

THE LUGWORM CHRONICLES

by
KEN DUXBURY

With an Introduction by ROGER BARNES



Lugworm on the Loose

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THE NORTHERN SPORADHES

THAT FIRST MORNING after sleeping on the beach it was strange awakening to the brilliance of the white sandy bay, the un-believably blue cloudless sky, and behind us the shimmering green waves of the olives climbing the hill, their leaves chattering in the early wind. We spread our charts to dry on the white pebbles at the top of the beach, for they had become limp in the night air, and then renewed the fire. While the crackling wood died to a glowing bed of heat for the toast we discussed the days ahead. Our initial hunting ground was to be the Sporadhes, a group of large islands stretching some forty miles eastward of the Gulf. We decided to stick to the original plan of making good somewhere around ten to fifteen miles each day, which would allow a detailed exploration of the coast, and time to get to know the locality of our night berth before darkness fell. We intended to keep so far as possible off the tourist track, seeking the unpublicised and therefore unspoilt islands and bays; indeed our equipment was geared for such a cruise for we carried no clothes suitable for sophisticated shore-going. Our diet, we hoped, would be local produce augmented by our own catch of fish and we had plenty of hooks and lines.

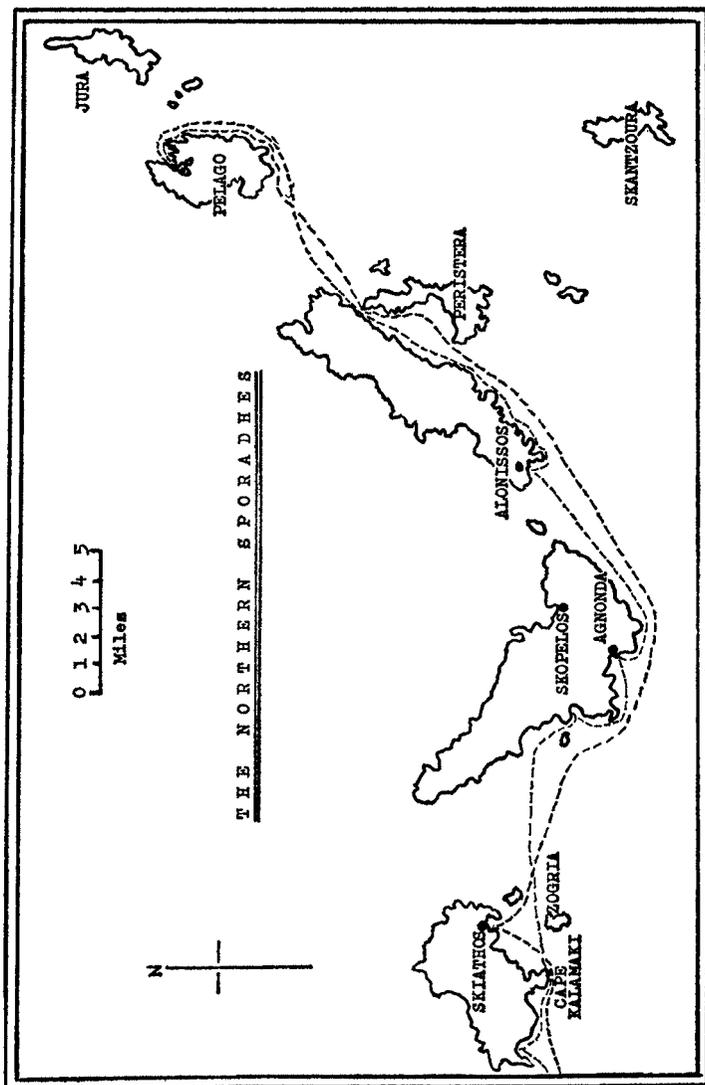
Before breakfast was over that first promise of wind had petered out, leaving a sweltering unprotected world under the blinding sun, and it was good to feel the cool water as I waded out to check the lines we had laid from the boat the previous evening. Both hooks were fouled in a tangle of reddish weed a fathom down and as I plunged in to free them, B. joined me for a swim. We were both idly circling round the boat when a rustle on shore like a distant sigh caught our attention. A ripple of wind ran over the tops of the olives, and bent a solitary cypress to a sickle shape high on the hill. We watched as the ripple of movement fanned out, for all the world as though giant invisible fingers were stroking the tops of the trees. It died, then swirled with renewed vigour round a single point. A sprig of leaves, ripped from a tree, danced madly in a tight circle, leaping upwards as a pillar of invisible power swept in a line down the hillside. As it advanced, it was as though a huge vacuum cleaner were sucking at the earth, pulling every loose object to join

the swirling dance upward. Fascinated, we saw the miniature whirlwind sweep towards us, happy that all *Lugworm's* sails were secured. The column of dust and leaves was gathering momentum now, sweeping across the beach towards the sea. We both remembered at the same moment: too late! Our charts of the Aegean whirled skywards, twizzling madly in a column of rotating air, carried relentlessly over our heads seawards!

Relief mingled with dismay as the vortex abruptly disintegrated, leaving the bay to swelter again in the motionless heat. Motionless that is, save for our charts which languidly descended like falling leaves to settle soundlessly on the water. We rescued them, dragging the limp and delicate paper into shallow water, lifting them carefully by the corners to drip for a while before laying them again, under strict supervision, on the hot white stones. Within minutes they were dry but they had become brittle with it, and never since then have the mountains and sea lost an intriguing three dimensional impression. The parallel ruler never has run smoothly on those charts again, and to this day, when the atmosphere gets damp, they go as limp as rolled pastry.

But a light easterly had now settled in, and we broke camp, hoping that there would be a northerly slant out in the Trikeri Channel to get the sails filling, but it remained light and from the east, which was disappointing because we wanted to make the eastern extremity of the Trikeri Channel before nightfall, ready to strike across to Skiathos the following day.

Out in the channel, free of the protection of the Gulf, the coast had a quite different look. Rounded hillsides fell into the sea and fewer trees climbed their slopes. The shoreline was a pitted sharp escarpment of bleached white rock for a height of ten feet or so, from there up becoming deeply thicketed with bushes of spiny broom and hawthorn which lay densely in the protected cuttings of the small valleys, and thinning on the headlands. Here and there a solitary carob tree spread a ring of shade, its fleshy leaves making a darker patch against the silver-grey of the rock, but compared to the verdant cultivated shores inside the Gulf, this was sparse stunted maquis. We motored gently on within a few feet of the rocks, our time divided between peering into the crystal clear water to where their footings disappeared under the silvery sand, and watching the hillsides above for any sign of life.



There was none. Apart from the occasional low stone building roofed with bamboo laths interwoven with dried leaves and high enough only for goats to shelter against the heat, there was no sign of habitation until we passed the fishing village of Trikeri nestling in a tiny bay at the foot of a hill on whose crown the village of old Trikeri still stands. Throughout these rocky coasts and islands we often found that the main village or 'chora' to give it the Greek name, stood atop some almost impregnable hill, and we learned that this was generally for defence purposes against the pirates of olden times. Once these human predators had been wiped out, the need to build on the difficult—but easily defended—hilltops was gone, so newer and more accessible hamlets of the same name now nestle on the shoreline. Life still goes on in the majority of the choras but there are signs there of desertion, some of the buildings having fallen into decay.

After a frustrating day of light headwinds, it was late evening by the time we anchored in the bay of Platania just off the village, and prepared for a night afloat.

* * *

The trouble with those first nights sleeping aboard the boat was, quite simply, that we didn't sleep. As a first act of what became a nocturnal ritual, the airbeds would be inflated—three hundred hypnotic stabs of the footpump each—and the stove placed carefully on the flat after deck. We rarely bothered to erect the tent unless the weather was doubtful. Billycans, teabags, sugar, dried milk and the water canister would be placed secure against any rolling but ready to hand for making the morning cup while we were still warm in the sleeping bags. We would then snug down, listening to the quiet chuckle of water along *Lugworm's* wooden sides, watching the stars gently circling as she swung to any wind which might blow. Gradually, as the sounds on shore died with the deepening night, another sound, so slight, so gentle yet so disturbing, would creep into the consciousness. It was the faintest crackling, akin to the noise of static electricity when one pulls off a nylon garment, but continuous, insidious, under, in and throughout the whole fabric of the hull. We would lie silent, listening to this peculiar and unaccountable noise.

'Ken.'

‘Uh?’

‘Do you think we’ve got Toledo Beetles?’

‘Unlikely—and it’s not Toledo, it’s Teredo. Just keep quiet for a moment and listen.’

We would hold our breaths, trying to locate some source of the sound. Was it a wood borer? The inexorable crackling would continue, to my worried ears sounding more and more like the tearing of minute fibres in the wooden hull. Was it, after all, just small fish nibbling her underparts? That first night, I decided I just had to know. Cautiously, so as to make no noise I raised my hand, bringing it down with a resounding crash on the side deck. The result was electrifying.

‘What the Devil!’ from out of the violent eruption alongside.

‘All right, dear; it’s me.’

‘YOU ...?’

‘I wanted to frighten the fish.’

‘My God ...!’ It was minutes before the thumping of B.’s heart subsided sufficiently for me to concentrate again on the persistent, disturbing crackle. We were both wide awake.

‘It’s the shrimps,’ I said, more to give B. confidence than from conviction. ‘I think every time they jump under there they set up a minute shock wave that drums on the hull—thousands of them.’

‘Oh, DO go to sleep.’

‘If it IS borers, we can’t afford to just ignore it. You know what they do? They get into the keel and eat their way along, drilling a tunnel. When they get to the end do they call it a day? Not they! They simply turn around and drill another tunnel beside the first. Looking at the wood doesn’t give you a clue. I remember a tale where a sailing ship was attacked by them. A gale sprang up off the Horn and there they were swimming around in a mass of sawdust; the ship just disintegrated.’ I was keen that B. should appreciate my concern and I believe she did, but we never, during the whole trip, found the cause of that crackling. All we knew was that when anchored in deep water it was more echoing and hollow, while in shallow water it became sharp and stacatto. A Mediterranean mystery.

But there were other disturbing events. I made the mistake that first night of anchoring *Lugworm* close inshore in about two feet of water with a bow anchor

out deep and a stern anchor up the beach. In a sea where there is no appreciable tide it seemed the logical thing to do for it's much easier to be able to wade ashore rather than have to pull the boat into the beach every time. At some unprintable hour of the night I was roused to full consciousness by the distant roar of breakers on rocks farther out in the bay. *Lugworm* gently lifted her bow, levelled off, then dipped. At the same time there was a disturbing tug on the headrope, then the sternrope. I sat up and hoped.

Next time the bow lifted it was too violent to be disregarded. When it came down she hit bottom gently, then lifted again. By the third time I was out and over the side, watching with horror a long line of black looming towards me. It reared: *Lugworm* despite my feeble efforts practically stood on end. As she levelled I felt the crest of the wave lick my armpits and then hurl me shorewards, playfully rolling me up the shingle. Above it all I heard a startled cry.

No, we didn't sleep much those first nights, but one learns quickly. Ships—vast floating citadels ablaze with light—doing their magnificent fifteen knots, make a wake which long after one has forgotten their passing, can turn a quiet beach into a maelstrom. I felt B. ought to understand this phenomenon in detail.

'The fact is,' I explained to her while wringing out my sodden jersey, 'that a large ship tends to make two distinctly separate wakes. This can be tricky because it is just when the first series of waves has died down that the second series catches you off balance. It's logical enough,' I continued, trying to locate a billycan that was clattering up and down the pebbles. 'If you watch a large ship moving through the water you'll see that the bow wave is augmented by the displacement of the sea as her fat belly forges along. But as this displaced water rushes back to fill in the space behind the ship it meets its counterpart on the other side doing the same thing. The resultant collision sets up another series of waves emanating from her stern.'

'Interesting,' came her voice from the darkness. 'But what are we going to do about it?'

'It's obvious: we will anchor out in deep water. She'll rise and fall out there but with nothing like the violence here in the shallows where the wave is about to break.'

‘If you knew that,’ said the voice, ‘why didn’t we anchor out there last night?’
It was a good question.

* * *

Nothing lifts the heart like sun and blue sea. Add a velvety warm wind flowing round your skin, a sky as blue as a kingfisher’s tail, the sibilant chuckle of water gurgling away from your transom and ...

‘Thou, beside me in the wilderness,’ I quoted aloud.

‘Some wilderness,’ said the straw hat from down on the lee deck. Poking out of the sea ahead was the green crowned isle of Skiathos, the brilliant green of the pines forming a bright contrast to the marble slash of rock at the waterline. A heaven-sent northerly, funnelling between the mainland and the island, was flecking the blue with lines of white laughter.

‘I’m going to sing,’ I said.

‘Don’t. Not yet. Last time you tried that we got in irons and I’m comfortably wedged down here. Have a nut instead.’ I had a nut.

‘Would you agree that we’re islomaniacs?’ I asked the hat. B. and I met on the Scillies, spent our honeymoon in Malta, and had been marooned three times since on other islands. Here, just for a change, we were coming up to an island.

The hat bobbed and a long golden leg flopped over the side to trail toes in the cooling water.

‘Not exactly. More escapomaniacs.’

‘Tell me more.’

‘Well, you and I suffer from the malaise that dogs twentieth century man. We’ve become depressingly aware of the prison we’ve spent our lives building around ourselves. But now we’ve taken steps to break out.’

That was fairly profound for a lyrically beautiful morning. I switched hands on the pivoting tiller and took another almond from the bag beside me. Placing it carefully beneath the hinge I brought the tiller down with a satisfying crack. *Lugworm* wiggled.

‘Prisons?’

‘The stresses and strains of everyday life that hedge us in. Crossing water does something ... it’s like a moat that keeps them at bay. Small islands particularly;

they're an entity in themselves, a compact whole. Maybe unconsciously that helps to heal the cracks ... in the smallness of an island we more easily become again a whole individual away from the fracturing herd.'

I had another nut.

'Never really thought about it,' the voice from the other side of the hat went on musingly, 'but I think I feel safer on an island. And then, of course, there's the romance. Islands. Treasure. Pirates. Palm trees and grottoes; kid's stuff, but it's there. Deep down we're all kids at heart.'

The cap, I thought, certainly fits here. Who but an overgrown child would buy an open boat, lovingly carve teak decorations on her transom, then sail off on a wild voyage of discovery like this?

'Do you think we're less mature than most?' I asked, trying to count the gnat bites round my navel.

'No; more.'

'Because we're more like kids?' I teased provocatively.

'Because we admit being more like kids.'

'Ah! Now there's a thought.'

To port we could now see the long golden strand of Koukounaries beach, mentioned in the brochures as being the finest in the North Aegean. There was a plush looking hotel at the western end and another, but far larger, skeleton of grey concrete going up at the eastern end. A new road scarred the lovely hillside like a raw wound. We sailed on until the first white and red-roofed houses of Skia-thos harbour came clear of Cape Kalamaki. It looked enchanting, the sugar-lump houses climbing atop one another up the steep hillsides round the bay. The wind, which had swung north-west as we first came under the lee of the island, now began to head us and we had to beat up inside Zogria Island, a lump of craggy rock to the east. On the water front gaily coloured awnings flapped in the wind and the cafes and tavernas were crammed with people. Yachts of all sizes jogged each other for room inside the basin. It was a scene of colour and animation and we watched fascinated as an inter-island steamer, towering immaculately white above the quay, detached herself and began to froth towards us, the white bone in her teeth lifting and widening as she gathered speed and swung smartly round to pass between us and the shore. *Lugworm* lifted gently to her wake, and the wind

grew fickle and died as we came close under the lee of the harbour. With B. securing the main, I rolled the mizzen round its mast and started the outboard.

We closed the basin, dodging the heads in the water near the rocks off the entrance. Inside, the headropes of the larger yachts swept out to mooring buoys, others lay to a bow anchor; all had their sterns to the jetty and fenders were squeaking complaint as the elegant bellies of the hulls jostled each other. There didn't seem to be any room at the quay, even for a chip of a thing like *Lugworm*. We circled round.

'Do I detect,' enquired B. who was studying the tavernas through the glasses, 'that you don't intend to make fast here in the basin?'

'Well, it isn't going to be very private is it. All right if we had a stateroom and doors we could shut like those elegant ladies over there, but ...'

I nosed the bow seaward. Over at the far side of a larger bay beyond the harbour was a small sandy beach under a low cliff. It had a lee from the north wind and though it would mean a walk of about a mile round the top of the bay into the town it appealed because of its privacy. In a few minutes we gently crunched on to the sand, B. springing ashore with the wine flagon in one hand and a sardine tin in the other. 'No point in going shopping until after five o'clock because they shut for the afternoon siesta at one-thirty. You bring the opener and the tomatoes.'

Under the cliff the cool wind made the blazing sun just tolerable. We drank and slept, and later that evening with the shopping done, had our first taste of moussaka, the popular Greek dish of baked aubergines with mincemeat and bechamel sauce, eaten beneath an awning of a taverna on the water front watching the harbour life. Here was Norman Wisdom's yacht *Conquest* alongside another called *Richmond*. An ocean-going ketch *Rainbird* bobbed near the ferry mole unable to find a berth on the quay itself. A couple of German yachts and a magnificent large ketch called *Zara II* made a gorgeous picture in the fading light. I took another sip of Plaka Spumante, savouring the surprisingly pleasant cool white wine with the champagne style bubbles. 'We're supposed to be staying off the tourist track,' I remarked, 'and here we are basking in the fleshpots! Indeed, Mrs Duxbury, over there,' and I pointed to the far side of the bay, 'in splendid and aloof isolation, lies our yacht awaiting our return. The steward will have turned

down our bedcovers, switched on the reading lamps and put the champagne in the ice bucket; what's it feel like to be a millionaire?'

'Tell you something,' came the voice alongside. 'I wouldn't enjoy it one half as much if it were like that! I'm happy with *Lugworm*; you can't beach a millionaire's yacht on a pocket handkerchief of sand at the back of a deserted little spit and go native with your hair down in the sun, can you? No, I'm happy with *Lugworm*, thanks.'

I had a nice warm feeling, and it wasn't only the wine, as we strolled idly back round the head of the bay, past the fishing caiques pulled up on the foreshore and the derelict windmill that had lost its arms, up through the olives softening the rocky hillside and down the twisty path through the myrtle bushes where the cicadas still chirruped in the warm night. There again, a dark shadow against the moonlit water, lay our home. We laced a line taut between the two masts and threw the tent over it to keep the dew off the bedding, and turned in.

It was four o'clock in the morning when a small voice said, 'I think we ought to wake up!' The tent, carelessly lashed down from the corners, had come loose and was flapping madly above us. There was a patter of rain.

'Rain! It can't rain in the Aegean in late June.'

'No, it can't. But it is.'

It was not only raining, but one look at the ragged torn edges of cloud scudding across the tops of the hills to the north was enough. The meltemi had arrived. It was a bit ahead of the daily schedule but one thing was obvious: this small bay had not sufficient lee from a really good blow, and we were getting wet.

'No time to stow all the bedding now. Resecure that tent lashing and I'll motor across to the lee of that high cliff just south of the town. We'll sort ourselves out there, in the calm.' It was a mistake: we ought to have stowed the bedding there and then removed the tent, but all the sleeping gear was strewn about the boat, not to mention the cooking utensils ready for breakfast, and I wanted to get into that lee as quickly as possible.

By now there was a faint lifting of the darkness, and I could see the cliff under the town, about half a mile across the mouth of the bay at most. The sea was already running steep and wetting with white horses galore for we had a

fetch of about three-quarters of a mile to weather. The rain was setting in hard, driving almost horizontally with the force four to five wind. I could see that it was only a matter of time before the wildly flapping tent broke adrift altogether, and anyway I was far from happy with the windage it was offering. Four horsepower isn't enough to combat that pressure on the beam; we were making more leeway than headway. 'Get the bedding stowed, quickly as possible, and take that tent off her; we've got to get the jib and mizzen set.' Too late. The weather lashings parted together and that half of the tent swept across the boat carrying everything loose with it: billycans, water containers, stove and all the clutter on the side deck from the night before ended in the lee bilges. B.'s struggling outline bulged white and shiny through the p.v.c. She was doing a marvellous job in what might have been called difficult conditions. I cast off the ridge line and brought the boat more into the wind to reduce the spray which was sheeting over the weather bow. We were about halfway across the bay. With jib and mizzen set we frothed along, wet, but at least under control which was more than I had felt motoring with the tent frolicking. As we approached the cliff the wind died, but I still had the outboard running so we nosed up close to a small shingly beach and WHAM! A fistful of hard air slammed us almost on our beam ends—from the south!

'Do be careful, darling,' came B.'s justifiable complaint. 'I've just got everything propped for the starboard tack; I can't cope with both tacks at once!' It was ferocious, that back-eddy of wind under the cliff. We dropped all sail and watched the hammerblows of wind hitting the water from all directions. Certainly up there on top of the hills the force must have now reached a good six, and it seemed to be even more violent down here at sea level. It was against all my experience of wind behaviour, and I didn't like it. There was something about islands in the Aegean that played havoc with the rules of the game.

We sorted the mess out, and got the boat shipshape on the beach, but it had taught me a lesson.

'From now on,' I pontificated, 'we'll be in all respects ready for sea at a moment's notice when we turn in at night, no matter what the weather may be like.'

'Can one be ready for sea with the tent up?' B. asked candidly. She had a point there. We compromised and agreed that at least all the gear should be properly

stowed away so that the tent could be dropped immediately if need be. On occasions need did be.

That sudden rising of the wind, with virtually no warning, made me think. We had often discussed our action on being caught on a lee shore with a rising wind and sea, and always, as a last resort, I had casually assumed that when the worst came to the worst, we could haul *Lugworm* up a beach clear of the breakers.

Though the rain had now stopped and there was intermittent sun, the wind was still roaring over the island so, since coastal cruising was obviously out of the question this day, I thought it a good move to exercise getting *Lugworm* up the beach unaided. 'The thing is, to make a proper evolution of it,' I instructed B. 'Take it in slow time and get the hang of it at first, then, when we know what we're about, it can be speeded up.'

'You're wonderful darling,' she said. 'Give me my orders.' I never feel quite at ease when B. adopts this attitude, but in truth I had very often run through the whole procedure in my own mind, and thought I had it weighed up.

'Most important, of course, select an area of beach where you're not going to be stove in on a rock before you get ashore: that's common sense. Over there will do fine,' and I pointed to a wide sweep of fine shingle beyond. Oddly enough, since we had landed I had noted that the beach over there, despite the low land to weather, had apparently less wind on the water than where we shuddered under the cliff. We motored across and while approaching, B. made the comment that there appeared to be a long ground swell surging up and down the shore.

'All to our advantage,' I assured her. A lift up the beach from the sea will help no end. Now listen carefully: First, I'll remove the rudder and steer with the outboard. About ten yards off the beach I shall swing the boat bows to seaward and give her a pull full throttle astern before cutting the motor and tilting it clear of the water. As she beaches stern-first we must both leap out and use the top of the surge up the beach to get her as high as possible, holding her there and keeping the bow to seaward while the surge slides back down the beach. The important thing is to prevent the boat broaching across the swell in line with the beach, otherwise we'll have trouble. Ready?'

I swung the boat in a tight circle at the same time engaging reverse gear at full throttle, then lifted the engine. She swept gracefully stern first on to the shingle

at the very peak of a surge. By the time we had leapt out she was almost high and dry as the water receded down the beach. At this point I must explain that I have an aversion to drilling any holes in a boat's hull, even to the point of not screwing fittings into the skin, and for this reason, when rigging our tent, rather than screw eyes into the planking, we rigged a stout girdle of terylene rope right round the hull and it was to this that the tent lashings were secured. Now two people—one man and a woman—could not expect to haul over nine hundred pounds dead-weight of boat quickly up a sloping beach, so prior to leaving the cliff I had rigged this girdle round *Lugworm* since it was to this I proposed securing a block and tackle for doing the heavy work.

'Very well managed,' I commented, giving myself a backhanded compliment. 'So far so good. Now all you have to do is stand at the bow and see she doesn't swing sideways while I rig the tackle and haul her clear of the water.' I carried the anchor and its ninety feet of one-and-a-half inch warp up the beach, hooking it round a tree before rigging the tackle. B. valiantly held the bow, her enthusiasm wilting with each successive surge.

While making these preparations a group of young men had idled along the beach towards us. They now stood close at hand engrossed in our activities. As I have mentioned before, one of the endearing characteristics of the Greeks is their willingness to help. At times it is almost compulsive, and they will carry it to any length in normal circumstances but, faced with a situation where an attractive blonde in a bikini is struggling valiantly to obey the commands of an idiot who's trying to do the impossible, they one and all fell to, gathering round *Lugworm* with gusto, dead set on carrying her bodily up the beach.

'Ohi ... epharisto poli!' I cried, squandering my total Greek vocabulary in what I hoped was, 'No ... thank you very much!' They looked astonished. 'Solo,' I tried to explain. 'Important ... she and I, SOLO.' Ah! They had the message. Delightedly they moved from *Lugworm* and ranged themselves behind me on the tackle. If this nut of a foreigner wanted to drag the boat up rather than carry it, who were they to argue?

'Ohi, ohi.' I started all over again. 'Ego, I ...' pointing to myself and B. who was, by this time both moist and embarrassed. I grasped the rope, dug in my heels and strained. *Lugworm* lifted on the rise of a surge up the beach and shot about

three feet shorewards under the strain of the tackle. B., who had been putting all her weight on the bow, fell flat on her face in the shallows. Six bodies moved as one to render help and the boat slid gently back down the beach as the surge withdrew.

A crowd attracts a crowd. By this time our comic opera had been joined by a drift of other curious holidaymakers. A donkey hovered in the background. A large lady in peasant dress sat side-saddle balancing a box of small fish.

‘Don’t you think we’d better let them help?’ queried B. ‘I mean, it might be the easiest course in the long run.’

‘There’s no point B. The whole object of the exercise is to see whether we can do this by ourselves; you’re forgetting that we don’t want the boat up the beach anyway.’

No: by now I was truly on my mettle. We were going to get that gravelly boat up that shingly beach unaided or bust. We’d show them. I disentangled the tackle from among the feet of the bystanders, told B. to again take station at the bow and started once more to take the weight. Instantly a new group hastened forward to help. The original onlookers, puzzled but obedient, rushed to stop them. Violent arguments broke out. I stopped pulling, trying patiently again to explain the whole concept. More people joined the crowd. Through their sheer weight of numbers I was beginning to feel a little embarrassed myself. It was all rather like a solo circus act and there was no difficulty in imagining the conversations round about.

‘What’s going on?’

‘I don’t know, but it’s worth watching. This idiot’s going to rupture himself trying to get the boat up the beach but he won’t let anyone help. Stick around: it’s hilarious.’

Once more I grasped the rope. The crowd pressed forward. Somebody clapped expectantly. The tackle snapped taut and, just at that critical moment the donkey decided to move across it. Now donkeys are sure footed animals, we all know, but three taut bars of steel-like terylene snapping up under its fetlocks was too much: down it went as though poleaxed, its rider somersaulting volubly into the crowd. The hullabaloo cannot be described. Undamaged but resonant the large lady sat, quivering in the wet sand surrounded by hundreds of whitebait from the upturned box. The donkey got up and trod on someone. Out of the melee a larger, louder man clove a path towards me positively roaring with invective.

It may have been her husband or brother, I don't know, but he seemed to be in no doubt as to who was responsible. *Lugworm* swung sideways down the beach and listed dangerously seaward as a swell receded.

'I think he's going to hit you,' came B.'s warning shout from somewhere among the crowd and I saw her run and grab an oar from the boat. Things were getting out of hand. I lunged after her, snapping the tackle free from the girdle and saw, to my astonishment that the large man was haranguing the woman. She gave as good as she got, both hands bristling with sandy fish: for a moment the focus of attention seemed to have shifted as the crowd joined in the argument with relish.

'Come on,' I roared to B. and leapt to *Lugworm*, shoving her off as the surge lifted her weight. Immediately a united roar arose from the crowd: somebody at the back was brandishing something in the air. It was my anchor and warp.

We abandoned the idea for the moment, and retired to another quiet beach just outside the harbour at the north of the wider bay. For the rest of that day the rain held off but the wind continued with undiminished force so we unstepped the masts and rigged the tent properly as we should have done in the first place. That evening, after a meal on board, we settled into our bags early, with the battery reading lamp augmented by a couple of candles we became lost in the world of ancient Greece which comes wonderfully to life through the pages of Joseph Alsop's *From the Silent Earth*. The wind continued to sigh through the olive grove beyond the foreshore road, and we lay listening to this evocative sound planning the next day's leg up the string of islands, and were well on the way to sleep when, with an audible 'click' the air became resonant with the background crackle of a powerful amplifying system. To our horror, bludgeoning over the natural whispers of water and shore, came a blast of American 'Pop'. 'YEAH, YEAH ... KISS ME HONEY, KISS ME ... YEAH, YEAH, YEAH.' The moronic beat, the endlessly repeated hysteria of a decadent section of the teenage world, so discordantly out of tune with the atmosphere engendered by these islands, blazed across the bay.

I crawled from my sleeping bag and peered through the flap of the tent. A discotheque, its white stucco walls illuminated by garish coloured bulbs, pulsed among the olives not a hundred yards away. There was no movement nor gaiety; no voices nor dancing, only the overpowering sonic expression of this American

sub-culture blasting its alien path across the fractured night. The record broke off halfway through a note to be immediately followed by an equally strident choral piece in different key and different tempo but of the same underlying hysteria. I listened for a minute or two, trying desperately to click into some sort of sympathy with the mood of the turmoil, but it was hopeless.

'I don't pretend to fully appreciate the popular Greek records I have heard,' I said to B, as I crawled back into the sleeping bag, 'but give it me anytime rather than this affront to the senses!'

"We agreed," she replied, 'to keep off the tourist track. We can't grumble if we indulge the culinary delights of the flesh-pots when we have to take a bit of the other side of the culture too. It's a part of what we're escaping from: we shall appreciate tomorrow all the more for it.' But the mind-numbing decibels encroached two sonic hours into the morrow before, with a terminating 'click' we were plunged into peace again. Maybe we are just growing old.

* * *

If you look up the narrow channel between Alonissos and Peristera, you can see at the farthest end of Alonissos a golden buttress of cliff. On the opposite side of the channel the low-lying tip of Peristera is backed by the thousand foot peaks of Pelago Island beyond. It is an exciting prospect, that narrowing blue water between the two green islands, and beyond, the fainter backcloth of misty heights which is Pelago.

A few days after our enforced stay in Skiathos we were beating across the Khe-lidromi Channel, having skirted south of Skopelos Isle, the expected and predictable northerly giving us a vigorous sail in the open water, and while I was loath to sail past the entrancing bays and inlets of Alonissos, that distant outline of Pelago seemed to cast a spell: I wanted to get there. From the chart I knew there to be a deep protected lagoon on its northern side—safety against any inclement weather that might come—and so far as we had been able to ascertain the island was uninhabited. Fresh from our experience in Skiathos we were both keen to return to the open, wild and carefree life of the lesser known islands.

'If we don't loiter we can be at Pelago before night,' I said to B. 'Are you game?'

‘O.K. by me, but I want to explore a lot of Alonissos on the way back including that hill on the point back there with the chora on top.’

I too had noted that chora, and it was certainly impressive. Like a fairy-tale illustration the white village perched on the crown of a rounded hill whose lower levels were thickly covered with maquis. Immediately below the walls of the village a grove of olives flourished and between this and the maquis was an area of waste land, the baked grey rock showing through patches of dry grass.

‘Then that’s a promise on the way back. Pelago it is.’

With the fickle wind, which swung dead ahead down the narrows and fell light before we were abeam of Gregali Point, it was five in the evening when we were off the southern tip of Pelago. It was densely covered with maquis, the stunted trees and thick leaved shrubs painting the whole island dark green. There was what appeared to be a low-roofed building halfway up the southern side but we could make out no track to it, nor was there any sign of life. By now the wind had died completely, so we closed the shore under power and skirted up the eastern side. At first the hills fell in a fairly steep incline straight beneath the water, but as we worked north the shore became an almost continuous line of medium height cliffs, contorted strata of rocks forming vivid patterns and grotesque figures. The sun was low now to the west, and beneath us, in the shadow of the overhanging rock faces the water was a deep blue-black, suggesting unfathomable depths full of mystery. The intrusive throb of the engine echoed and re-echoed off the cliffs. Suddenly it was cold.

I suppose it was the combination of fading light, bailing warmth, and the eerie hollow echo of our engine coming back from the dark cliffs that gradually turned the atmosphere of that island into a brooding alien place. Before we were halfway up its eastern shore we were wishing that we had stayed in the hospitable sunny bays of Alonissos, where fishing boats plied and life flourished. Ahead, the incredibly barren outline of Jura Island rose stark from the black water, a vast *primaeval* crag of mountain top. We felt we had arrived at the end of the earth, much as the early explorers must have done with their ever-present dread of the unknown.

It was close on six before we came abeam of the northeastern promontory, a jagged outcrop of rock that fell to the sea leaving a trace of treacherous black

shapes beneath the water. The aspect to the west was appalling in the failing light. Deeply indented bays were fringed by great fingers of sharp rock stabbing above the surface, indicating very real hazards beneath. Pitted and hollowed by the restless swell which worked unimpeded here from the open sea, born of the north wind, it was a grim prospect to any sailor, and the silence was oppressive. Heaven help the ship that gets embayed here, I thought. We nosed across a deep bay to a second promontory no less awesome than the first, then skirted a second bay, watching all the while for the entrance to the lagoon. A long narrow outcrop of rock stood black against the shoreline to the west, and I knew from the chart that the entrance lay due south of this small island but such was the light effect and the merging of the foreground rocks into the far shore that we were actually on the narrow cutting before its presence was known.

By now the sun was well below the land, and as we turned southward into the lagoon it seemed that we were moving into a brooding bowl of gloom. The entrance, narrow, deep, and some half a mile long widened slowly into a dark lake which to our senses appeared to be holding its breath in silent scrutiny of our intrusion. We turned east, hugging the northern shore, while peering down into the water alert for any pinnacles which might tear out our bottom.

No sound, or movement, save our own unavoidable clamour, broke the silence of this mountain-ringed lagoon. Through the glasses I scanned the grey waterline of razor-sharp rocks that fringed the lake, looking for some inlet with perhaps sand or shingle where we could beach the boat and pitch camp for the night. None appeared, and we continued to creep along the rocky shoreline until ahead in the gloom I could make out a low stone wall built on the rocks close to the water. It appeared to be a pound of some sort—the type of enclosure used to herd animals. Such was our sense of loneliness in this desolate place that even the derelict outline of this work of man's hands gave some slight comfort. We nosed carefully into shallowing water close beneath the wall and threw an anchor ashore. I vividly remember the echo of the metal hitting the rocks, reverberating off the thousand hard faces of stone surrounding us, ghosting across the water into the dark abyss of the hills behind. Not a living thing stirred, where one might have expected a bird to rise with a startled flurry of wings; only the oppressive

silence. Unwittingly we hushed our voices to a whisper feeling our way up the knife-ridged rocks until we stood inside the enclosure. It was a wholly dismal place. On the inside of the lower wall a trough had been constructed to catch rainwater which ran down the smooth sloping face of the rock above. The trough was green and stagnant with mould and animal droppings, for it was evidently a goat pen. The stale but overpowering stink of these animals pervaded the place, augmenting the alien atmosphere. Somewhere in the back of my mind, relic no doubt of childhood teaching, I still associate the devil with the cloven hoof and goat's form. In this dark outpost of brooding loneliness, I could easily have fallen prey had I allowed myself to wild imaginings of witchcraft and other dark happenings beyond the ken of warm human experience.

'I couldn't stand this smell all night,' I whispered to B. to sound her reactions.

'No: I'd rather anchor off than try to make camp anywhere in here,' she assented. 'Oddly enough I would feel safer on the water, dismal though it is, than on shore; there's something uncanny about this place.' Looking down into the shallow water we could see dimly on the bed the form of countless grotesque sea slugs, their obese corrugated skins black against the grey silt.

I am very susceptible to atmosphere. The fashion in which an environ affects me undoubtedly depends on my mood at the moment, but atmosphere is self-generating, and once the overall impression has been established the mind tends to feed only on data which will corroborate rather than contradict such an impression. Under guise of not wishing to risk damaging the propeller on unseen rocks, I told B. that I proposed rowing farther round the perimeter of the lagoon. If truth be told I was loath to violate the silence with the noise of the engine feeling that such advertisement would in some indefinable way focus the brooding attention of the place on we two unwanted visitors.

It was while quietly ghosting along the southern shore of the lake, sliding silently through black water, with the sky above already showing a full panoply of stars that we first noted the sound. I stopped rowing, and together we listened. Faint, almost imperceptible, distant, yet at the same time all about us, came a 'clop! ... clop! ... clop!' It could have been the distant beat of an unshod hoof on stone, but there was too long an interval between the sounds, and it was too regular. Whoever imagined a horse that hopped very slowly on one leg? We held our

breath and waited. Continuous, insistent, the regular, soft yet strangely violent sound came across the water—from where?

‘It must be some sort of animal.’

‘Maybe. Sounds exactly like the drip of moisture off a cave roof plopping into water far below. I’ve heard it before now in deep underground caverns but never out in the open like this. I don’t like this island a bit,’ came B.’s hushed comment. ‘What do you think it is?’

‘I don’t have the first idea, but I’m certain we can’t turn in tonight without finding out.’

Of course there would be some quite ordinary explanation, I argued to myself as I pulled the boat silently along, following the contours of the black shore as close as I dared. After a while I rested on the oars. Did the sound seem nearer? Dull, continuous, regular with a frightening slowness the hollow ‘clop, clop’ filled the night. I found myself counting ‘clop’ one, two, three, ‘clop’ one, two, three. Regular as clockwork. And then it stopped.

If the sound itself was disturbing, its sudden cessation leaving utter silence was far more so. We had already, I suppose, in our minds, explained it by a vague idea of water dripping from a height. But dripping water doesn’t stop suddenly like that. This, undoubtedly, meant that the noise came from a living thing. Then it started again.

I continued quietly easing the boat along—in fact I was skirting the perimeter of a rounded hill which formed a projection from the southern shore of the lake—and as we nosed round a small promontory on its western side we could make out a deeper gully leading into the blackness. Beyond, faintly visible in the light of the stars, was a deep valley. For the first time the sound began to emanate from one direction. Whatever it was, it was at the head of this bay, maybe somewhere up the valley itself.

‘Take a sounding with the lead,’ I whispered to B., for I was pulling away from the promontory into the centre of the bay now. I heard the splash as the weight went down. ‘Thirty feet,’ came the reply after a moment. ‘Keep sounding, and let me know as it shallows up.’ I pulled *Lugworm* out into the darkness, the shore still undetectable ahead. The oars were soft in the rowlocks, silent in the water—and then I caught a crab. Maybe I was concentrating on the sound too much, or just

being very careless, but the oar came out of the port rowlock and thumped hollowly on the gunwale. It was like a single drum beat echoing across the lake. The sound stopped instantly.

‘This is just ridiculous,’ I said, and cupping my hands I bellowed into the darkness, ‘Ahoy ... anybody there!’ I felt highly theatrical and was half ashamed of the clamour I’d made, echoing and re-echoing back from the hills. On our starboard side a light flickered and there came an answering hail.

‘So much for our ghosts,’ I said to B. trying to keep the relief out of my voice, and pulling strongly for the light. As we closed the glow we could make out a man standing on shore, peering into the darkness towards us. Alongside him was a small fishing caique. On board, a woman and a small child peeped from behind a shelter rigged at the stern. As we watched the man bent and picked up a mass of what looked like slimy weed. He raised it above his head and brought it down with a hollow thwack on to a flat rock. It was an octopus. Again he raised it, and repeated the violent action. He stopped and straightened up as we drifted into the fringe of light. ‘Kali spera,’ he called to us—a greeting we had come to recognise as meaning ‘Good evening’.

We pulled alongside the caique, grounding *Lugworm* on the shingly beach and, at the invitation of the fisherman, jumped aboard his boat, but I was more interested in the octopus which he had once more started to flay on the rock. It must have been going on for over fifteen minutes now; surely, I reasoned, the thing was dead before this.

We could not communicate of course, but from sign language we gathered that this treatment of what, after all, is a fairly harmless sea creature, was somehow connected with making it more edible. We learned later that the tough muscles of the tentacles need tenderising, rather in the same way that one would beat a thick steak to break up the fibres.

But that night, as I looked down at the pathetically small and defenceless creature ripped from the only environ where it might defend itself, two eyes—dreadfully human in size and shape—stared up at me beseechingly. As a brown hand once more lifted the trailing form into the air, an odd thought entered my head: ‘I know,’ a voice seemed to be saying, ‘that to you I’m a repellent evil thing that preys on other life down there. But I’m made that way: I can’t help it,

can I?' I looked at the man bending again to close his fingers round the trembling muscles. I looked at the woman up there in the light, and the soft face of the child beside her. We too had to eat, and we too were made that way: we couldn't help it either, could we?

But that of course is the four billion dollar question.

We fled from that lagoon as the first green light of dawn filtered over the mountain tops, but the fishing boat was already gone. As we motored in the early calm out of the narrow neck it was as though we were spewing from some dolorous cavern out into the light where warmth and clean wind would once more reign. I am sorry, Pelago, to paint you in such sombre colours for I have no doubt that you are as beautiful as many other islands in the Aegean, more beautiful perhaps than some, but that was the mood of our meeting. Some day we may return, in the warm light of high noon, and be surprised.

The sun rose, a blood-red disk behind the silhouettes of Papu, Kubi and Prasso islands, with Jura a dark shape beyond—I have the photograph taken at five in the morning beside me as I write—and our spirits rose with it as the warm rays began to dry out the boat and gear. With it came the expected north-west wind, and by the time we cleared the southern end of Pelago white caps were forming. Under full sail we had a vigorous beat across Pelago Channel, just able to fetch Gregali Point, the wind freshening as the sun got higher.

Maybe there was something symbolic, something in the way of a ritual need, but once in the lee of the warm ochre cliffs of Alonissos we grounded *Lugworm* on a sparkling white pebble beach and stripped everything from the boat, airing the bedding and the clothes from the lockers, sponging out the bilges and stretching the spare halyards and warps from under the bottom boards to dry in the hot sun. Then we stripped, swam, and finally washed ourselves and our hair in fresh water before restowing the gear. By ten o'clock we were running before a force four following wind which swirled through the narrows. It was noon, and blistering hot, when we rounded up into Murtia Bay at the southern tip of the island, grounding on a white shingly beach for a snack of wine, olives, tomatoes and cheese before stretching out for a nap, our feet caressed by the cool wavelets.

On the hilltop above us was that white village we had noted on the way to Pelago, and after the effects of the wine had worn off we began to get restless as usual. B. was keen to see this chora, and I was game: why not? If the pirates could do it, we could.

To be honest, we knew from Denham's book *The Aegean, a Sea Guide to its Coasts and Islands*—which book, incidentally, was our Bible throughout this part of the cruise—that there was a donkey path from the next bay leading up to the chora. But behind our tiny beach there was a dried-up watercourse, and innocently we assumed that sooner or later the two would converge, or at least we would be able to strike across and join the path halfway up. It didn't work out like that. In fact that was the start of an experience we hope never to repeat on Earth, and most certainly we shall not do so in Heaven.

Of course, oven-hot air is not the best medium in which to attack a sixty degree incline, nor are bare feet and bikinis the best rig for tackling prickly spurge and holly, thistles and brambles. Only maniacs would set off that way, so off we went. The watercourse soon deteriorated into a deep boulder-strewn gully and finally ended, for us, at a vertical outcrop of bare rock. We struck sideways, picking our painful way between incredibly spiny broom, glad to see a patch of open baking space only to find that the dried thistles and a really lethal seed with needle-sharp spines made it untenable. This day I learned why all the wild shrubs left on Greek hillsides are either poisonous or armed with rapiers: it's defence against the goats. If the tough mouth of a mountain goat cannot tackle a green growth, you may be sure it's wise for humans to give that growth a wide berth. On this hillside it was difficult—in bare feet rather like walking on red-hot pin cushions. The trouble was that the rock, when there was enough of it to leap from chunk to chunk was too hot to stand on. You may ask why I was not wearing any shoes. The answer is not complicated: I don't like wearing shoes.

On the lee side of the hill there was not a breath of air, and the high pitched throb of the cicadas seemed to nail the blistering heat to the ground. We began to feel peculiar. Things appeared to quiver and slide about.

'Put your shorts over the nape of your neck, as I have done,' I counselled B. who was following glassy-eyed behind. I looked at her carefully. She hadn't heard me. 'B.,' I called, 'are you all right?' No answer: she was walking like an automaton, slowly, round in a small circle; it was appalling. Great Phoebus, I thought,

she's got sunstroke! I dragged her beneath a huge bush of broom which gave little enough shade but it was better than nothing, and fanned her face with my shorts. We were both running with sweat. After a while her eyes began to focus and she made the understatement of the year: 'I think I'm just too hot!' There is no doubt in my mind that we were both suffering from heat exhaustion and very near to collapse, but the olive grove was there above us, and beyond that the chora.

We staggered on, trying to imagine that icicles hung from every bush, and the grove above was a green waterfall of cool lime juice. It helped. But it needed concentration. Finally we dragged ourselves on to the donkey track just where it led through the village walls—whitewashed walls that reflected the excruciating heat even more than the baked earth.

'I can't stand any more of this,' B. said, 'I'm going to faint.'

'Well, don't faint here darling, wait 'till we get to a taverna,' I encouraged her, and after more interminable steps upward there, blissful sight, was a flat square with a huge mulberry tree spreading coolth, and a wooden bench, and a sign: 'TABEPNA'. Which, in Greek, means TAVERNA, and Heaven!

'B.,' I said. 'I'm glad I'm not a pirate!'

After the fourth lemonade with ice-cream in it—the best substitute available for waterfalls of lime juice—my feet began to come to agonised life. I spent half an hour trying to remove the thorns while the landlord told us how many English soldiers he had hidden in the room above when the Germans were on the island, and great ripe mulberries kept falling from the tree with a squelch and gradually the world began to take proper proportion and things stopped quivering.

In between lemonades and thorns I had a haircut—the landlord was also a barber and the postmaster—and it lasted me four months. He did a good job.

Return to the shore was made by the cobbled mule track which Denham wisely recommends, but of course it took us to another bay. The delight of that luxurious swim back round the headland to where *Lugworm* danced in the clear water will remain with me for ever. Without more ado we hoisted all sail and with a light northerly coming through the straits, reached out towards Skopelos.

Looking back in the mellowing afternoon light at the small white village crowning the hilltop there, it was as though we were being magically dissolved from the reality of everyday life into a world of fantasy. This picture our eyes pho-

tographed could not possibly be reality; it was a world of pure imagination such as we had not experienced since living the enchanted pages of fairy tale books more years ago than we cared to remember.

One's hand, unthinking, rested on the tiller. A soft recurring pressure on the fingers was matched to the easy, rhythmic roll of the boat, and the sighing water beneath her hull chuckled into a small swirling wake astern. The occasional relief of shadow from the main denied the brazen heat and through it all the voice of the soft wind coaxed the following crests into playful leaps and pressed the russet faded canvas above with that effortless strength which is the mystery of sail. One breathed, thought and felt in complete harmony with the magical world around. Greece, I realised then, was for me a half conscious hope that new dimensions of experience might be tapped. I little thought that those forgotten worlds of colour and scent and feeling that were a part of my earliest being would here be unlocked again to marry fantasy with reality.

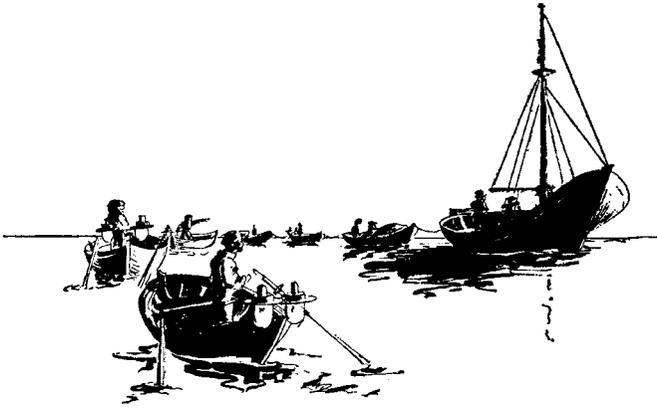
The shoreline of Skopelos drifted by to the north. Swords of translucent pines dropped, a green transparency, in a cicada throbbing volume of quivering heat down to the dividing line of white rocks which barred the deep mauve of the Aegean from further access. Astern, and misty now with a blue wash that softened the harsh edge of contours, Alonissos was fluid in the mirage. The blinding white chora up there had withdrawn from our awareness, folding its wings around it to pass back into the realms of fantasy. The green-brown maquis on the hillsides merged into distance, tinted by the first orange glow of late afternoon.

Something happens to the summer sky in Greece after four o'clock. The brazen blue of noon dissolves in an ever diminishing circle vertically above, relinquishing its kingdom to a softer, kinder, misty blue that gently draws a chameleon curtain of mauve, orange, then green up from the hazy horizon. Suddenly evening is with you.

So we ghosted on to Agnonda, a tiny fishing village, on the south shore of Skopelos, where we found a delightful taverna nestling under a riot of yellow mimosa and, despite painful feet and aching leg muscles, we slept better that night than we had done so far on the trip.

Just at the dying of the day as one sits on the terrace before some beach taverna with the carafe of wine perhaps only half empty, there may be seen out on the water a sight which is so characteristic of Greece that it is worth describing in detail.

A fishing caique has drawn out of the nearby harbour, and floats now, a black silhouette on the glassy water as the sun disappears below the horizon. Astern of her is a smaller boat with three or four men aboard and piled high with a



large fishing net. Out in the bay, waiting to be taken in tow, are four or five small rowing boats each with one man aboard, and slung in a special bracket over the stern of each are two—sometimes more—huge, ungainly paraffin pressure lamps, their glass bowls hanging down with a reflector above to direct all the light down into the water. When the caique with the net boat in tow moves from the harbour you will see these rowing boats gather together and pass a line to one another until they are strung like beads on a necklace. As the large power craft draws nearer, the man in the leading boat will throw his line to the net boat and then, just like a mother duck and her brood, the caique with the whole fleet behind her will chug off to sea.

Grigria assembling for a night's fishing. Later, when the night is quite dark—and this type of fishing only takes place at around new moon or last of

the old—you will see, out in the blackness, the string of four or five brilliant lights. They will stay quite still, winking now and then as the long swell dips a lamp below the horizon perhaps, but if you were out there with them you would watch a fascinating scene of tense activity.

Arrived at the selected fishing ground, the small rowing boats, known locally as 'Grigria' cast off and separate, then drift. The lamps are lit and the single crew begins a long, long—often all night—vigil. Beneath the boat a pool of light illuminates a small area in the black depths, and the fisherman sits, chewing at his hunk of bread, looking down there into the void. After a while, if you were watching with him, you might see a quick silver flash deep below the boat, and he will lean over the gunwale and shield his eyes against the reflection of the lamps. Shortly, if it is a successful night, he will see more and more of these quick silver flashes, and something about the way they come and go tells this fisherman that deeper down, where they cannot be seen, is a shoal of small 'marides', what we know as whitebait. The fact is, that in common with the proverbial cat, fish are curious, and that curiosity proves disastrous. They cannot help investigating that light on the water above them, and collect in their hordes, fascinated by the glare. Once he is certain that the shoal is there, the watcher will hail the caique and net boat which are lying some distance off, and they will quietly approach. While they have been waiting, half of the net has been transferred from the net boat into the caique which is equipped with winches and reels, and when they are close to the watcher the net boat will cast off her tow. Then, from both caique and net boat, the net is fed over the side. The bottom of the net is weighted, the top buoyed with small cork floats, so that when it settles it hangs like a deep curtain. Caique and net boat gradually encircle the watcher paying out the net, and when his boat is completely surrounded, and the caique and net boat are alongside one another again, he will row across the top of the net out of the way.

Rings are attached at intervals along the bottom of the net, and a footrope is already rove through these, being brought up into both caique and net boat. As soon as the encircling by the net is complete this footrope is hauled taut which draws the base of the net together thus forming a huge bag—with the shoal of whitebait inside it. Then comes the mammoth task of drawing the net into both caique and net boat—about half into each.

It is wonderfully satisfying to watch the net coming aboard, bright now in the deck lights of the caique, and shimmering with the living silver harvest. Often the fleet remain out all night with a disappointing tale to tell when they return at dawn to harbour, but occasionally as much as several thousand kilos of marides are brought back in one night—and that takes some hauling aboard. The village will know before they land, for in that case there will be a telltale flock of gulls circling in their wake.

* * *

We left Agnonda at dawn, with heavy thunder clouds gathering to the north and a brisk north-easterly which showed every sign of freshening, but we had the island to weather and made good way to a magnificently protected bay at Panormos on the west coast where we anchored for a swim and breakfast, keeping a cautious eye on the wind in view of the open water ahead between Skopelos and Skiathos. It has a tendency to funnel with greatly increased force through these breaks in the island chain. Indeed, the Sporadhes are known locally as the ‘Gates of the Wind’. By nine o’clock it showed no sign of any hazardous increase in strength so under full sail we worked our way well north of Dasa Islet before freeing off for Skiathos. It is a habit of mine always to work well to weather of a destination in case of a wind shift which might result in a heading. In the event we spanked along on a beam reach across the six miles of open water, and were clear of the rocks north of Zogria Isle by ten thirty.

The thunder clouds were breaking up, and now the wind—as we fully expected—fanned out round the south of Skiathos to give us a run until noon, when it freshened considerably and began to head us, sweeping round the western end of the island. We closed the beach at Koukounaries and had lunch aboard beneath the hideous skeleton of that new hotel, sun bathing in the boat away from the hordes on shore. By early afternoon the wind had eased a little so we reached across Skiathos Channel to the mainland where we picked up a splendid east-north-east airstream straight into the Trikeri Channel. By four o’clock it had swung due east so we boomed out the large jib and the main with the two oars and rolled along, hour after hour watching the green hills and the white shoreline slide by.

‘Do you realise,’ I asked B. after one long silence, ‘that we’re floating through a veritable Irish Stew of History! A stockpot of legend, romance and blood curdling drama? It was on that very headland,’ and I pointed to where Cape Artemision was flushed red-gold to the south, ‘that Themistocles undoubtedly sat to view the Persian invasion fleet in 482BC. He had a hundred triremes, each with a captain, twenty marines and four archers at the ready, pulling up and down in this very water, waiting for the signal fires to give warning of the Persian arrival off Skiathos. A hundred more ships were stationed off Piraeus and along the Attic coast to guard the mainland: all part of a strategic plan to harass the Persian fleet prior to the battle of Salamis.’

‘You’ve been reading Denham.’

‘Yes, I have, and it’s exciting. I’ll bet the sea bed right beneath us now is littered with Persian skeletons and bronze helmets and halberds and triremes. Just think of it: across the vast canvas of Greek mythology and history ships carrying immortals have sailed into these straits and looked at these same shores, and now, US!’

There was another long silence.

‘Which bit did he sit on?’

‘Who? On what?’ I was far away in a bygone age of Homeric chivalry.

‘Themocrates and the Persians.’

‘Themistocles!’ I surveyed the headland again. ‘I don’t know, but I suppose it must have been at the highest peak if he was keen to see the signal fires at Skiathos.’

‘He must have been very fit!’

It’s hard to be romantic with B. in the boat. The baking heat of early evening eased as the sky once more turned from deep blue through those lighter misty shades of pink to a full orange-red as Helios once more sank beneath the horizon. Then the greens set in, and still we ghosted silently along before a velvet warm wind, eating the miles effortlessly, listening only to the soft creak of the gaff on the mainmast and the whisper of water along the hull. It was gloaming as we slipped softly into Trikeri Bay, and our anchor plunged—a comet-tail of phosphorescence—into the black water. We swung stern to the beach and stowed the boat for the night before wading ashore for a meal in a taverna.

At first it seemed that we had entered a deserted village. None of the small whitewashed houses beside the dusty harbour frontage showed any signs of life. Windows were black hollows in the grey walls, no lights welcomed from within. Even the animals seemed to have disappeared. But faintly, along to the west of the village, we could hear a murmur and the occasional voice raised in a call. As we picked our way in the darkness towards the sound, the first strains of music reached us. Shortly we struck the cobbled alley way which served as the main thoroughfare of this quaint fishing village, and headed away from the bay to where, in the distance, we could see the glow of lights and hear the throb of the music. We stopped at some distance from the throng who were gathered in front of a taverna. But this was no ordinary night; a fiesta was in progress. The grape vines above the tavern front were strung with lights. Beneath this canopy of living green were seated two women and three men with string and percussion instruments. We both had the same thought: that they must be wandering gipsies, for this music they made bore no relation to our westernised concept of Greek music, conditioned as it was by Nana Mouskouri and the melodious bousouki and guitar. This was almost Moroccan, with a wailing hint of Indian discordance behind. We stood, a little back in the darkness, to watch without being seen, for it was evident that the whole population of the village had gathered at this spot to join in the fun.

Standing there, we became once more aware of the power which sound has to mould the mood of men, kneading them into pliant things responding to the hypnotic influence of the drum and strings. Not one of those present, could you have asked them, would have been aware that they were enslaved by that pulsing hypnotic rhythm, but watching the faces and the movements from without, it was plain to see that the rising and falling of the music, the subtle power which first suggests, then dictates a mood, had them in thrall. Here for the first time we were hearing our first real folk music, and though the sounds were strangely alien to our ears, it did nevertheless corroborate an impression I have always held that through the music of a people one has the most reliable and direct window on their soul.

Around the perimeter of the square vendors had set up their stalls, the orange flames of their oil lamps a soft contrast to the yellow-green brilliance of the pressure lamps. They were doing a brisk trade with cheap toys for the children, fruits

and confections. The violinist, a man, commenced to sing in a high harsh key, the broken rhythm taken up by occasional hand clapping from the crowd. Another man stepped forward, holding in his right hand a white handkerchief, rolled into a short rope. He held this at arm's length, hanging down as his feet started the ritualised steps, the fingers of the left hand clicking as we had seen the dancers at Volos. Another man came from the crowd, took hold of the handkerchief and joined the steps, in perfect time. More followed, then a woman. All the time the line of dancers was moving slowly, winding as a snake, each figure's arms resting on the shoulders of his fellow. The watchers increased the clapping and it sighed like a breaking wave out across the square to be taken up by the crowds there. We moved closer, to where a low wall enabled us to see over the heads of the crowd. The woman violinist was singing now, big boned and strong, with a rich voice that went well with the black hair and eyes, set off by her brilliant green dress trailing to the ground, swinging to the beat of her feet.

A group of children spotted us and cautiously approached. Finding us friendly we were soon surrounded with a twittering aviary of small girls and boys, all pressing questions, one or two trying out their school English with the expected 'Halloee!' and 'Good-Byee!' wide eyes aflame with temerity, egged on by their friends. Their attention was soon conveyed to the crowd, and momentarily we felt a shift of the focus from the musicians and dancers to ourselves. Where had we come from and what were we doing here? This was no tourist attraction, how had we got here? You could see the questions being asked as they summed us up. The end man of the line of dancers caught my eye and held out his free arm, an invitation to join them. I felt B. pulling me and soon we too were under those bright lights hilariously trying to imitate the intricate footwork.

Groups outside the canopy of light were now forming up and dancing among themselves. The big woman singer moved away from the musicians and stood brazenly before a rheumy old man who was evidently well on in his cups. She held out a hand, inviting him to join her. Startled from his reverie, he looked up at her. Instantly a roar of laughter burst above the din. The old man straightened, looking round in disdain, then, to everyone's surprise he rose unsteadily to his feet and stood challengingly in front of her. Kindly she broke the step and commenced slowly, guiding, coaxing and finally flagrantly challenging him to respond. Unspo-

ken, the sensual sexual contest flowed with the spirit of the dance. He set his feet wide, straightened and looked her full in the face. Slowly he started the difficult steps, giving then following, unsteady at first but gaining strength and confidence with the beat of the music. A roar of encouragement broke out from behind him. The woman played up to him and his watery old eyes took on a new life as he summoned up energy he had forgotten he possessed to give everything to the hypnotic compelling beat.

As suddenly as it had begun the music stopped. The dance was over, and the old man, feeble now with the effort, was escorted back to his seat. Head erect, eyes proud, those unexpected moments had come to him like a wild wind of youth and he was proud of his ability to accept the challenge. There were tears in his eyes as his glass was filled and hands pressed in warm regard on his shoulders. He was evidently popular.

Another, slower tune was struck, commencing with a regular beat of the drum and cymbals. Behind us I could hear a single cicada still strident, competing with the musicians. Above us and to the north I could see a yellow flicker up in the hills. It was Old Trikeri, balanced up there at the end of a cobbled mule track, deserted by its population, doubtless for this night's festivities. Certainly we were not going to get a meal at this taverna, for the landlord and staff were frantic serving wine and beer; any thought of cooking here was out of the question. Since the two other tavernas appeared to have stopped business for the night also, we joined the throng among the stalls, seeking something to appease vigorous appetites. Above a tin tray holding a glowing bed of charcoal, small juicy pieces of meat skewered six and eight together dripped temptingly, the smoke from the burning fat making our mouths water. 'Pos ta lete,' (What are they called?) I asked the vendor. 'Souvlakia,' he replied as we bought two each. 'They're a sort of shishkebab,' I heard B. mutter, 'Aren't they delicious!' Another meat vendor with a similar stand had longer skewers with what looked like brown elastic wound round them until they were about two inches thick. The smell here, too, was appetising, and we bought about six inches each of this tantalising cylinder of unidentifiable meat which was removed from the skewer, chopped into half-inch lengths, and given to us in greaseproof paper. It was delicious, the outer skin being browned to a rich crackling, the centre slightly tough but extremely tasty. Had we known it to

be sheep's intestines we might have enjoyed it less, but we eat stranger things in England, so what matter!

There were stalls doing a brisk trade in Turkish Delight and another jelly-like brown sweet which was sold in large slabs cut to one's requirement. We were soon satisfied, having returned to the souvlaki stall for another round which we washed down with a glass each of resinated white local wine. Back aboard *Lugworm* we lay listening to the distant beat of the music and the murmur of the crowd. It was still pulsing when we fell asleep. *Lugworm*, her stern anchor back aboard and the bow anchor shortened in to clear the beach, swung gently in a flat calm. The stars were our night lights.

So far, I reflected, there has been little to fear in the meltemi. Will she favour us with a fair wind down the narrow but deep channel between Evvia and Thessaly, bowling us on towards the Cyclades?

