without any help but I held his elbow as I walked up the slope.

From the yacht we could see only vertical crags of rock, but lush green plateaus were plentiful. The old man's hut, on a grassy plane, was built like a dry-wall igloo made of large blocks of sandstone leaning inward at a slight angle to retain its structure. A piece of corrugated iron formed the roof, held in place by stones.

There was no door, merely an opening. Inside, along one side of the hut, I saw maturing mizithra cheese, hanging in white calico bags in a row, dripping into buckets neatly arranged below. On the floor of stamped earth, at the other side of the hut, I saw a jacket and a blanket neatly folded. The old man slept on the ground; it was just large enough.

Outside the old man had ground down a large stone to form a rudimentary seat. I sat there, and he brought me a small sweet black coffee that had been made over an open flame.

I asked the old man if he had a problem with water. I knew that the porous rock would not hold any rainfall and that this island was too small to have a spring. He explained that his grandsons regularly brought him drinking water from the village. In addition he had installed kerosene tins to collect rainwater from his roof.

The old man was quick to give me advice. "You must gather your children and come back home to Greece. Australia is not a good place. Come to my village. We can get you a little house near the water tap. You would not have far to walk," he promised. I told him that Australia had become my home, that my children were happy there, and that they could not even speak Greek.

"Your children cannot speak Greek!" He repeated with amazement.

"We speak English at home. Besides, the children's father was not Greek. If you haven't been there you can't know what Australia is like."

"I do know what it's like. I know people who went to Melbourne," he explained, pronouncing it 'Melvoorne.' And he went on, "In Australia everyone is in a hurry, chasing more money than they need. People don't know the names of their neighbours. They go to work far from their homes in cars and they do not greet people in their village on the way. They buy things they do not need. When they are tired of these things they throw them away and start all over again. Australians do not love their families. They swap their wives when they get bored with them. They put their parents in old people's homes to die there and move away to other towns. You cannot live in a place like that."

I was astonished. Here was an old goat herder, illiterate in his own language and who spoke no other, who had never been outside his local village and its nearby islands, had never been exposed to anything like television, had lived a large part of his life as an hermit on an isolated place, and yet he had such penetrating ideas about Australia.

I told him that Australia is a good country; that people from all over the world want to go there; that it is a law-abiding place where people pay their taxes and government

officials do not take bribes. The public utilities work: the street lights turn on at night, the water flows to the taps and the electricity is reliable. Anyone who wants to work hard can make a good living. Good people love their families just as in Greece. And it is also a beautiful place with fine sandy beaches, shining in the sun.

"I love Australia," I said, "but I will always have a place in my heart for Greece."

We both fell silent for a while. Then he said, "If the officials do not take bribes, how is it possible to get anything done?" I started to explain, but he interrupted me.

"I have everything I need right here," he said, and gestured with a lift of his head towards to goats on the grassy plateau just below us. And beyond that, I knew, invisible threads of affection and respect stretched across the sea connecting him to his children, his grandchildren and the people of his village, threads that gave meaning and purpose to his and their lives. I looked again at the old man and saw him anew as if with sharpened vision: his untamed bushy eyebrows, his clear eyes and creases of laugher and care, his strong rough hands made large by labour and wear. I looked out across the water and saw that we were floating above the world upon disks of emerald meadow, Elysian fields where gravity was become light. Behind me I heard the clunking of the goats' bells, and below the hush of the shore, and elsewhere gulls calling in other parts of the sky. I heard and felt all of these in the same moment of transcendent clarity and joy, and I remembered how much I loved Mummy and Neville and Fotis and Vangelis and Erminia and all the people who had touched my life. And at that moment I reached out to embrace the universe entire, from this place in heaven, where the light is sharp, the air is clean and the sparkling blue sea is as clear as clear can be in its turquoise crescent shallows and its profound unfathomable depths.