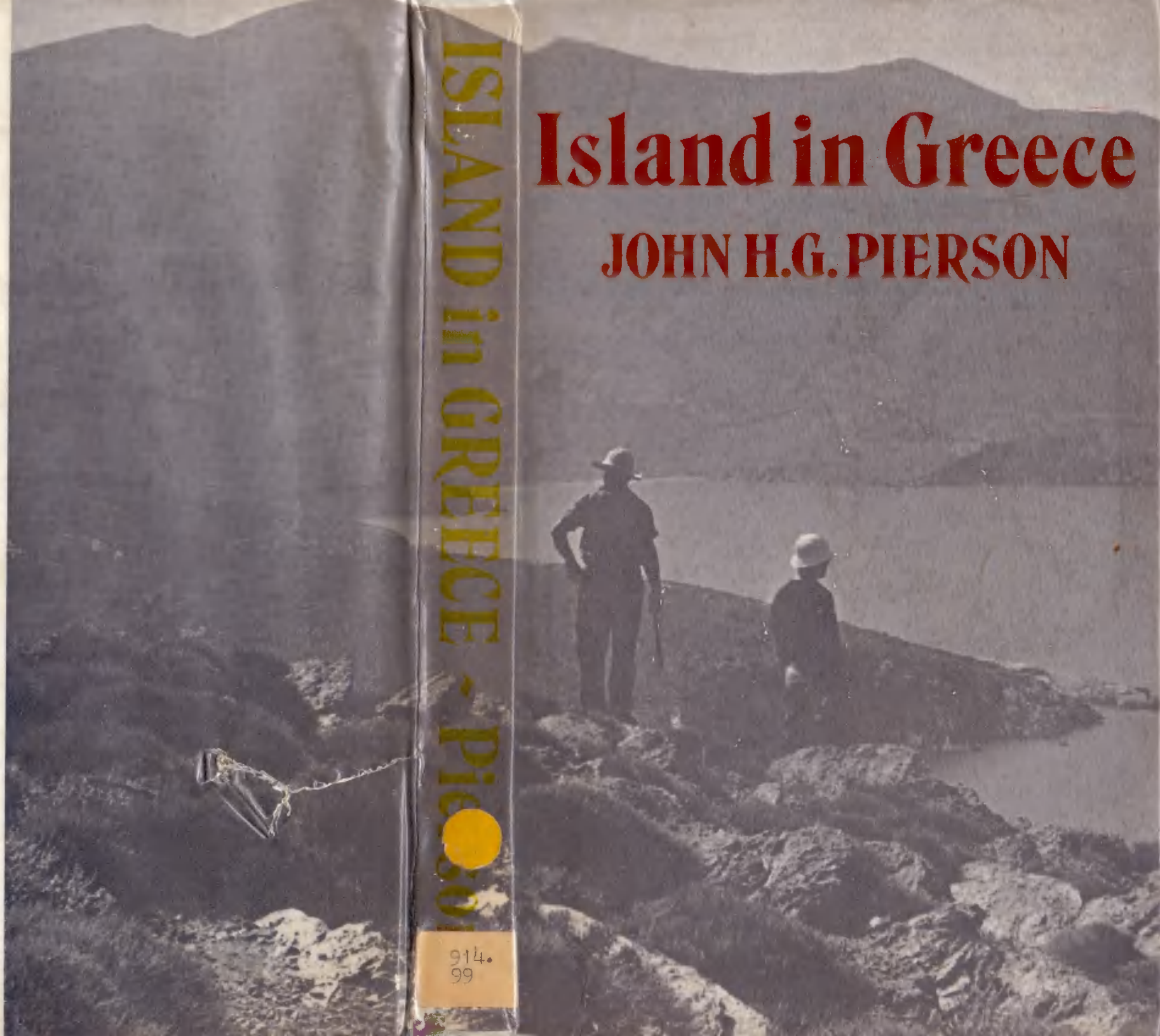

Island in Greece

JOHN H.G. PIERSON

ISLAND in GREECE - Pie

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to a memorable leader and counselor in the
public or for that matter any other service, my friend

Harry C. Hawkins

ISLAND IN GREECE

John H. G. Pierson

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Preface

What follows is more or less the truth, hardly embellished at all. I trust that no one who appears in the story will challenge that assertion in the hope of redeeming his own dignity, because then I might take a notion to do so myself, which would be a clear waste of time.

Actually I owe a great deal to all the other characters in the cast. In particular I am grateful for that friendliness toward strangers that seems to be instinctive with the Greeks, and mindful too that there is scarcely one Greek involved in this story at whose feet I have not in point of fact been sitting to continue my education.

Recent political events are another matter. When the bough breaks the cradle of democracy will fall. One must fervently hope that the day of the return to a free Greek way of life is not far off.

As for the fabulous Aegean area itself, there really was nothing that needed to be added by me. Indeed I have the feeling that such words in praise of it as I utter herein, brief as I wanted to keep them, are too long-winded.

Two members of my family, my son John with a set of notes and my wife Sherleigh with some letters, have helped immensely to keep certain episodes in this saga from passing into oblivion. Of course to John in another respect — he being, so to speak, my accomplice — I owe a further debt in many other both obvious and hidden ways.

Finally, I am thankful indeed to Gordon Sweet for his great photographic collaboration and to Hugh McKinley for his encouragement and advice.

J. H. G. P.

I

The Start of the Seareh

The man coming up the narrow gangplank with a struggling goat under one arm and a *karpouzi* — watermelon, that is — under the other met the man going down with the roped-together trunk on his back, got around him, and came aboard just as the plank jerked upward and the space between the hull and the pier began to widen. The phenomenal yelling subsided. We backed out, turned around, and headed for the islands of the Aegean.

As the *Pandelis* rounded the breakwater that defines the harbor mouth at Piraeus, young John and I spread our maps for another look. My finger moved to Amorgos and I explained (he and his friends being barely off the plane from America) the doubt that I had lately begun to feel. If the cliffs on the southern coast ran the whole length of the island, as now seemed likely . . . well, how can you hope to plant trees on the side of a precipice?

Admittedly I had also begun to be of two minds as to whether the *southern* coast was the one that we really should have been talking about in the first place. The doubt had arisen when some people in Athens with a concern for the uses of island soil warned me against the warm wind *from* the south. Still on the whole it seemed better to take the hint from the writings of sailors concerned with the elementary business of

staying alive and beware above all the demonic blasts from the north.

"Time for a look around," said Peter, arriving with Mag to carry John off on a general tour of the ship. Peter's nose twitched in anticipation.

As the trio departed, I drew from my pocket a typed document that promised to be of help. For the next hour or so I studied this in intervals between trying to defend our corner of the first-class saloon against others who had as much right to it as we had except that we got there first. The strength of the successive invasions and the poverty of my Greek tended to undermine my defensive action and it only partly succeeded. But the manuscript lived up to my highest expectations: it re-directed our search.

* * *

My son John — a Vermonter at heart, really — had fallen in love with Greece two summers before. Tramping about with Peter, talking with shepherds and priests and grassroots people generally, climbing Olympus and other high mountains, discovering that all Greek women are beautiful, he had jettisoned then and there such part of his objectivity about that country as might prove a nuisance.

Then my wife Sherleigh saw some of the Aegean islands on a cruise. It was summer again, and they were brown. As the *meltemi* wind would strengthen, a little of the dust still miraculously adhering to an island would blow away. The sight of so much barrenness wounded her soul. For even a partial recovery, measured doses of Corfu over on the Ionian side later proved essential.

I was not able to go on either of those expeditions. But then, once you have been to school, Greece can get under your skin even if you only occasionally circle above the Acropolis or come down for a brief uncomfortable stay at the airport. Or, better, cast your eyes on an old grove of olives or even a single Aleppo pine in the August sunlight. And indeed I had done more.

For on Samothrace I had accidentally found an archeological treasure — and handed it in to the local museum at the "dig" — a treasure quite modest in its pretensions, to be sure, yet significant for me in that its finding marked the hundredth anniversary of somebody else's finding of the "Victory."

Besides, something in me had always wanted to take a positive stand against the process of disintegration of man's original habitat here on earth.

So one winter day as we were speaking of this and that I said to John: what would you think of the idea of getting hold of a piece of a Greek island and trying to restore the fertility, the green look, the soil? It would take a couple of lifetimes, probably. Maybe we would form a group. And he, ignoring the absurdity of this, replied that it sounded like a great idea to him.

So far as I know we have no earlier piece of paper on the subject than John's brief note to a busy newspaper reporter (himself) which reads: "are the soils of Greece in bad shape? are they any worse than they've always been? can they be improved? can they be improved within the means of the average farmer? how? where is there a region (island) that's typical, congenial, available? how much land would you need for a fair test? how long would it take? what would it cost?"

"When one sails through the Cyclades today," says Ernle Bradford in his *Ulysses Found*, "it is their bare sculptured quality that makes them distinctive from all other Mediterranean islands." . . . "But," he continues,

> "these sun-devoured islands which the modern traveller knows are very different from the islands of the Homeric age. They were thickly forested in those days, and there were many more springs, green groves, and grassy places. Seriphos, Siphnos, Milos, Santorin — I think of sailing past them, and of being blinded by the glare off their rocks after the cool, veined marble of the sea. But the islands which Ulysses knew were as rich and green as Corfu is today, or as the long valleys of Rhodes

where the butterfiies seem like specks of fire in the aquarium light beneath the leaves."

How the change came about is not entirely clear. Did the Phoenicians cut down all the trees to build their wooden ships? (It has been estimated that four thousand oaks had to be felled for just one of the larger warships of Medieval times. This gives some idea of what might indeed have happened to those earlier oaks or pines.) Going back farther, were those islands buried under a lethal blanket of ashes from an eruption of the volcano of Santorini around 1400 B.C.? — and, incidentally, was Santorini the lost Atlantis? — but in that case their forests had evidently recovered by the time of the fall of Troy two centuries later. However these things may have been, it seems that already by the fourth century B.C. the process of destruction was far advanced throughout Attica, not to speak of the adjacent islands. "In comparison with what then was," Plato tells us in *Critias*,

"there are remaining only the bones of the wasted body, as they may be called, as in the case of small islands, all the richer and softer parts of the soil having fallen away, and the mere skeleton of the land being left. But in the primitive state of the country, its mountains were high hills covered with soil . . . and there was abundance of wood in the mountains. Of this last the traces still remain, for although some of the mountains now only afford sustenance to bees, not so very long ago there were still to be seen roofs of timber cut from trees growing there, which were of a size sufficient to cover the largest houses . . . Moreover, the land reaped the benefit of the annual rainfall, not as now losing the water which flows off the bare earth into the sea, but, having an abundant supply in all places, and receiving it into herself and treasuring it up in the close clay soil, it let off into the hollows the streams which it absorbed from the heights, providing everywhere abundant fountains and rivers, of which there may still be observed sacred memorials in places where fountains once existed; and this proves the truth of what I am saying."

Not that the process of destruction came to an end then. Certainly throughout much of recorded history the forests (and consequently also the soil and the water) not of Greece alone but of the whole eastern Mediterranean region have been ravaged by wars and piracy and bad farmers and, in the end, goats. For wherever everything has been approximately ruined, the only remaining visible cause will usually be a snickering band of goats, not guilty by any means of the entire crime as sometimes charged but nonetheless the present inveterate enemies of the people, sworn to prevent the regeneration of the land.

* * *

In spare moments we did as much homework as we could — disturbing the dust on botany books, reading reports from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, buttonholing experts.

John in Washington learned from former Agricultural Attaché Edward Bell a land-regeneration strategy applicable at least to areas of considerable size. It goes like this: First you (in your poor Greek Appalachia-type community) have to get the sheep and goats down out of the hills so that trees can get started. The only way you can do this is to grow enough feed for them in the lowlands. For that you have to have irrigation, which in turn means that you have to put together labor and rocks, and cement from somewhere and conceivably also some outside knowhow, to create simple works for catching and storing what little rainfall there is. In short, get water, grow forage, bring the animals down from the hills, plant the hills to trees. Later, when the trees mature a bit, you can let the animals go back up and graze in open woodlands.

Inasmuch as my friend Victor Kovda, the Director

of UNESCO's Department of Natural Sciences, was a soil scientist or pedologist, I, being at that time rather frequently in Europe, seized the first opportunity to consult in Paris with him. "There are," he told me, "three ways you can rebuild the soil, and two of them are expensive. You can import fertilizer or you can import water, if you are in a hurry and don't mind spending money. Or, you can just use plants — let their roots decompose the rock by mechanical and chemical action." "Do not take sandstone," he continued. "But limestone is good and also schist if it's friable. Clay is derived from schist. If the land is low, watch out for contamination by salts."

"If we use method number three," I asked him, "how long would you think it might be before somebody flying over our area could notice any difference in the color? Ten years?"

He laughed. "Maybe in five years you could see something."

In Rome Luis Bramao, Chief of FAO's World Soil Resources Office, showed me the soil maps they were systematically developing on a global basis. The island of Amorgos, it appeared, was largely composed of the red limestone typical of the Aegean region. Soil derived from this was quite rich; our problem would be the shortage of water. Bramao's hydrologist colleague, R. Ambroggi, made some penciled calculations based on my guess as to the surface area of this island and his own as to the annual rainfall (15 inches, more or less). If we drilled there, he told me, we could certainly hope to find enough water for household use plus possibly a little for agriculture. The water table in these islands tends to be at about sea level. We would have to be careful in pumping lest we draw too much and begin to get salt water.

If you open an atlas and look at the map of Greece you will see that the islands of the Aegean are not just an arm of that country but are part of its very heart, and that the one called Amorgos lies fairly well out and presumably off the beaten track (a presumption

which the shipping schedules will confirm). Another thing much in its favour, for our purposes, was its "grand and noble" appearance in the eyes of various discerning voyagers. There is an interesting account of it also in the classic study by James Theodore Bent, *The Cyclades: Or, Life Among the Insular Greeks*, published in London in 1885. Asking for this book one day iu the British Museum I was just able to finish the Amorgos chapter before the library closed for a long week-end and I on my part had to make my way to the airport.

Besides the need to choose the place for our gesture with proper care, we had a few other preliminary questions to consider.

I had originally supposed that we might be able to lease a substantial piece of land — possibly one square mile — from the Greek Government. The lease would run for twenty-five years or so, with an option to us to renew for another twenty-five, at the end of which time the land would revert to the Greek Government. Having recently helped to prepare a report on land reform around the world, I thought I knew some of the angles. We wanted, though, the right to retain small plots with houses for those who had been participating in the soil-building scheme.

We might form a group of like-minded people — Americans and Greeks — selected on the hunch that there was something odd about them that would make them want to keep at it over a span of several generations. Then we could pool some capital and use the income from our fund for annual expenses including the necessary capital equipment — seedlings certainly, wells probably, dynamite if needed, fencing material if custom would permit the use of that straightforward method of dealing with the goats, and so on. Some local man on a nearby farm would become the year-round overseer. One of the first things would be to put up a simple headquarters building on the site. The partners would turn up from time to time, as they were able, do some of the manual work, and enjoy

fringe benefits such as swimming, *retsina*, and soaking up the sunshine.

The weakness of any group when it comes to carrying out a visionary project like that is perhaps obvious (or, if you prefer, historically proven) but John and I both liked the group idea and never formally abandoned it. What happened was rather that we rediscovered the fact that, if you want to get something done right away in the limited time you have, you almost always find you are doing it yourself. Then, too, I learned from my Athenian colleague and friend, John Zarras, veteran worker for social justice, that the urban Greeks do not really care for such islands. They seem to love islands but what this means is civilized islands just across the bay — Aigina and Poros, or maybe Spetsai and Hydra.

The other point — about leasing — was disposed of more cleanly. The New York Greeks whom I consulted — most of them, as it happened, experts on legal matters — told me in diplomatic but unmistakable language that I had better leave leasing alone if I hoped to stay out of trouble. (They also said, with a certain glint in their eye, that there were *many* Greek *lawyers*, implying, I gathered distinctly, that I had better leave *them* alone as far as might be humanly possible.) If indeed the Government had such land to lease — which was not at all certain, though the monasteries perhaps had kept theirs — our little project could be destined to become a temptation to some and a substantial annoyance to everybody concerned.

So our ideas were evolving, and, having had time to acquire some foreboding of the hydra-headed problem we were conjuring up, I disclosed to Zarras near the end of a lengthy letter what my tolerant friend must have considered a kind of Noah's Ark formulation of how to go out to meet the monster: "When the time comes to set out for the island or islands where the prospects appear to lie, it is obvious that various forms of expertise will be needed, in addition to good contacts with community leaders — for instance, expertise in soil science, hydrology (water being no doubt one of the

paramount problems of all), language, and law. I hope some way can be found to muster the right combination of skills from a base in Athens."

I also mentioned some relevant specifics: "Our target for 1964 is to find and acquire a piece of land. There is not much time for it, either, as I have to be back at my desk during the week of 13-19 September at the latest, and John can at most get three weeks off from his job."

* * *

August was more than half gone before I could get to Athens, and then it was Zarras himself who (dark eyes betraying his solicitous interest) introduced me to friends in the Government's Tourist Bureau who in turn easily convinced me that our target for 1964 had better be maintained. Two exhibits only were required to demonstrate this — a map and a file of newspaper clippings.

The map showed red-tinted frontier areas, near the Turks or other neighbours, where land could not be bought by any foreigner; cross-hatched areas where purchases could allegedly be made if certain conditions were met; and white areas where there were no such restrictions at all. Fortunately the islands of the Cyclades, unlike some others, were still in white; so far so good. But when it came to the file of clippings, this was the record of a fierce outcry — some echoes had indeed reached me a few weeks earlier — against the invasion of Greece by foreign buyers of land. Especially Germans. "Greece is up for auction!" A law to end all sales of land to foreigners was being introduced in Partliament.

I must say my sympathies were aroused. Then in my mind's eye, as I rallied to the cause of our project, appeared again the thorny alternative of leasing, not to speak of the other dubious alternative of buying through a Greek "front." I came away thinking that we had not a moment to lose: we must find and buy the land we needed at once.

I quickly sought and gained other staunch and (I can

now add, gratefully) durable allies by going to the American Embassy and introducing myself to the Agricultural Attaché, Don Motz, and his adviser, Nicholas Triantaphyllidis. Nicholas, in fact — in spite of his being quite heavily weighted with official duties, and my having also a few other fences to mend or build — became almost my constant guide and companion during the ensuing days. Together we made the rounds of the working branches of the Ministry of Agriculture: the Forest Service, Mountainous Economy Service, Extension Service, Institute of Soils and Fertilizers, and several others.

I was fortunate in having a sponsor like Nicholas. Knowledgeable and resourceful, diplomatic, fluent in the two essential languages, he practically carried me on his back. A "Jim" (Dem.) Demetriadis, Director of the Mountainous Economy Service, might speak excellent English, giving me an easy time when I visited him, but such accidents in my favor were naturally quite rare. It made little difference: once Nicholas got the hang of my story, I would just say a few words besides "how do you do" when we entered an office, ask him to translate them for me, and lean back in my chair while he went on and on.

He would speak (I believe) about erosion and reafforestation; about the high-minded nature of our plan; about the fact that, although our project was small and essentially symbolic and we were not soil experts as of now, my son and I nevertheless felt that with luck we might conceivably develop minor variations on known methods of regenerating land that others, Greek, would want to copy; about our desire to work in closest cooperation with the Government at all times; and so on — always from time to time throwing in that fine-sounding *o-kirios* (i.e., Mr.) and then my name.

Most important of all, naturally, were the broad generalities we all of us uttered, for it was necessary to establish the presumption that at some future time assistance, when needed, would be forthcoming. This

part turned out splendidly. Everybody praised my motives, said that the project was well conceived, and imagined that it would prove to be a fine thing for Greek-American relations. I did not in Athens see on anyone's face that meaningful look which, even when not accompanied by a rotation of the index finger near the temple, means that somebody clearly must be crazy.

The second point was to try to find out something about the islands in which we were interested: which islands would be the best ones to have a look at? what about their soil and their water? and so on. I did get a little information about Paros, especially, and about Naxos; considerable polite if puzzled attention when I said Amorgos; and a suggestion from the Forest Service that the place to go would be Kythera, not in the Cyclades at all, where their people were already working. Obviously it was no use pretending that the Cyclades, Naxos perhaps aside, held any important place in the agricultural plans of Greece.

Nor could I seem to get conclusive information about the winds, on which I tried an occasional question since the subject was bothering me.

I did get promises of introductions to people in the islands who knew the islands, most of all from George Kavouras, Director of the Agricultural Extension Service. Those promises were immediately fulfilled, both by letter and by phone. I had not realized until then that you could easily telephone to, from, and between the various islands.

The office where Nicholas and I really got down to specifics was the Institute of Soils and Fertilizers. By the time we reached there I knew full well (had there been any doubt in my mind about it before) that our sizable tract of land (which by then had been trimmed to a hypothetical 1000 *stremmata*, roughly 250 acres) would have to be pretty poor from a farming standpoint. Certainly we could not afford to buy it otherwise, nor would we have any right to try. This then meant that we had to be careful not to end up with terrain on which no green thing could ever be induced to grow. I put

the problem up to the Institute's Honorary Director, D. S. Catacousinos, in wretched French.

"If you can find a piece of land that suits you, we will make a preliminary survey for you," he said. "A quick one, to give you an idea whether or not you should buy it. Then later on your Embassy can write a formal letter to the Minister asking for a full soil analysis."

I expressed my deep appreciation and said that I would pay the charges, of course.

"Not at all. It will cost you nothing. Yours is a project that is good for American-Greek relations."

I walked out feeling a real sense of accomplishment, tinged to be sure with some regret that, under a new regulation, a number of senior officials including Dr. Catacousinos were retiring.

* * *

When I finished checking the manuscript, I stowed it in a bag, gathered all of our bags on and around my single chair, and went out on deck to find the others.

A parting question that Jim Demetriadis had asked me was, did I read German, and when I said that I did a little, he loaned me this document. It was a fascinating tract in which, as I now reported to John, the author referred to the island of Amorgos as *unsre* ("our") *Insel*, analyzed its problems systematically, and set forth a comprehensive, detailed plan for its economie development under the guidance of a team of German experts.

After ascertaining this (I reported further) I spent nearly as much time again examining the manuscript to try to determine what official status it might have, if any, but found no clues. We mailed it back from Hermoupolis the next day, and never seriously considered Amorgos again.

On successive trips I have grown very fond of Patroklos, hard by the shore just before you reach Cape Sounion and the columns of the temple of Poseidon. Some of the lines of this miniature island are quite

lovely. But then I suppose that subconsciously I am also wondering as I scan it whether you could make something grow there if it were yours. This will no doubt become a relatively simple matter once a ehemical spray — or would it be a new kind of lasser beam? — is invented that breaks rocks directly down into topsoil.

Mag was reading her book but took time out for a glance at Patroklos.

The rocky southern tip of Kea, when we reaehed it, had much the same feeling on a more impressive scale. The we were rolling, eaught in the wash coming down from the Kafireos Channel. To starboard at a hazy distance lay Kithnos. After a while far ahead and a little to port we could make out another island, which it seemed was Yiaros. I had during this part of our voyage an opportunity — to be repeated many times in the days ahead — to feel a mixture of pride and envy at John's incipient mastery of spoken Greek. He had struck up an acquaintance with a young engineer from Zakinthos who was now explaining to him that Yiaros was where they had formerly put the political prisoners, of whom thank God there were no longer any (then). None of us guessed the dismal future in store for the place. Some *sotto voce* singing of political songs by both young men ensued, accompanied by considerable laughter.

We churned on. The sun behind us was no longer high in the sky when Peter called my attention to a luminous something low down and far off in the haze on our starboard bow. Seemingly to begin with it had no counection with anything else, but soon the outlines of hills appeared above and around it and we then realized that in certain kinds of weather the island of Syros was first made visible to travelers arriving from the west at that hour preceding sunset not by its skyline but by the incandescence of a particular cliff that rose from the sea.

So the *Pandelis* passed the little unmanned lighthouse on the rocky northern extremity of Syros; bore down around the island's shadowy eastern side; evoked the

clear sound of the bell at St. Demetrius in answer to its own heavy blast of greeting; turned sharply away from little Donkey Island, guarding the harbor mouth, to enter the harbor of Hermoupolis itself, with its lovely lighted town running up the two hills; and stopped.

2

The Casting About

Since the Hermes Hotel was full, we checked in at the Mykonos, found likely-looking places for *ouzo* and dinner close by, and then for an hour strolled about the streets and the impressive main square before turning in. Peter and John and I shared the best room in the house; Mag's, from the look of it, was about eighth — assuming that to have been the total number. Our splendid one gave on a balcony overhanging the middle of the busy quai, a balcony apparently constructed for the express purpose of enabling Bogart or Cagney to make a dramatic appearance and give a flaming speech, as John next morning threatened to do in their absence.

Another wonderful thing about the Mykonos was the price. And though the plumbing, not easy to locate, was a catastrophe anyway, fortunately the public toilets were just outside down a side street.

At my insistence we got down to business — John and I — soon after consuming the coffee, bread with honey, and *karpouzi* we ordered for breakfast. Getting down to business meant getting in touch with John's old classmate Elias, who had come to the island ahead of us to visit two great-great-aunts, aged ninety-eight and a hundred and two.

Having found Elias and lingered awhile to pay our respects to those still vigorous ladies, we accepted his guidance to the office of the Director of Agriculture

for the Cyclades, that being the natural starting point for any such quest as ours. Hermoupolis is the capital of the *nomarchy* embracing all of the islands of the group. This Director was the man to whom above all others my Athenian friends had sent me. Officially the keys to everything were in his hands. Moreover I had been told that he personally knew every stone in the islands — an impressive qualification, in fact an astronomical concept if ever there was one. We entered a substantial building from the main longitudinal street, walked up some wide stairs, and were ushered into his presence.

Hardly, however, had we sat down, accepted his invitation to have coffee (two coffees, medium sweet, and one orangeade, he summed up to the boy from the *taverna*), and started to explain our mission when the Director threw a block by stating that Elias' interpretation was totally inadequate. Having always regarded Elias as a true Greek — an American one, of course — I found this shocking. Elias himself took the indignity calmly. We adjourned the meeting until a substitute interpreter could be found.

Hermouplis seems to be a metropolis of the proper size for the conduct of important operations. It is not so small that you cannot turn up practically whatever kind of person or thing you need. On the other hand, it is not so large that the turning-up takes any appreciable time. Within half an hour our party was back in the Director's office, augmented by Haralambos, a native son just back from studying naval architecture in London.

Haralambos — Babi for short — took to his new assignment with avidity, apparently finding our project absorbingly interesting. But the Director, I thought I sensed, did not. "Unfortunately," he said, "such substantial areas of land as you have in mind are not to be found in these islands."

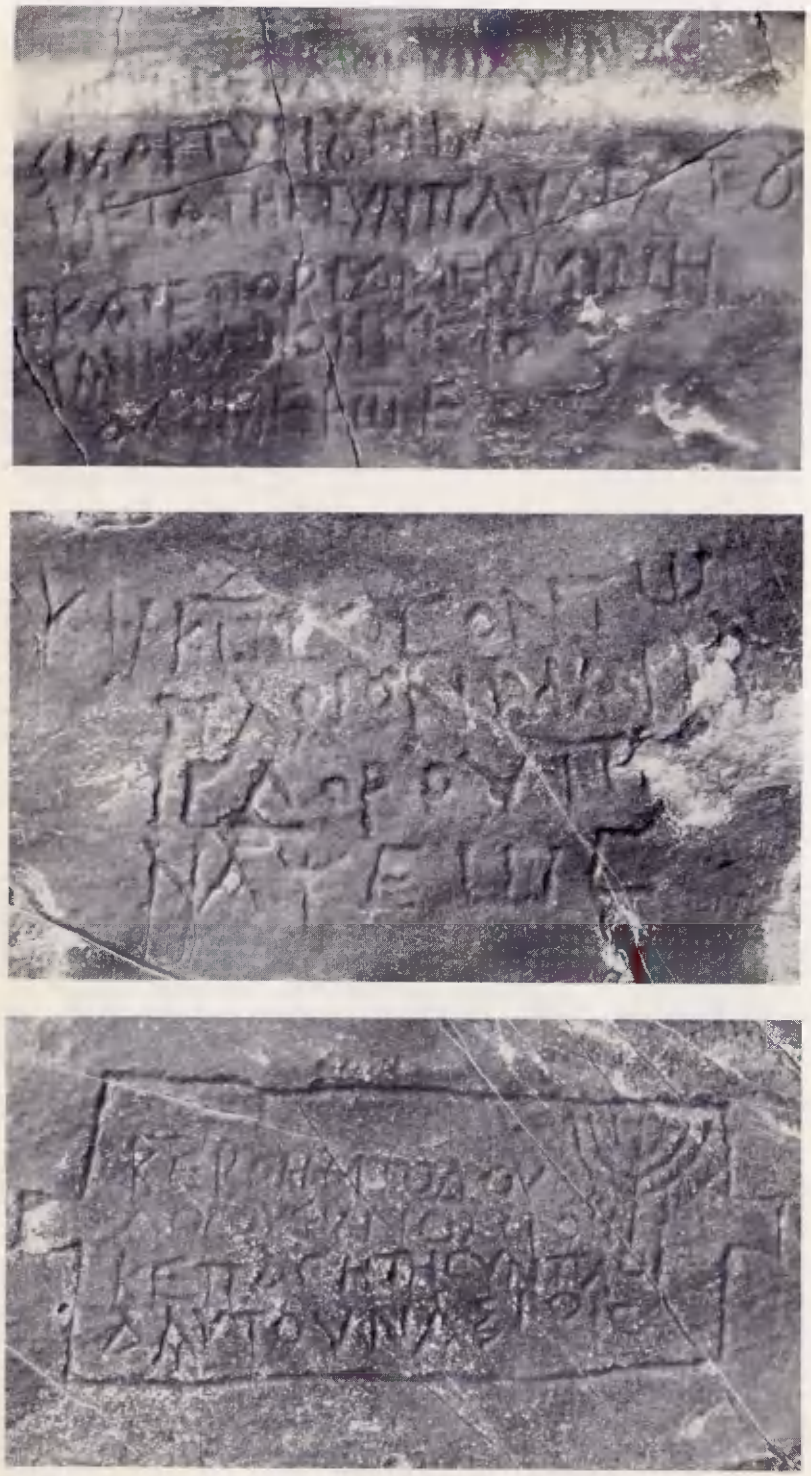
"Look," he continued, "all the land in Syros for instance is owned in small plots." And he pointed from his window over the roof-tops to where the boundary markers of fields could be seen on the hills.

I was irritated. "What about southeastern Naxos?"

1. Enemy of the people.

2. A metropolis of the proper size.

2. A thousand feet below us lay the calm blue sea against a deeply indented shore line.



4. The dim old inscriptions were chiseled in varying styles.

I said. Not for nothing had I sweated out those days in Athens.

"Well, maybe there might be something in southeastern Naxos."

"What about south*western* Naxos?"

"Well, possibly southwestern Naxos, too."

"And what about Paros?"

"I am not sure," he said, "but you might find some land like that in Paros, too. Or in Antiparos."

By the time we left his office we had his promise to communicate on our behalf with the agricultural officers stationed on Paros and Naxos, plus his further promise to intercede in advance for us with the head men of several really small, far-out, undeveloped islands such as, to name the nearest, Iraklia. That was probably, he concluded, the kind of location we really wanted, and he would make sure that when we set foot ashore we would be welcome.

Out on the street Babi looked at me disapprovingly and said: "Why are you interested in the soil of our islands, anyway?"

"I don't know," I replied, "but last winter I slipped on the ice and broke my collar bone. Probably damaged my head too."

"*Popopopo*," said John, which means in effect "tsk, tsk."

Having caucused with Peter and Mag we called on Frieda at the Tourist Office and arranged to go to Naxos via Paros on the next boat, scheduled for two days later. Elias had another voyage to make but Babi agreed to be a regular member of our party — you might say its key member.

I was glad of the chance to see something of Elias' Syros in the meantime. It was an island whose natural beauty J. Theodore Bent had held in low esteem. (This point, as it happened, we only learned a year later when his celebrated 1885 book was reissued and John bought a copy.) "Of all the Cyclades none is so bleak and barren as Syra," wrote Bent.

He did soften those words a little by adding, "yet

this island possesses an attraction of her own," and he balanced them with a remarkable tribute paid from another point of view entirely: "Future ages will quote this little spot as the brightest specimen of activity produced by the revival of the long dormant spirit of independence in Greece . . . the flourishing commercial centre on the island of Syra is due to the spontaneous outburst of mercantile activity incident on the recovery of freedom . . . Whatever was left of vitality in Greece after long years of depression found itself drawn to rocky, ungainly Syra."

Here Bent was speaking of the town of Hermoupolis, which was settled after the great massacre on the island of Chios in 1821 by refugees from the Turks — refugees fleeing not only from Chios and neighboring Psara but from Crete and other places as well — and which was very appropriately named by them for Hermes, the patron of commerce. By 1964 you could certainly no longer call it the largest seaport in Greece, as you could have at the turn of the century, and you might also want to reserve your opinion about its vitality. Nevertheless we were impressed: by the activity of the harbor, by the gracious evidences of French style in some of the houses we saw on our first explorations, by the promenading of the citizens of an evening in marble-paved Miaoulis Square in front of the great town hall (said to be the largest town hall in Greece, *still*), by the ruined theatre behind it, patterned on Milan's *La Scala.*

In the Italianate central square were also posted during working hours more taxis than you will encounter on neighboring islands. These vehicles, which were, moreover, in good functioning order, testified mainly to the existence of roads leading south and southwest to the little towns and farms and even beaches to be found in those directions. Babi told our driver, however, to head north.

Our road climbed the shoulder of the hill that bears the old Roman Catholic staircase town of Ano Syra. We looked across at the slightly inferior Orthodox hill and back at modern Hermoupolis and its harbor, which

we had left far below. All around us were steep brown rocky slopes intersected by stone walls. A quarry, some gnarled fig trees, the remains of a big stone windmill caught my eye. A man standing part way up the slope of our hill carried on a long conversation with a tiny figure of a man on the opposite hill which we could easily hear above the laboring of our motor.

Soon we were past the shoulder and looking down into an amazingly terraced deep cleft on the other side, in which were a church and some vineyards. Across the way one stone wall achieved the seemingly impossible by going almost vertically up the smooth stone face of Mount Pyrgos.

As we ended our ascent the paved road, too, came to an end, and for the next twenty minutes or so we proceeded at a very slow pace, tossing about like a ship at sea as we circled the rim of the grand valley that lies between Pyrgos and the other big mountain, Syringas. Our driver was probably a sailor at heart but why he was sure enough of his tires and the constitution of his car to be willing to proceed was not clear to me. It was a relief to get down eventually at the place — Mavri Raki, we found it was called — beyond which no four-wheeled thing could possibly go.

We asked our driver to come back for us in mid-afternoon and went ahead on foot. A climb up a long steep trail, followed by a much shorter and milder descent, brought us in half an hour to our destination, the locally famous Syringas spring, source of some of the very best water on the island. That was certainly our own evaluation of it, hot and thirsty as we had become. As a matter of fact, however, the point had been established dispassionately by people in Hermoupolis who had the choice of various brands of water, conveyed in barrels of different colors on the backs of donkeys coming from near and (as in this case) far.

The water came out of a rock against which a grape arbor had long before been placed, shading now with its leaves and large bunches of *staphilia* part of a flagstone court. The court ran more or less between a small

ruined building, close by a ruined church, and another small building that was merely badly delapidated. The latter structure, we learned, was soon to be converted into a little bottling plant for lemonade and orangeade, using some of the water from the spring not needed for irrigating the grapes and almonds.

Where such a considerable flow of water really came from was rather a mystery, since the top of the mountain seemed to be not so very far above us. The owner of the spring — and of, it would appear, a vast tract of surrounding land — flashed a golden smile as he accepted an American cigarette from John and spoke of his luck (Babi was now interpreting) in inheriting all that wealth as the adopted son of the previous owner who had died not long before. Some of his grape vines, he said, were now more than a hundred and fifty years old (their trunks were indeed thick) and would soon have to be replaced. The spring water (and here he voiced a local belief which I later learned was geologically untenable) doubtless came from rain and snow deposited on the high mountains of the island of Andros more than twenty miles away.

We thanked him and moved down to one of the terraces of his vineyard to eat the lunch we had brought. The sun was warm, the air scented with thyme. A thousand feet below us lay the calm blue sea against a deeply indented shore line. In the middle distance a dwarf white steamer made its way to some destination. Far on the horizon, over the end of our island, lay the island of Yiaros — no, that could not be the horizon, for there was Euboea, dimly shaping up behind Yiaros, should you care to notice it. I became aware that we happened to be looking at one of the loveliest vistas in all the world. And somehow, consciously or unconsciously, a softly gleaming promontory thrusting out in our direction from the base of a cliff at land's end registered with me as holding some kind of clue to the nebulous thing I had come to the islands to find.

As we drove back from Mavri Raki, passing again at one point the isolated house from which John on a later occasion was able to give a lift to a woman just stung by a scorpion and get her to a doctor, I was awed at the labor that must have gone into the terracing of those wild slopes. Now they were already settling into deep shadow at their base.

In Homeric times there was said to be a king of Syros named Ktissias. One day his young son Eumaeus was carried off by Phoenician pirates to be sold as a slave on Ithaca, where he later became Odysseus' swineherd and served that wanderer well at the perilous time of his homecoming. As Eumaeus remembered Syros and told Odysseus of it, it was

> "an island . . . out beyond Ortygie, where the Sun turns in his course. It's not so very thickly peopled, though the rich land is excellent for cattle and sheep and yields fine crops of grapes and corn. Famine is unknown there and so is disease. No dreadful scourges spoil the islanders' happiness, but as the men of each generation grow old in their homes, Apollo of the Silver Bow comes with Artemis, strikes them with kindly darts, and lays them low."

I mused on this, gazing from our car window. Deeply as I appreciated the splendors of the land all around us, and more than willing as I was to imagine that there had been a better living in an earlier day, I still felt that Eumaeus could have been talking about the less rugged southern part of the island when he spoke those words.

* * *

The next day it began to blow.

We went up the Catholic hill to call on the brand-new mayor of Ano Syra and ask his help. Bikentiou Papitsis had taken office, he told us, only "fifteen days" before. (The expression, Greek enough, still called to mind how much of the tradition on this island and above all this hill was from the French — this rock from which, Bent tells us, the Catholic bishops for several hundred years made a desperate attempt to convert the Eastern

world to their ways of thinking.) Accordingly the mayor did not pretend to know very well as yet all the people who lived in the farther reaches of his extensive domain. But he said he would find out who owned the land that we indicated to him on his map, and would see if the owners would be interested in selling should anyone ask them.

Then that evening we bore down on the island of Paros as though the devil were behind us, for a gale from the north drove us on. The harbor at Paroikia, in spite of the protection it got from an arm of land, was an uneasy place in the twilight with the water so on the move. Disembarking passengers had to go ashore in small boats, and some of the older, less agile ones among them had my sympathy as they got ready to make their awkward jump.

With a crash one veteran landed on the seat of his pants. His feet waved in the air. Not to be outdone, the old woman with him immediately lost her bundle overboard. As this came dripping back on the end of a boathook, and some saw fit to laugh, Christ and the Virgin Mary were mentioned by both of them.

Soon it was time to think of our own discomfort as our ship labored across the northern side of the island and on to Naxos. Taking the howling wind now more or less directly abeam, the *Lemnos* rolled sickeningly if perhaps not as dangerously as I, for one, felt it was doing. We got to the island and town of Naxos late at night; walked unsteadily with our luggage the length of an impressive (tedious, it seemed to me) pier; asked where the hotel was in which we had reserved rooms; were guided up a dimly lighted back street to an unprepossessing-looking building; and went to bed.

Next day it blew harder. Somebody said it was now ten on the Beaufort scale. The air was a dirty mess of grit, relieved somewhat as you got near the bluff by a cooler admixture of salt sea spray.

"I came here to go back to the land," said Mag, spitting unsuccessfully, "but instead it's coming back to me."

"Don't put out that little hand in an awkward way," Peter warned her from the vantage ground of his greater age and experience," "or you'll lose that pretty arm, from the shoulder." Just then he lost the first of his floppy hats. After a few seconds during which we watched it go we saw it no more.

We wandered the nearby roads, looking at the wild sea close at hand and at the impressive mountains rising to three thousand feet in the distance. We saw the vestigial doorway of Ariadne's temple still standing on the headland linked to the shore beside the harbor, but could not get to it because of the heavy surf.

One thing was painfully obvious to John and me as soon as we got down to serious consideration of our timetable: the small islands off the steamship routes were necessarily *out*. To reach even Iraklia we would have to take a caique — assuming the sea would calm down enough to make that possible — and the time that would be required exceeded what we had to spare.

John Theocharopoulos, representative of the Mountainous Economy Service, was a busy man and a very businesslike one who had little use for visiting nonsense, but our introduction held good and he set aside a day to take us across and about that proud and beautiful island in his car. It was a drive to remember. Especially I like to think of the interior valleys where the wind no longer blew so strongly and groves of olives planted by the Venetians centuries ago vied for your praise with stone walls some of which truly deserve to be considered among the architectural wonders of the world.

We crossed the high range, vistas opening out in all directions, and descended to a point of land on the eastern coast. To the beach at the base of that point a very superior emery is brought for export, coming slowly in buckets that travel an overhead cable down from a mountain mine.

At a little *taverna* placed there they were all out of fish but we enjoyed the potatoes and made friends with two little girls of about ten, who thereupon agreed to pose for Peter's camera. One was plain, the other en-

chantingly beautiful. Peter and John began to calculate (and make rather light of, I thought) their age disparity. Perhaps, had she really been an island girl, one of them would have agreed to wait. But it turned out that she and her friend were only there on a short visit from Athens.

So we were left with just the Peter-Mag-John triangle, and there was not a great deal of fire in that.

On the dirt road running southward along that coast we met a shepherd who agreed to leave his flock, climb into our crowded car, and be our guide. Out of his right mind though we soon decided from his manner of speaking that he was, he located for us a wonderful tract of land which he knew could be bought. He even took us afterward to the house of the nephew of the owner, who wrote down for me the name and Athens address of that uncle, which I still have. The shepherd also answered my question about whether local custom would permit me to build a fence in order to exclude goats. I was little surprised at what he said, which came down to this: if you legally own the land, you do what you damn well choose.

John and I were deeply smitten by that land. It ran from the sea up a long, fairly gradual slope. Ascending this — threading our way among the head-high junipers, pines, and a host of bushy shrubs — we turned and saw a cluster of smallish islands standing in the middle distance, and beyond them high Amorgos. (Rhodes was invisible far behind Amorgos, with the crisis in Cyprus many leagues further off still and a bit to the left.)

Almost everything seemed to say that here was the place. Only — I felt as I stood there in the intoxicating sunlight — this land was perhaps too *good!* Certainly it was not as lush as the rich country that Francis Noel-Baker had driven me from Athens to see two weeks before in northern Euboea, but still it had the look of land that could not be far from its take-off into good farming use.

In their *Flowers of the Mediterranean*, Oleg Polunin and Anthony Huxley speak of the degradation of ever-

green forest into *maquis*, which in turn can be downgraded into *garigue* which, finally, if the exploitation continues, can become *steppe*. I did not have those precise distinctions clearly in mind at the time but, if I had had, I would probably have said that this vegetation was at least a low maquis, whereas the right thing for us would be the humbler Mediterranean garigue, known to the Greeks as *phrygana*. Garigue would obviously have much farther to go in the regeneration process. Quoting Polunin and Huxley:

> "Extensive arcas of the hottest and driest terrain are covered with garigue and it is easily distinguished by its low scattered bushes, rarely more than ½m. high, dotted over the hillsides, with bare patches of rock, sand or stony ground between. Many of the shrubs are spiny and have small leathery heather-like leaves often covered with woolly grey hairs; many are aromatic. . . . It is largely plants of the garigue which give so much colour to the Mediterranean spring landscape, but the sudden burst of flowering in April is soon followed by a dry and parched countryside with dead fruit heads and dry dusty-leaved shrubs."

Several hours later, our expedition having recrossed the mountains, at least two members of it were still lost in thought over what they had seen on the south-eastern side of the island.

I was also thinking about Theocharopoulos' grass seed problem. As far as Naxos was concerned, he had told us, the Mountainous Economy Service had decided to concentrate on building up cattle raising, sheep and goats for the most part. Much of the upland soil was rich, as we ourselves could tell (all but Mag. who was reading her book) from the heavy growth of thorn bushes — mainly *Poterium spinosum* and *Euphorbia acanthothamnos*, I imagine — that encumbered the higher slopes. But none of the grasses he had planted experimentally had seemed to thrive. Could I help him find some others? To enable him to make a trial this

year, he would have to have the seed in hand by November.

I took along when I left Naxos a list of those fourteen disappointing grasses, and I later did what I could through the Embassy in Athens and the FAO liaison office in New York. In October Mr. Roald Peterson, Chief of FAO's Pasture and Fodder Crop Branch in Rome, wrote to Jim Demetriadis in Athens, referring to this matter and attaching a further list of grasses and legumes

> "which might, after trials, be found suitable for grass and hay production. I think all these seeds should be available at the Hellenic Agricultural Research Station at Larissa, Greece. Might I suggest that your trials are conducted in conjunction with this experiment station, from whom you could obtain the seeds you require, together with expert advice on the preparation of a test plan and the observations necessary. If some of the seed varieties suggested are not available at Larissa, please let me know as we might possibly be able to supply them. May I also recommend that you make further trials with *Phalaris tuberosa* which I feel might have useful results."

What if anything came of these suggestions I have never heard. I have also since come to wonder whether the original grass seeds were really wrong or whether they were just not trampled in well enough. Any grass seeds tried out in such conditions, Israeli experts have told me (handing me at the same time yet a third list of suggested types), are difficult to establish. And so, no doubt, are some of the sophisticated botanical techniques those brilliant Israeli experts were talking about as I toured their memorable country, gaining firm friends and losing nothing very important except my passport.

Now our car left the main highway and threaded its way over what was scarcely more than a track between the hills. So we came again to the coast, and, at a point far to the west of where we had been before, we again saw a marvelous tract of coastal land said to be obtainable.

It was hard to say which land we really liked better. Each had its own appeal. This one had the advantage that there was no road at all along the rim of the water to keep you from communing with the sea and sky in perfect isolation. However, Theocharopoulos told us that there were plans to push ahead — if the public works money held out — and bring the circumferential road around the whole southern shore of the island. John and I imagined a stream of tourists just waiting for the moment of completion of that road, and it took us aback. We had come upon a second reason to hesitate over the land in Naxos.

On returning to our base in town we learned to our dismay that the *Myrtidiotissa* would not be making its weekly trip to Paros the following day, "so you can go next week instead."

This was quite out of the question for us — our limited vacation time would simply not permit it. Had we not learned the next morning that we would be able to get to Paros on the unscheduled steamer *Filippos* which would be making a special run on its way back from the Dodecanese Islands to drydock in Piraeus, we would have faced a crisis. As it was, thanks to this stroke of pure good luck, we had only one extra day to wait.

Mag, as it now transpired, was becoming a serious problem. The rest of us found her washing some of her things but she absolutely refused to wash ours.

Peter wandered off to the shops to carry forward his own peculiar experiment in weightlessness by buying another string bag. In Hermoupolis he had paid six drachmas. Here he managed to get one for five.

John cornered a supply of a picture postcard which showed some local citizens with donkeys and big baskets of melons and was captioned (in one of its four language versions) "Picturesque corn of the island." We sent this to everybody we could think of.

Then a taxi driver doing a slack business told Babi about a fabulous piece of land belonging to a friend of his that he knew we could get for very little money. We reassembled our forces and drove with him to have

a look at it. As I had hoped, it lay again to the south but fronted this time on a western coast, commanding a fine view of Paros and the strait between. But it also turned out to be a sandy waste — the only land we had so far seen that was too bad for us rather than too good.

Back in town, as the wind dropped later in the afternoon, the smell of very hot octopus drew itself forcibly to our attention. These delicacies were cooking that day in dozens of places along the quai — one on practically every stove, it seemed to me.

We dropped in at Theocharopoulos' office to say goodby, and I happened to speak of the fine protection that all the sites we had examined on the island had from the north wind.

"Ah, but the south wind can be terrible, too," he said. "The south wind is the one that comes to the land loaded with salt. Sometimes it will carry the salt even beyond the first line of hills. The south wind is a twister. I have seen it pick up potatoes right out of the fields," he said, "and carry them fifty metres."

* * *

We ought to have liked Paros, that gently yet handsomely shaped island in which the people are known to be kinder to strangers and from which the famous marble came. Everything I had heard predisposed me to like it, in fact to try to find there rather than anywhere else the thing we were seeking. But something happened to prevent. I think it was really our sense of the creeping tourism all about.

The outgoing and the incoming Agricultural Extension agents were helpful to us in turn, having had from Hermoupolis the word of our impending arrival and our mission, now supplemented by Babi's interpretation of what we could think of to say after we got there. By this time Babi in his consummate mastery of the forensics of our problem reminded me of Nick Triantaphyllidis back in Athens. John or I would start and Babi would listen long enough to catch the angle

we thought needed stressing to a new person or to the same person as the action unfolded. Then he would be off, giving the whole of our thought, chapter and verse. At least, if that is not what he did, we will never know.

We found one fine piece of land on the southern coast but that was all, though we drove to every corner of the island. And even on that land our first exhilaration died as we began to take seriously what we were being told about the bird shooting there. Apparently for some strange reason once or twice a year all the game birds migrating between Eastern Europe and Africa pass exactly over that particular piece of land, and all the sportsmen from throughout the Aegean assemble there to blaze away at them. Something approximating that must be the fact of the matter: we saw the old shotgun shells. I don't remember whether or not all the rabbits also gather underfoot.

So we turned to Antiparos, which lies to the west and, as its name would suggest, is over against Paros, separated from it by a rather narrow channel. Travelers are duly informed that this is a dull island, and for most purposes I have no doubt that it is. For our special purpose, on the other hand, it began to seem to have possibilities.

We rode down the channel in a small caique under power and sail, continuing then all the way to the relatively narrow part of Antiparos that finally ends in a lighthouse at its southern tip. On this neck of land we stepped ashore, and for several hours we climbed and wandered about on the varying levels of ground, meeting goats, peering over cliffs, feeling a growing fascination with the whole atmosphere of that lonely place. Finally our helmsman, a young boy with a bad skin cancer on his face, shouted to us to come back to the boat.

In our preoccupation we had not noticed that the wind had risen and that now the water was flecked with foam. Our long ride back in the teeth of a north wind blowing with near-gale force was rough indeed, and left all of us wet to the skin, shivering, and more or less ill.

Later John and I held a private session for the purpose of taking stock of the situation. First — as we summed things up to each other — we were interested in the land we had just seen. We therefore went back to the incoming Agricultural Extension agent and asked him to try to find out for us whether it might be for sale and whether, if so, it would be a likely place to find water by drilling. As to the latter point he, from our description of what the rocks looked like and his own recollection, said that he suspected it was.

Second, on the other hand, I had myself begun to wonder about the difficulties of such remoteness for people like us who had so little time. You could never be sure but what the weekly boat from Athens would have to bypass an island like Paros because of bad weather. Once landed, moreover, you would probably not find on the island the materials and equipment you needed for your operation. And then, what about the further logistical problems involved in getting yourself and all your supplies to the far place on Antiparos we now had in mind?

Before my eyes there floated, and not for the first time, a picture of that land we had seen in the distance from below the Syringas spring.

"John, I think that I really like the look of that place on Syros the best. It would not be so hard to reach from America either."

John concurred. We agreed to return to Syros at once and spend there what little time we still had. Luckily, the regular boat would be going there in the morning.

The regular boat, we learned to our horror, had broken down. We might have known it!

Yet again we were destined to be fantastically lucky. No one should ever be advised to expect such luck. The small freighter *Maria* which could be seen in the harbor unloading some cargo by lighter was due to finish and start for Hermoupolis by three. The captain agreed to take us along. We could hope to be there by dark.

Just before we left Paros, Peter bought a string bag

for four drachmas and I bought my Paros hat — a blue cloth cap of some distinction which everyone who has seen me wear it has been maligning steadily ever since.

3

The Coming to Grips

We found rooms this time at the Hermes. Up next morning by five-thirty, we walked down a small street or two irregularly punctuated with cats and were shortly having breakfast with Frieda at Costa's. My guess is we were his first customers of the day. Nescafe, zwieback, and strawberry jam composed our meal. We also bought from Costa some grapes in a bag for later, and at a candy booth we acquired some small bars of chocolate.

Soon the six of us, including now also Babi, had boarded a bus and were making the run to Kini, a fishing village which lies on the island's west coast. The local transportation company has no more scenic ride to offer than this one. When the visibility is good, as it was for us then, you can see from one or another loop of that road a dozen or so of the islands that lie in a ring about Syros. As we crossed the high saddle we had a fine retrospective view of the mountainous shapes of Paros and Naxos.

By prearrangement with Frieda, to whom I had phoned from Paros the day before, saying among other things that I had only three days left and could not afford to take any chances with the weather, Yani was already waiting for us at Kini with the *Anna*. The manoeuver here involved — which needn't have been used on that occasion, with the wind so light — costs the skipper and his boat extra mileage but gives you a

shorter and usually a more sheltered ride to where we were going.

Descending from the bus we skirted the harbor and climbed aboard from the rocks. Yani had the neck and eyes of a young bull. His front teeth were missing. He started his diesel engine, pulled up the anchor, and got us quickly under way. In his dungarees and gray pullover shirt he was the personification of quiet alertness and strength. Soon our thirty-foot boat with its star painted on the bow to ward off the evil eye settled into an eight-mile pace northward along the rugged coast.

The *Anna* had slipped through the narrow channel inside the big rock known as Barbarousa, and had already brought us quite close to our target area, when Frieda made a remark that bothered John and me a little even at the time.

"If the *grammata* are right on your land, there will maybe not be the possibility for you to buy it."

On the battered old map which used to hang on the wall in Frieda's office (I have it now) two areas in the northern part of the island are circled in red. One is Halandriani; the other, Grámmata. Both are archeological sites. The tourist folder which you can pick up from the rack in any of the usual accredited versions—Greek, French, German, and English — deals with the first of these sites succinctly thus:

> "Halandriani: An ancient town of Cycladian civilization, in the North-eastern side of the island. The walls of its acropolis (Kastri) are still standing together with a large number of tombs. Communication by sea, by motor-boat (6 miles), or by land through Ano Syra. Carriage road and thence a footpath."

The tourist folder is silent on what is to be found at Grámmata and how to get there. Moreover the circle red-pencilled on Frieda's map gives only a pretty general indication of the location of those old inscriptions. As to what they were, we understood from her that mostly they were messages to Poseidon — prayers for

someone's safety at sea and thanks for having allowed someone else to escape shipwreck with his life. We decided that at any rate we had better begin our exploration by pinning down exactly where they were.

So we throttled down and proceeded slowly along the base of that luminous great cliff facing in the direction of the boats that come from Piraeus. The water here was a very clear dark blue, with the look of being miles deep. A sea bird skimmed the gently heaving surface. High above us on the cliff's perpendicular face an occasional green plant stood out surprisingly from a small ledge or crevice, proving that it could draw its sustenance from that rock and the air.

We proceeded all the way to the vicious-looking reef at the island's extreme northwestern tip, known by a name that looks at first glance like "diapers," an ugly and a likely place to end up in a wreck.

Still, peer as we might at every rock face that could have carried an inscription, we found absolutely nothing. It was clear that even our chief experts on Syros, Yani and Frieda, were at a loss.

Two crows flew raggedly past us, one of them cawing hoarsely.

Finally it began to dawn on all of us that no shipwrecked sailor, once saved from the clutches of the sea, would be such a fool as to put himself a second time into jeopardy by chiseling his thanks on any of the treacherous, more or less vertical rock faces we had been examining. No, the inscriptions had to be somewhere else — probably on the sloping inner side of the promontory, within the sheltered bay.

So the *Anna* turned to retrace her course.

We were part way back to the promontory when Yani called attention to a goat standing on next to nothing some forty feet up the sheer cliff.

"Oh, the poor thing!" cried Mag. "Let's go and help it."

Mag was an exponent of the technique of not showing interest in anything, but the goat had startled her out of it. The leading idea behind that technique is that by concealing your interest you gain points whereas by revealing it you would let somebody else gain some.

Peter was just explaining that goats do pretty well by themselves when this one, startled by a shrill whistle from Yani, proved the point by jumping from the difficult spot he was on to an impossible one higher up.

Actually, for a person, Mag was pretty good on the rocks herself. That is to say, she walked and climbed in rough country as well as any of the rest of us. My own chief worry for her was that some day she might beeome even more absorbed by the book she was reading and step right off some high point into empty space.

Passing now the place where the cliff broke sharply down to a lower level, we continued along the outer side of the promontory as it gradually lost its remaining height; then we doubled back to the left around the point which barely stood out above the surface of the sea, and entered the quiet bay. With the wind coming from the north, and light as it then was, the quiet of the water in that sheltered place was phenomenal. It cast on us a deep spell.

Running slowly along the inside of the rock not many yards away, we soon spotted the old inscriptions.

Or rather, what we spotted first, from the boat, was some fairly new inscriptions, since these were much more sharply etched and visible. Once we had tied up to the marble rock and climbed ashore, however, we found a number of old ones, too, intermingled with the new ones dating from 1937 and 1873 and so on back — including the name of Babi's own great-great-grandfather inscribed there in 1859.

The dim old ones were chiseled in varying styles which, to the archeologist we saw ourselves coming back with some day, would doubtless disclose their origins as well as their meaning. But the smooth sloping marble surface had blistered and peeled under many centuries of wind and water until it seemed that not very much of what man had written there still remained. We ourselves could only wonder whether any of it had been there since the time of Homer or earlier, as was supposed to be the case.

From the smooth rock we made our way across broken surfaces where the pitch or the quality of the rock was not the same, so that the weathering had produced a radically different result, and past a place where it was clear that the marble had not long before been quarried. Then we proceeded to the land — the stony hills to which the cliff and the promontory were, after all, only a splendid signature.

The land rose quite steeply to hills some five hundred feet high, marked dramatically in places with outcrops of light or dark rock and elsewhere peppered in varying degrees of liberality with smaller boulders and stones. The basic colors now, near the end of the long dry season, were grey and brown. There were no trees.

On the slopes grew many bushes of thyme, about a foot high, as well as several types of thorn bush, the usual one having an arrangement of thorns that looked like a chemist's diagrammatic conception of a molecule. Quite common, too, were the highly aromatic little shrubs of sage. Here and there out of an enormous onion-like bulb arose a long spike; this, we concluded, must be a kind of squill. There were many other small plants besides to which we were not prepared to give a name.

The bees were making a pleasing sound, especially around the thyme. As we clambered about in this landscape, going with considerable care on the downgrades on account of the loose small stones, we found beehives in the ravines and here and there a goat shelter, generally half cave, half piled-up stones. In one such shelter, where we expected to find the usual goat droppings, we were nonplussed to see a mound of snail shells instead.

We found no fresh water — not in the spot marked *nero* on Frieda's old map nor anywhere else.

The black, volcanic rocks on some of the heights contrasted with the white outcrops of marble in other places. Some of this marble was a lovely shade and could no doubt serve well to beautify structures built by man. Indeed on a somewhat higher slope in the middle distance we could see the handsome, creamy-

looking spillover from a marble quarry, reminding me of another one noticed on the way up from Kini, said to be a source of marble for the recently completed Athens Hilton hotel.

We could also see quite distinctly, well up on the side of Mount Syringas, the minutely small distant buildings and vineyard that marked the Syringas spring. Thus we could interlink our thoughts with those we had had a week earlier when gazing down from there to where we stood now.

Due south of us, on to and far beyond Kini, the coast line of Syros swelled and dipped in a fascinating line.

Right down in Grámmata Bay, meanwhile, Yani with his fins on was thrashing the water for fun and exercise in the manner of a swimming champion, which in fact he had been. After we got down to the little beach at the base of the promontory, however, we saw little of him but his snorkel until he later emerged with his spear, some fish to take home for supper, and a couple of fan-shaped molluscs.

So we ourselves swam. The many-colored grains of sand on that little beach were just the right size. I thought, too, that I had never swum in such silky water.

Afterwards we ate our grapes and our chocolate and lay on the beach in oniy a rather cursory way, since the responsible members of the party at any rate realised that there was work to be done. Soon we were again assembled on the *Anna*. Its motor coughed briefly and then came on strong.

There were several adjacent coves. We had poked into two or three of those other inlets, examining the shore line and the depth of the water, when the serious business took over. The opportunity for it presented itself in the form of a man and his girl fishing with long bamboo poles from a point of rock. After quite a lengthy colloquy with the man, conducted in shouts, Frieda turned to us non-Greek-speakers and in her bouncy voice explained:

"He says that the land you want is owned by three brothers and two brothers."

We continued back to Kini digesting this piece of information. And as we sped along each of us in his or her fashion noted also the look of the sky and the water and the land, the feel of the sun, the smell of thyme drifting out to us now and again from the shore.

At Kini we drew up chairs in front of a café by the beach, and the serious consultations began.

It surely seems reasonable to suppose that someone — either Frieda or Babi — must have tipped off the restaurant owner after we got there as to who the rest of us were and what we wanted. However, for all that I myself could actually make out, he knew all about us before we even arrived. And so, apparently, did the short, baldish, horny-handed man with enormous thumbs who joined us a moment later.

Be that as it may, little time was lost getting down to the essentials. The restaurant owner reported — Babi translated for us — that the mayor of Ano Syra had spoken to the landowners but had failed in his efforts to persuade them to think of selling.

"What are you doing?" Babi asked me suddenly. I found I was thoughtfully stroking the top of my head where it had collided with the cabin roof of the *Anna* when I went in too carelessly to get the suntan oil out of my pack. According to my wife, the scar from this still shows.

Frieda quickly took charge of the conference. She spoke at considerable length, and some of the fine points she was making undoubtedly failed to come through in the interpretation. Nevertheless it was clear to all of us that what she was saying had the emphatic approval of the restaurant owner and of the man with the enormous thumbs, and that what it came down to was the proposition that we would have to use devious means to gain our objective.

"This is how you must do it in Greece. It's different."

Babi tried at first to argue the point. It's amazing how a few years spent in England can incapacitate a Greek. He even thought that John and I could go straight to the landowners and ask them.

"Let's go to them and talk Turkey," I whispered to John, quoting from an anecdote of World War II involving Mr. Molotov among others. The beautiful inappropriateness of this particular phrase for use among the Greeks had made it an old joke between us.

Indicative of how far Babi had gone astray in his thinking is this bit of perspective on such matters provided by Ernle Bradford. The clarification is given just at the point in his *Ulysses Found* where Calypso has reluctantly agreed to help Ulysses escape from her island:

> "Suspicious to the last, Ulysses does not hesitate to say that in suggesting he make a raft and embark on the high seas, the goddess may have something other than his survival in mind. His suspicion of her motives only confirms him in her affections. Anyone who has ever lived in the Levant will recognise the respect that is everywhere accorded to guile and craftiness. The qualities which are supposedly embodied in King Arthur, Charlmagne, or Abe Lincoln are not those which are held in the greatest reverence in the eastern Mediterranean. Some of Ulysses' actions which may seem to us despicable rather than admirable would have been viewed quite differently by Homer's audience — or, indeed, by a group of Aegean islanders to this day."

"The Catholic Father is the one who knows the farmers best," Frieda was repeating. "If they are religious, we'll use him; if they're not, we won't."

Finally even Babi saw the error in his own ideas. Frieda had prevailed completely. The meeting was over.

* * *

By then it must have been about three o'clock in the afternoon. We had some *pastitsio* and beer and caught the bus back to Hermoupolis, where John disappeared into one of the innumerable barbershops in the town to get a proper shave.

At five-thirty, dressed now in town clothes, he and I foregathered with Babi and Frieda in her convenient office. Babi looked slightly more *soigné*, we found, than we did, and Frieda a great deal more so. Babi's trousers were pressed and his shirt properly laundered — I wanted to ask him where. Frieda in her suit and scarf seemed to have just emerged from a store on Fifth Avenue.

At five-thirty-five Father Demetrius roared up on his motorcycle and paced into the room, obviously not at all hampered either astride or afoot by his sandals or his long brown hooded Capuchin robe bound with a clothesline belt.

"*Buon giorno*," he said, shaking hands firmly as we were introduced.

He was a wiry man of around forty, not tall, blessed with abundance of energy which showed in his rapid movements and in the keen eyes behind his tinted horn-rimmed glasses. His long dark beard was only slightly tinged with grey. He carried a long cigarette holder which he immediately drew out and started to fit with a cigarette from another pocket.

"Ah, thank you," he said, as John beat him to the draw by proferring an American cigarette. As we soon discovered, "thank you" was all the English he had.

Somehow he made me think of a figure escaped from one of El Greco's paintings, but whether this impression owed more to the general resemblance or to some contrasts I am not sure.

"*Ti geeneteh*" (what's up?), he asked, taking us all in with his glance.

Frieda, the other Catholic present, kept still and let Orthodox Babi do the talking. From time to time the Capuchin Father asked a question, the tone of his voice raising some doubt in my mind as to how favorably he regarded the whole matter. But the briefing process and the decision-making were soon at an end.

"I'll help you," he told Babi and Babi told us.

The restaurant owner from Kini arrived just then to say something significant to Frieda and Babi. I never learned what it was. Probably the reason I forgot to

ask was that John and I were at that moment looking at a letter from our consultant Elias which had been handed to me at the hotel a few minutes earlier. When we were in Naxos, Elias had been passing through Athens, and now here was the answer from his Uncle George to my question as to what we should do — so help us — about a lawyer.

(The colloquy on this subject had all along been running more or less like this: *I:* "We'll need a lawyer, won't we?" *Respondent:* "Well, yes, unfortunately.")

"My uncle," wrote Elias, "recommends a Mr. Markos Provelengios who is a notary in Syra, which in the Greek sense is just the sort of man for the job. In addition, my uncle says he is a Roman Catholic and likely to have influence with the landowners near Ano Syra. Mention my uncle's name."

So here was our answer. I turned to Babi to ask him how we could get in touch with this man, but was diverted from asking the question by a face that appeared at the window. The face disappeared and then immediately reappeared because the owner of the face — Markos Provelengios, it just so happened — walked into the room.

Provelengios was a man of short stature with a look of sobriety and honesty tinged with shrewdness and wrapped in a slight smile. Babi went over the ground again with him, explaining our fifty-year soil-building plan. He expressed incredulity.

"Mr. Provelengios wonders if it is not rather a question of your having found oil," Babi reported. "There has been talk of new oil possibilities in the papers recently."

It was always difficult when encountering this attitude to avoid feeling like an unmasked boy scout. I tried to say something to cancel that impression and yet at the same time paradoxically reassert that we had no hidden motives at all when Father Demetrius broke in, luckily sparing Babi an impossible translation job.

"We must go to see the owners at once," he said, tapping his wrist watch. "Tomorrow morning they will probably be coming down to town, but we will have to

talk to them before that. Let us start immediately." And out he went and off he roared on his motorcycle, leaving John and me to notify (but not invite) Peter and Mag, rejoin Babi in the square, and start along in a taxi after the Father.

There was no time then for us to be asked up to the Father's rooms just below the Cathedral of St. George crowning the Ano Syra hilltop. John and I were to marvel at his eagle's nest on a crag, with its unsurpassed surveillance (helped, too, by binoculars) over everything down in Hermoupolis, but that came later. On this oceasion Father Demetrius, earrying a briefease, emerged from a gate at the next-to-the-top bend in the road just as we reached it. There he at once climbed into our eab and told the driver to proceed as rapidly as possible.

After the concrete road past Mount Pyrgos, the dlrt. We were on the same course to Syringas as on the earlier oceasion. (Maybe Syringas was the higher of the two mountains; our maps disagreed with each other on that.) Again the wild beauty of the land. But the sun was setting, and I wondered how we would make out. I thought laboriously and came up with an Italian phrase, appropriate to the years that the Father had spent in Palermo as a student. After losing the thread of his voluble reply, I shifted to French, which killed our conversation, he being even less adept at that than I.

We were nearing the end of the road when we overtook an old man on a donkey. The donkey was earrying sacks, baskets, and cans in addition to the man.

"That's one of them," said the Father. The figure of the donkey reacted with noticeable slowness when hailed, but an instant later we had all descended from the cab and Father Demetrius had the figure engaged in earnest conversation. Out of the briefcase came a map.

"Can you read a map?" "I assume you can read a map," Babi translated for us. The rest of the conversation was lost to us for the moment, but very soon we were advancing up the road on foot (we were so near the end

of it), followed by the man on his donkey, and he in turn by the cab, and then we learned that things appeared to be going *molto bene*. At least it seemed that old Barba Yiorgi was himself not unwilling to sell. The question, he told his young Father, was up to his friend, the other owner, and we should call on him.

At the end of the road our procession paused only long enough for John and Father Demetrius to slap each other's backs in recognition of a highly successful venture John had just made in Greek. Then, all but the taxi which settled down for a wait, we proceeded on a donkey path that veered to the right (away from the trail to Syringas) and worked its way counterclockwise around the steep shoulder of another mountain.

The Father set a sizzling pace. It was a long mile and a rough walk, up and down over large smooth stones for the most part, with here and there a cushlon of donkey dung. I wished for my other shoes. Fortunately there was still light enough to see by, a little. Somewhere below us, I knew, were the ruins of Halandriani of 2000 B.C. Across a dozen miles of water lay Tinos, with lights beginning to come on by the shore. Near our side a boat was heading for port; we heard its toot when it reached the chapel of St. Demetrius a bit later; Babi told me it was the *Despina*.

Babi and I were stumbling along somewhat behind the Father and John, though ahead of Barba Yiorgi on his donkey. At one point we caught up momentarily to hear the Father say *scusi* as he lifted his skirts to the side of the path while John stooped discretely and tied a shoelace.

Finally we reached slightly less precipitous land and a farmhouse. We entered the yard. Father Demetrius called out loudiy several times, to no apparent effect. Barba Yiogi went jogging by, heading for his own more remotely situated abode. From where I stood, the cat on the stucco wall beside the door was sqnarely in front of the crescent moon. The a motherly woman came to the door and invited us in.

We entered a small low-ceilinged parlour furnished

with some plain chairs, a table, and a couch. On the wall hung a small mirror and a number of religious pictures. The table held a kerosene lamp, water jug, glasses, and a combination salt-and-pepper shaker. Plastic curtains covered the window.

Mrs. Voutsinos asked us to be seated, filled the glasses with *ouzo*, and brought them to us. She was like a Vermont housewife, as John remarked afterwards.

In the doorway leading into the dark of the room beyond stood a shy boy perhaps seven or eight years old, gazing with fascination at Father Demetrius' flashlight. Behind him was a beautiful girl whose age I guessed at thirteen; in her thin frock she looked older. A finely drawn nose divided two olive-shaped eyes.

Two men — one short and one tall — nudged the children aside, entered, and sat down between Father Demetrius and Babi. The talking began. First the Father talked. Then cigarettes were exchanged, and Babi took his turn at it, with Father Demetrius interrupting to amplify now and again. There was, of course, no opportunity here for any rendition into English; I simply had to guess at the purport of the words and the impact they might be having.

I could see from the look on the first man's face, however, that things were going well. He became more and more convinced, and finally said (I feel sure of it, though I didn't understand a word) that he would go along with the idea of selling us the land. Unfortunately, however, it was the wrong one who had been convinced: this short man, as the Father told us later, was only a cousin who happened to be staying in the house but had nothing to say about the matter at issue.

Now the tall, powerful-looking man unclasped his bony hands, which were, I believe, without exception the largest hands I have ever seen, and, deepening the habitual slightly pained expression on his face, began to speak in the whining voice of an old lion with a miserable thorn in his paw. Clearly he was objecting. Father Demetrius and Babi exchanged glances and then both of them began to talk some more, now singly and

now both together, without ever letting Antonios (Big Hands) finish having his say. Another one who talked simultaneously too was the wife: she kept telling her husband to listen to the Father.

The shadows cast by the lamp danced about the walls in a fascinating way, especially a shadow that seemed to have a two-foot beard and a yard-long cigarette holder. And as the shadows danced the voices rose.

Big Hands was not a bad talker in his own whining and repetitive way but eventually he had to give up. An enormous educational advantage lay with his adversaries, and with sheer talk, it seemed to me, they beat him down. Silence enveloped us at last. After a while Babi explained quietly to John and me that it had been agreed that we should all meet in town the next morning to discuss terms, and then walk the land on Sunday to see the boundaries.

We filed out, said thank you and good-by at the gate, and headed back along the donkey path. The night was inky black by now. Father Demetrius pointed his flashlight down and a little back, which made things all right for him and for John at his heels, and also more or less all right for Babi and me as long as we managed to stay immediately behind John. Given the terrain and the Father's speed, however, that was anything but easy, and, if we had stumbled some before, we floundered now.

When we reached the road and our taxi I noticed for the first time the pattern of the numerous lights in the several towns across the water on Tinos. I also looked at my watch, remembering my promise to telephone to my wife that evening in Athens at seven o'clock, and saw that it was now eight-thirty.

During the ride back to Hermoupolis Babi jubilantly declared that he was almost certain that the land was as good as ours.

When I finally phoned from the Hermes Hotel to the Grand-Bretagne in Athens, Sherleigh told me that her book and her broken ankle were both progressing, and that she was taking the call seated on the stairs just below the mezzanine where the telephone switch-

board is loeated. Her expectation of my call was indeed the only reason why the management had given her this grandstand view of the full-dress-and-medals party in honor of young King Constantine and his affianced Princess Anne-Marie which was then in progress. Somehow I could not properly appreciate at the time — not that is mattered much — what she was telling me about that resplendent affair, nor did she on her part really seem to get the picture of the donkey trail out on the mountain.

4

The Climax

On Saturday, day number two, I was reaching for the *logariasmo* (check) for our collective breakfast when Costa smilingly stated — and John decoded the remark — "so you're buying the land up at Grámmata."?

We watched a man stop massaging the octopus he had in a large tin can and change over to slamming it again and again on the edge of the quai. After that we returned to the hotel, threading our way through the usual assortment of cats. It was still quite early, so there was time to waste waiting for the Father and Babi to arrive at nine. John and I went with them to another cafe, unfamiliar to us.

Not much was said over our coffee there. A man in a Panama hat came in and gave us a conspiratorial look. Then he said a few words to Babi in a low voice and went out.

"That was a cousin of Barba Yiorgi, the man on the donkey," Babi told us. "He agrees that the old man would be crazy if he didn't sell you his land."

Was Panama Hat giving us the tip-off, I wondered, or was this just his own private opinion?"

From the café we walked several blocks and entered through the street door into the room reserved for our negotiations. At a glance it seemed to be partly a shop and partly an office. (One side, John found out, was a Singer Sewing Machine agency, the other the head-

quarters of the agent's cousin, who did a commission merchant's business in cloth throughout the islands.)

After we had sat for a while a fine-looking woman with a strong face and intelligent eyes entered the room casually, followed by Barba Yiorgi. He was immaculately dressed in a store suit and vest, collarless shirt, and Panama hat — which he kept on. We exchanged greetings.

As we waited for the others, I noticed that whenever Babi or Father Demetrius addressed a remark to Barba Yiorgi, the Old Man would shake his head in a dazed sort of way before replying, as if he had been hit on the chin. He did not seem to be hard of hearing but just, you might call it, hard of thinking. On the other hand, it was clear from the start that his wife Marigoula was anything but that.

Next entered the cousin whom we had glimpsed at the café, but again he didn't stay long. Since the *agent's* cousin was supposedly in Tinos at the time and the agent himself had by now dropped out to give us the place to ourselves, that made six of us sitting against the walls of the room so far.

Antonios Voutsinos (Big Hands) was evidently taking his time — I could sense some general irritation over it — but eventually he arrived, dressed with the same extreme neatness as Barba Yiorgi, and the meeting got started. His wife, our hostess of the previous evening, did not stay with us but came back into the room at intervals in the course of her shopping.

To me it began to sound after half an hour as though we were running through last night's performance all over again, except that most of the talking was now being done by Big Hands (whining a little) and by Marigoula, rather than by our side. But one or two new questions did emerge. For instance, Barba Yiorgi had an idea, according to Marigoula, that we wanted the land for tourism — for a hotel and so on; or possibly we wanted it as the site on which to erect a factory. Babi told them no, we wanted to rebuild the soil.

After a while their side asked our side to go out so

as to give them a chance to agree among themselves on an asking price. We found another cafe just across the street and killed a few minutes standing around there before returning. John bought some chicklets.

I had naturally been anticipating the next moment for quite a long time. I was prepared to deal with an asking price perhaps double what such remote, undeveloped land was said to be generally worth on Paros or Naxos. Which is to say that I was clearly not prepared to deal with reality. On behalf of all of them Barba Yiorgi named a price per *stremma* that was a multiple of that double figure. It was staggering.

"Babi, tell them that it's impossible and fantastic."

Babi did so — with personal conviction, too, I could see.

"Tell them they must have been thinking of land near town, not land that's miles away from anywhere. I might conceivably pay what they ask if I wanted just a small piece of land right near town — say near Kini."

He did so but substituted, I noticed, "New York" for "Kini."

"Tell them I know I'm crazy to want their worthless, stony land at all, but I'm not *that* crazy."

Babi gave an exact rendition of the "crazy but not *that* crazy" part of this statement, and I had a suspicion that the intended irony of the word in my own use of it might have been lost on the farmers.

We seemed to bog down at this point, but shortly, of course, they asked me what I would offer.

I made an offer of one-fifth of their asking price.

They came down to two-thirds.

Babi and Father Demetrius now both put up a tremendous struggle for us on their own. We had, contrary to any rumors, not found uranium on their land. Onassis might be able to pay such a price, but not people like us.

I raised my offer to one-third.

I felt that this combination might have proved effective, had it not been for Marigoula. But she, it appeared, and hence the others, were adamant.

She and Barba Yiorgi left. Our farewells with them were polite but rather cool.

Then Father Demetrius had another go at Voutsinos, who seemed perhaps still open to some persuasion. After a while Big Hands said that, if the decision were his alone to make, he might come down; his brothers, however, were joint owners with him, and he had agreed with them on the two-thirds figure as the absolute bottom.

The Father persisted. Big Hands said nothing. I said: "Look, I will meet you part way. I will give you . . ." (and I raised my bid per *stremma* by thirty per cent, to not quite two-thirds of their two-thirds figure). "But that is absolutely my final offer. I will not go any higher. If you don't agree to that, then I'm through, and you may keep your land forever, as far as I'm concerned."

He left saying that he would ask his brothers and would send word back to the Father.

The Father helped himself liberally to the chicklets John re-discovered that he had. We agreed that, in order to save precious time, the Father as soon as he got word from Voutsinos would telephone Frieda and ask her to come around to the hotel to tell John and me.

I thought that I had a fairly clear picture of how matters really stood until Babi a moment later gave us some additional briefing. The most interesting part of the correction of what I had supposed had occurred had to do with the reason why the Old Man and Marigoula had broken up the bargaining session. Big Hands, Babi said, had suddenly suggested *doubling* the asking price, at which Barba Yiorgi had said "they'll never pay that" and had got up to go.

* * *

Well, the die was cast and certain arrangements had to be made, before my departure, for managing our affairs on Syros once the farmers said yes. Admittedly the chances of their *ever* saying yes seemed dim to me at that moment.

First we went to the notary's office, located in a fine old high-ceilinged building with a well in the center running up two stories, rather like the hold of a ship. A step through the door to the right disclosed Markos Provelengios seated behind a large desk completely surrounded by old photographs and old-looking books of records. A bright electric light bulb in a porcelain shade dangled above him by a long wire. He found the price that the farmers were asking for their land to be (screwing up his face) very high. To ascertain this had been an incidental purpose of our visit.

The main purpose, however, was to ask him to prepare a power of attorney for me under which Babi's father, Anarghiros, would be able to act for me in regard to the land in my absence.

Anarghiros, my contemporary in years more or less, a man of honesty, dignity, firmness, and discretion, had from the first mention of the possibility by Babi struck John and me as exactly the man for the job. If anybody was not going to talk too much, it was Anarghiros. He was a man we liked. He was available because, having seriously injured an arm years before while working for one of the big shipping companies of Greece, his work had gradually tapered off and he now had considerable free time. He also spoke a few words of English which he recalled from the months he had once spent in England and which he constantly refreshed (indeed, as we were to learn, constantly added to) whenever either of his two English-speaking sons, of whom Babi was the younger, returned to Syros for a visit.

While we were still going over this matter with Provelengios, Frieda entered. Apart from managing tourism on the island, arranging passages on boats, getting tourists out of jail when necessary, and so on, Frieda, as far as we were concerend, was also the local communications center. Our letters were addressed to us in care of her office. Now she reported that there was a telegram for me from my wife which she had left at the hotel and that in it my wife said that she would wait for me in Athens but please to hurry. Everybody appreciated

this, as was evident from the general laughter.

We accompanied Frieda to her office, to which she then summoned a young surveyor, the man we hoped we would soon — perhaps tomorrow — be needing. He didn't when he arrived look to me very much like George Washington or indeed like anyone else who had ever been out of a city into the open spaces. However, he undertook to come with us to Grámmata to work out the boundaries of our land if the deal went through.

I had my eye on the clock and cut this discussion quite short so as to get to the bank before it closed for the week-end. Anarghiros was with us by now, and he and I and Babi and John were soon at the Commercial Bank of Greece, Syros Branch, holding an earnest discussion with the manager. The upshot of this discussion was that I made a payment of 100 drachmas (about £1.30 or $3.33) to open an account, acquired a pass book as evidence of that fact, and established the essential proposition that Anarghiros as well as I would be able to draw from this account once the power of attorney was executed — and, to be sure, once this seed money had grown into something perceptibly larger.

Peter and Mag had not yet given up completely — I don't know why — so the four of us did in the end get together for lunch. The worst of all such great, momentous affairs as those in which John and I had now become so tightly enmeshed is that they ruin companionship.

More specifically, for almost the last twenty-four hours Peter and Mag had been deprived of their share in the excitement, I had been deprived of the pleasure of seeing them, and John had been deprived of his legitimate place in the previously mentioned triangle.

"Peter," I said, pouring another round of beer and thinking of my own earlier remark about being crazy but not that crazy, "I'm afraid we're in danger of getting a funny reputation around here. Do you have to take that bush with you when you leave on the boat? It won't help any."

He with an artist's eye had found at Grámmata the most beautiful, practically petrified, big dislodged thyme

bush, all silvery grey from having been long dead in that atmosphere, and signed off, so to speak, at the bottom with a root the twist of which surpassed the imagination. This he was saying he was going to take back with him to Woodbridge, Connecticut. I could just see the people on the dock, and then on the boat to Piraeus, trying to be kind to an inoffensive, that is, nonviolent person who was definitely off his rocker and who belonged to the party of the man who wanted to pay fantastic prices for worthless land.

On the other hand I could also sympathize with Peter, inasmuch as he was having no luck at all trying to buy a string bag for three drachs. What the shopkeepers all told him was that they cared not at all about his experience in the other islands; their price was still six drachs ("the same," one of them added, "as you paid me for it last week.")

I still served the party as banker. "How much do you owe me? let's see. The whole lunch came to eighty-six drachs including service, and I gave the waiter another four, which makes ninety. So it's twenty-two and a half, call it twenty-two each. Thanks, Peter, here's your eight back in change. Thanks, John. Let's see, Mag, you didn't want any grapes today, so let's call it twenty for you. Then there's the sixty-eight you owe me from before, or eighty-eight altogether. You only have seventeen? All right, I'll take seventeen if you like and we'll carry the seventy-one. You'd rather borrow from John? Okay, I'll take what he has there, so you can owe him fifty and your debt to the bank is now down to twenty-one."

John and I had to dash off after this to pay a courtesy call on the mayor of Hermoupolis. Anarghiros had set the appointment up, and together with him we mounted the grand marble steps into the enormous town hall, continued on up an impressive interior staircase to the landing on the second floor, and entered the offices where the Honorable Stavros J. Vafias, a tall, quiet man with an expressive face, was still, that Saturday afternoon, at work. Greeting us in excellent English he asked

us about the state of our project. Regrettably, since (as of course we knew) the land was not in his district but in Ano Syra, he could not intervene for us directly. But he wished us good luck all the same, would greatly welcome any opportunity to be of help, and hoped we would be returning to Hermoupolis often.

We in turn asked him about the current problems of his administration. Near the head of the list was the question of how to get more water, expecially now since some of the town's biggest wells were turning salty. The small island of Symi at the southern end of the Dodecanese, just off the Turkish coast, was on the point of inaugurating the first solar still in Europe. This would convert sea water into fresh water fit for drinking. Desalination, Mayor Vafias said, might well be the answer for Hermoupolis too.

* * *

No word came from the farmers that day. In fact the whole remainder of Saturday passed without any event. Unless you could call it an event that John and I, putting two and two (bits of what we had heard and seen) together, began to realise that the feeling of lack of confidence — and perhaps also jealousy — between our friends of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox faiths ran pretty deep. When the French in the Middle Ages, and then on down to, and after, the Independence struggle, lent their protection to this island, enabling it among other things to become the most Catholic island of the archipelago, they really sowed a small wind as far as our Grámmata project was concerned.

To believe the Orthodox thinkers, Father Demetrius was a man of frivolous habits who should not be trusted. To listen to the Catholics, Anarghiros was tactless and not the right man to operate as our agent. Assuming that both groups knew what they were talking about, John and I should obviously have stayed at home, or at least not come to Syros.

We paid a social call that evening on Babi, his father

and mother, and his vigorous grandmother in their house a little way up the hill, where we were received with gracious hospitality. The house, formerly the property of a rich doctor and now owned by his son who lived in Athens, boasted a parlour with a high ceiling resplendently painted by two artists who had come from Milan. The grandmother, we were to learn some time later, had been widowed after little more than a year of married life when her husband went up a mast in an effort to help an older man in trouble and fell to the bottom of the ship through an open hatch. The paternal grandfather, like some five thousand other people, died of starvation on Syros during World War II.

Sunday morning we got the word from Father Demetrius in person. In a brief note two Voutsinos brothers had said: "For the mountain, we do not agree." And Barba Yiorgi Dalezios had written on the same piece of paper: "I don't agree on the price, neither am I prepared to sell the land."

We held a council of war. Father Demetrius felt that the farmers would come around in the end. At any rate, he would talk to them again on Monday and would tell them that they should sell because it would bring economic benefits to the whole island to have us carry out the plan we had in mind. If no results could be achieved by Thursday, he would quit.

Babi said something about an idea that had come up of speaking to the butcher to whom all the farmers at the north end of the island sold their sheep and their goats. Economic sanctions! The Father with some vehemence said never mind, the farmers would listen to him; they were faithful (Babi in an aside to John said they were just thick-headed) and they depended on him to tell them what they should do. Listening to all this, I suddenly realized that I was not quite up to the point of wanting to have anybody denied his last rites just on our account.

Then and ever since I have of course been quite keenly interested in everybody's views about the price I had finally agreed to offer for the land. Babi, as if to

match the tactic used by Voutsinos when he doubled the asking price which was already far too high to be acceptable to me, now suggested that we ought to beat them down to taking nearly forty per cent less than what they had refused on the ground that it was unacceptedly low! His father, too, was later to say that he would get me some additional, adjoining land for a great deal less per *stremma* than I had originally paid. (I have yet to hear further from this.) On the other hand an American with vast and intimate experience in Greek rural affairs was to tell me that winter that I had got a good bargain.

In my own view, the price was a little higher than would have been necessary had the circumstances been different. Had we not been up against the likelihood that a law would be passed to prevent land sales to foreigners altogether, we might have continued to discuss the matter for several years, thus prolonging a drama that was giving enjoyment to quite a few people in various walks of life. The farmers on their part would have had the exquisite pleasure of playing all the possible angles of a long-drawn-out negotiation and of ultimately receiving (and being quite satisfied to get) something less in the way of money.

"Aren't you going to church now, Frieda?" asked John.

Looking at Father Demetrius, Frieda said that she did not go to church. He laughed and revved up his motorbike for his own departure.

In Greek you do not dot the "iota's" but, as we entered the notary's office, the equivalent of that was going on in regard to the Power of Attorney. Present besides Provelengios (still tapping his typewriter) were now Anarghiros, Babi, Frieda, John, I, two witnesses, and an unattached dog as additional silent witness. Also, temporarily, a boy bringing coffee and, a little later, a man who came in to argue a point with the notary and was not easily dissuaded.

The notary began to read. At one point Babi had to go outside and ask a boy who was ringing a bicycle bell

to desist. Then John and I were able to hear again the droning Greek and Babi's simultaneous translation. My strongest impression was that the document seemed to be rather long on biographical material and so on about Frieda. This was apparently necessary because she had kindly consented to do the official written translation. Babi was ineligible for *that* function because Anarghiros was his father. (The effect of the fact that Provelengios himself was related by marriage to Big Hand's wife was later shown to be less clear-cut. Reading between the lines I suspected that this was one of the strong points on the basis of which Elias' uncle had recommended the notary to me, but to Anarghiros it was a good reason why we should never let him in on what we were thinking.)

Since no summary could do full justice to this legal document, I must include here at least part of the official translation, rendered word for word from the Greek according to the notary's instructions:

"Number seventeen thousand one hundred and ninety two (17.192)

POWER OF ATTORNEY

In Hermoupolis of Syros and in town and in the street THIMATON SPERCHIOU (prior street agoras) number twenty one lies my public office (property of Marias Kalvokoressi), today thirteen (13) of the month of September of the year one thousand nine hundred and sixty four (1964) and the Day Sunday in front of me public notary, inhabitant of Hermoupolis Syros MARKOU STEFANOU PROVELENGIOU resident here, and in front of the two adult witnesses, of Greek citizenship, well known to me and been no relatives of mine, Messrs LEONARDOU MARKOU MAKRIONITI shoemaker inhabitant of Ano Syros and PANAGHIOTIS GEORGE FOSTERI coffee house owner Inhabitant of Hermoupolis Syros appeared to me well known to me and to the witnesses and been no

relative of mine Mr. JOHN H. G. PIERSON of CHARLES and of ELISABETH Official of the U.N. born in New York city of U.S.A. Inhabitant RIVERSIDE CONNECTICUT U.S.A. (22) twenty two ROCKLANE, staying here proprietor of the Passport number: D 295162/1963 issued by the competent authorities of the U.S.A. American National not knowing the Greek language known the English language, and the employed by him interpreter Miss FRANGISCA ALFONSOU VITALI private employee Inhabitant of Hermoupolis Syros well known to me and been no relative of mine born in Salonika Catholic Christian who declared that she knows very well the English language and the Greek language and she can interpret the will of the above appeared JOHN H. G. PIERSON to us in Greek language the content of the present to be translated in the English language to the said JOHN H. G. PIERSON since in the presence of the said JOHN H. G. PIERSON and the above witnesses, I swear the said FRANGISKA ALFONSOU VITALIS on the holy Bible that she will make full translation of the will of the said JOHN H. G. PIERSON to us and the contents of the present to the above JOHN H. G. PIERSON applied the composition of the present by which interpreting in the Greek language of the said FRANGISKA ALFONSOU VITALIS declared that he appoints and he restores by the present power of attorney, representative and his substitute Mr. ANARGIRON M. BAROUTAKI private employee Inhabitant of Hermoupolis Syros to whom he gives and he grants by the present power of attorney . . . [Here let the reader imagine a passage of about equal density and length, which I omit.] . . . Declare the above assignor to the Branch Office of Syros of the Commercial Bank of Greece that the present power of attorney will be in force until it is recalled with notarial action communicated with judicial usher to the Branch Office of syra of the Commercial Bank of

Greece, in case of death or incapability of carry out his duties the power of attorney will be in force untill it will be communicated to the Branch Office of Syros of the Commercial Bank of Greece recalling acts by his heires or his proxy or judicial protector he also declare the above assignor that he approves and accepts from today the transactions of the above assignee as valid and non-effensive. In credit has been composed the present in two sheets for which has been collected for taxes and my fees with one copy dr. hundred five (105) which has been read clearly and loudly in the presence of the assignor, of the interpreter and witnesses and assured has been signed at the end of the second page of the first sheet and at the end of the present, after the text of the contract has been translated by the interpreter Miss Frangiska Alfonsou Vitalis to the assignor, and declare that the above assignor understood fully the text of the present and completely agreed to that.

The Assignor — The Witnesses

JOHN H. G. PIERSON — A. MAKRIONITIS

The Interpreter — P. FOSTERIS

FRANGISCA A. VITALI

The Notary

T. S. MARKOS S. PROVELENGIOS

Precise copy on the same day"

The notary's voice rose as he reached the end, where Frieda's name came back into the story. John told me later that after the signing he fully expected to hear the notary say, "I now pronounce you man and wife."

One of the witnesses, carrying something wrapped up in a newspaper and fidgeting in his hurry to catch a bus,

tried to lay his hand on the Bible before he signed, but the notary told him to take it off; that was for Frieda, not for him. The other witness buttoned up his shirt and signed without giving any trouble.

That ended the matter legally. Before leaving the room, however, I wrote out in longhand and signed a separate agreement under which Anarghiros would act as my agent for the soil building project in Syros, representing me in dealings with other persons, making authorised disbursements for me, keeping an account of such transactions, and in a general way keeping an eye on the land. In return for this I undertook to pay him periodically a small retainer. He said that this part was entirely unnecessary, but I urged him to sign the paper too, and he finally wrote his acceptance of it in Greek and added his name.

* * *

The *loukoumia* (Turkish delight) made in Syros in a number of different flavors has the reputation of being unequaled anywhere else in Greece. *Loukoumia* signs ring the Hermoupolis waterfront. *Loukoumia* salesmen board all incoming passenger ships, practically trampling the passengers and vice versa. It has been stated on good authority that experiments were conducted of taking all the ingredients of Syros *loukoumia* to Athens, including the proper Syros water, and producing the candy there, but even then the results were not the same. When I left by the evening boat for Piraeus I was carrying several boxes of *loukoumia* bestowed on me as gifts.

Before that the farewells, and before the farewells some final strategy sessions with John and with Anarghiros and Babi, as well as another talk with Father Demetrius in the course of which he received my donation for the forwarding of the religious work in his wide parish.

As my steamer pulled out I swung my Paros hat — obviously the equivalent of a thumbs-up gesture and a great deal easier for anyone standing on the dock to see.

A couple of minutes later, having rounded the breakwater and come back past the other side of the Hermes Hotel, I was sure that I glimpsed again the waving figures of John and Peter and Mag, so I too waved again. The sun dropped behind the bulky hills very soon after that. By the time the northwest corner of the island was reached, there was not enough light remaining to afford me more than a shadowy glimpse of the Grámmata cliff.

The trip seemed long and the night increasingly cool, up on the top deck of the *Karaiskakis* under the many stars. I shivered as I watched the lights along the shoreline on the approach to Athens itself. We docked after midnight.

Part of our strategy was for John to stay on for a few days, pretending to look at other land on the slope of Syringas where the farmers from their distance of a couple of miles would obviously see him. This manoeuver was carried out on Monday, with no results apparent.

On Tuesday an unsuccessful effort was made to find the mayor of Ano Syros in the hope of getting him to re-enter the case. Later in the day Frieda and Father Demetrius suggested to John that the way for us to acquire the land was for him (John) to marry Voutsinos' good-looking daughter. It did turn out that evening, however, that the Voutsinos brothers might be willing to sell after all (a change of mind which Babi attributed to the influence of the butcher). That is, they might sell if they had enough land in the area to end up with some left over. To John it came as a bit of a shock to realize, so late in the game, that they had no very clear idea how much land they owned.

On Wednesday an expedition consisting of John, Father Demetrius, Babi and the surveyor went by car and on foot to the land, equipped with a can of paint, forty meters of string, and a nail. On the way in, the surveyor ventured some off-the-cuff overestimates of the areas lying in view ahead. On arrival at the Voutsinos part of the land, the measuring began, Big Hands and his son having joined the party as it passed his house and two brothers with a mule having caught up with it

later. The Father held the hind end of the string; Big Hands took the front. The boy hopped about to clear the string whenever it caught in the bushes. The surveyor and John kept count. The others then piled stones up every hundred meters, and to these or to prominent outcrops that happened to occur in the right places Babi applied the red paint.

Things seemed for a time to be going favorably. Suddenly, however, the brothers came out of a huddle, over their lunch, to announce that they were not selling. A three-way split of the proceeds of the 200-odd *stremmata* that had just been measured would give each of them, they said, too little money to make the sale worth while, and on the other hand if they parted with more land than that they would not have enough for their sheep and goats in the winter. It was all over in a minute. One brother, sideways on the mule, whacked it and galloped off, closely followed by Big Hands, the third brother, and the boy, who went out of sight at an astonishingly fast pace on foot.

A visit to Barba Yiorgi's house on the long way back yielded John only another negative answer. On the way in Marigoula had hailed him and dropped what might have been a hint — "measure our land too"; this suggested that the situation could conceivably be retrieved by an offer to take the whole one thousand *stremmata* from the Old Man; but apparently it wasn't so. Gloom descended on the party as it continued its return march. Father Demetrius said he had done all he could — emphasizing the point by wrapping his rope belt tight around his neck to demonstrate how far he would have to go to change the owners' minds. Now, all agreed, it was Anarghiros' turn to try. John left on the evening boat for Piraeus, on his way to catch up with Peter and Mag. That same evening (in view of the time differential) I had hardly, after my stopover for further contact work in Athens, reached home in Connecticut when I received the first of John's cables, which read:

"*No dice now. Leaving tonight for Rhodes Hotel Soleil.*"

But now the luck changed. A good friend of Anarghiros who owned a millinery shop went to work on Barba Yiorgi, and when John got back to Athens from Rhodes on Sunday evening, Babi told him on the phone that the Old Man *was* willing to sell. Some of his extensive land had been walked and marked out, and we could probably get about 900 *stremmata* — though it raised a problem of the path across his land to the land of the Voutsinos brothers which they claimed the right to use for their animals.

I was deep in my work at the office on Monday morning when John's second cable was handed to me:

"*Deal on again. Returning Syros. Home Wednesday.*"

At about the same time, I imagine, his boss at the UPI in Washington was learning by another cable that John was "delayed urgent transaction; request return work Thursday."

On Tuesday another expedition that included John taxied and hiked to the land up at Grámmata. A brief but heavy thunderstorm broke as they were walking the lines — the first rain John had ever experienced in Greece. The Voutsinos faction as well as Dalezios agreed to sell; hands were shaken on it. Early Wednesday morning John sent me his third cable:

"*Success. Arrive Kennedy* 17:30. *Useful you meet talk.*"

Frieda's note to me typed the preceding evening said: "Everything is all right. I'm sure you are satisfied now. I send to you some *loukoumia* in order to remember Syros."

Demetrius composed a longer letter which said in part (in the translation which he had commissioned) "I am in the pleasant position to acknowledge you that I have kept my promise I had made you when you left Syros, that is, I have made every effort to persuade, directly or indirectly, the persons concerned to sell the estate . . . When you were leaving I promised you that I would make every effort for this affair, and I now am very satisfied for my important part in this case. You and your son had realized from the beginning how many

difficulties there were until I succeeded. Assuring you that in future I will continue my task together with Mr. Baroutakis, I remain, Sincerely yours, Father Demetrius Freris."

It seemed pretty clear that the consummation of our hopes was due to some never-to-be-fully-known combination of many factors, not the least among which was the fact that I had made the farmers a pretty good offer. But I was not on that account thinking of taking at all lightly what the Father had done. "I can tell you," I wrote him back, "that my confidence in a successful outcome went up many notches the moment you first entered the negotiations. It was evident that your persuasive ability was something quite unusual. My son and I never lost hope after that, though I must admit that there were a few rather dark moments."

5. The house on Demosthenes Street is on the left.

6. A glimpse beyond the last page of this book — some Grammata trees in 1973.

7. In the Kafireos Channel.

8. North wind.

5

The Long Anticlimax: Phase One

On one wall of my New York office hung a picture of a small boy with a wide grin riding naked on the back of a huge buffalo. Leading the buffalo along the raised strip dividing two fields of young rice plants was a handsome man wearing a sarong. Further off you could see other buffaloes up to their bellies in deep dark muck.

I had my eye on this photograph, brought back with me from Asia, as I dictated a cable to Don Motz in Athens: "Syros transaction agreed. Grateful you request soil survey."

That survey would protect my pocketbook in case the perfect piece of dry, stony terrain we had found would turn out to be an absolutely hopeless place in which to try to regenerate soil. Even to admit of such a possibility was painful. So also was the thought of delay, because of the danger that new legislation might any day forbid all sales of land to non-Greeks. In simple prudence, though, I had got the farmers to agree to accept option payments and give me up to a year to make the final decision whether to buy or not.

Soon I was impatiently writing to Syros saying: "I hope the slight delay in obtaining the Government permit is perfectly normal and that no problem has arisen . . .'

In a couple of weeks I had my reply from Anarghiros and, wading through to the end of this tantalizing passage, found that we were deep in trouble:

"Because of the steps required to be taken I have begged the lawyer Mr. Papadopoulos to settle the

matter the soonest possible, since Mr. Provelengios has only the right to write the contracts as soon as permission is given. In fact every thing needed in this case has been done and the authorized service has been willing to give the permission to you. The only difficulty is that at the 'GRAMMATA' there is an archeological place and the above service wishes to be assured that the land sold is not included in this archeological place."

So there it was.

"John, are you up?"

"Yes, shaving."

John down in Washington was still working the peculiar hours of the UPI radio desk, so our telephone conference on this crisis took place before daybreak. We felt, as I wrote back to Anarghiros after hanging up, that an authorized representative of the Greek Government should visit the site and see for himself that it was only a question of a few square meters of rock. A permit could then be quickly granted which would exclude from the transfer some specified area (one *stremma*, say) at the immediate site of the inscriptions. Or, if an early visit like that would be impossible, a permit could perhaps be granted which would exclude from the transfer "a reasonable area" at the immediate site of the inscriptions, "reasonable area" to be defined more exactly later on. "Of course," I concluded,

"you and Mr. Provelengios and Mr. Papadopoulos are in a much better position to judge what to do than we can be at this distance. The reason I make the above suggestions is only that we do want very much to avoid anything that might lead to an indefinite delay in getting a firm transfer permit, since that is what we must have in order to make the option payments to the present owners and in order to be able really to ask for quick action on the soil survey."

* * *

Even the most patient reader would no doubt consign this chronicle to perdition were he faced with a circumstancial account of all of the struggles that then took place for the transfer permit. We had a number of honest efforts going but they were like the fish that used to come out of our *klong* in Bangkok and walk around to our driveway in the monsoon rains, getting apparently nowhere.

Then, too, like everyone else who spends much of his life near the haunts of organization man, I have developed the instinct for knowing when I think I am getting the run-around. Of course what one thinks about it may be completely wrong, as it doubtless was in the cases I have in mind. For instance, there was the Greek official who in the very beginning had told me: "when you run into a road-block, as you certainly will somewhere along the line, call on me and I may be able to be of some help." I called on him by letter, and Anarghiros took a boat from the island and called on him in person — or tried to, for he never got inside the door.

Then there was the American archeologist friend of a friend, strategically placed in Athens, to whom I wrote in vain asking if he wouldn't please explain to the Greek Archeological Service what our basic purpose was. We were not trying to make money but only to invest resources in reversing the downward cycle of erosion and restoring some land. We would be glad to help the Archeological Service record the inscriptions around which the difficulty centered. We would be quite ready to have an appropriate reservation of land made at that spot. "But we seem to be stuck. Perhaps this is partly because of the remoteness of the area, which makes it hard to get there for a quick inspection. I am concerned with the way that time is slipping by."

"I do emphasize that the matter is rather urgent and as you well know we can not keep the owners of the land waiting for a long time," Anarghiros wrote to me in November.

John got to Elias who passed a message to his Uncle George in Piraeus.

I tried cheering myself up with new contacts such as one with Bruce Lansdale, head of the American Farm School in Thessaloniki, who wrote me from there that he was "very much fascinated with your thought of trying to replace the soil on Syros. We certainly will be most happy to help you in any way possible, although we are quite aways away." Later in New York he gave me an idea of what a stone wall to keep out the goats ought to cost. Or, if we wanted to use wire instead, the place to get the chestnut posts would be Mount Athos.

To keep my own end up I sent Mayor Vafias the new United Nations report on *Water Desalination in Developing Countries*, which was based on a study of potential sites for desalination plants in forty-three countries and territories, Syros and several other Greek locations among them. I was able, too, to confirm that he had better have nothing to do with a certain Viennese promoter of a "new process" of desalination who had been doing some advertising of his wares in Greece.

Shortly before Christmas another letter came from Anarghiros. "After that failure," he wrote (never mind the detail on that failure), "I reached some friends of mine and intrusted them the matter. So I hope soon I will be able to report to you favorable news." His statement seemed to brighten the picture, and it interested me a good deal, but his hope was never realized.

Meanwhile the soil survey was languishing too. When he got my cable Don Motz promptly wrote to the Director General of the Ministry of Agriculture. Lest anyone think that our American Foreign Service officers waste precious time over trivial matters, I must add that he had the whole draft of this longish letter from me. It began:

"Dear Mr. Athanasatos:

> Mr. Pierson, an American citizen who works for the United Nations in New York as Special Adviser for Scientific and Technological Questions, has a project which he and his son would like to carry out as a purely private venture, which involves reclaiming and rebuilding over a number of decades some presently eroded and unproductive Greek soil somewhere in the Cyclades Islands. Mr. Pierson has discussed this project with a number of officials in the Ministry of Agriculture of the Greek Government, as well as with others, and it is the general view, which is shared by the Embassy, that a project such as this could have beneficial practical results, locally in itself and also perhaps more widely by example; that it is in the interests of good Greek-American relations; and that it deserves encouragement and support."

Don then touched on the search John and I had made which had led us to the land on Syros which we had agreed to purchase, subject to approval of the transfer by the Greek Government and a finding by qualified experts that this land had not been eroded beyond redemption but might eventually be reclaimed by reafforestation and other suitable means. "It is our understanding," he continued, "that the Institute of Soils and Fertilizers in the Ministry of Agriculture would be prepared in this instance to carry out a soil survey which would indicate whether in fact the area which has been tentatively selected by Mr. Pierson is a suitable one in that sense."

In conclusion his letter asked for authorization of the survey and named the mayors of Hermoupolis and Ano Syra as endorsing our project.

It was months before I had from Don the Director General's reply, which said: "in detail, what is the land amelioration foreseen to be applied, and the system of land cultivation?"

Cursing audibly, I sharpened up a number of pencils and went to work. When I had done, my answer struck me as very much like the answer I myself once received when I killed a large snake in the Indian jungles and asked the villagers to tell me what kind it was. A long pow-wow ensued. Squatting on their haunches in a

circle the men debated my question. One would juggle a handful of pebbles and his voice would rise. Another would grunt or spit reflectively. Finally the argument stopped and I was informed through an interpreter that the thing was a snake.

"It is not possible (I now wrote) to be very specific at this stage. The aim is to build up the soil over an extended period of time such as 25-50 years, assuming that erosion has not gone so far on this land as to make that impossible. (Hence the special need for a survey, which should indicate also the situation as regards underground water.) It is assumed generally that afforestation will be the main method, i.e. the planting of trees, or of small shrubs first and trees later should that be necessary. As to trees, the Aleppo pine is under consideration, but it is also hoped to bring in species that will yield lumber if that can be done, since a major aim is to restore the land in ways that will suggest paractical income possibilites to Greek farmers on similar soil. It is recognized that fences will have to be built to keep away goats and sheep. In a few places it is hoped that olives, vines and fruit can be introduced on a limited scale. Because of the steepness of the slopes, no thought whatever has been given to raising field crops . . ."

At about the same time I wrote another letter, this one to Peter:

"Dear Commissioner,

I am so happy to have those pictures from our Syros expedition . . . It so happens that you have the gift of timing to the *nth* degree. The day after I got these pictures from you I took them with me to the UN and showed them to George Papandreou, Jr., the younger son of the Prime Minister, who was in New York for the day. As a result of our talk, greatly assisted by the clarification of the situation that these pictures provided because you could really see from them what Ta Grammata are all about,

he and the member of the Greek Permanent Mission to the UN who accompanied him to my office are going to see if they can help us get our land transfer problem unstuck. How's that for luck?"

Actually, however, the meeting had presented a real problem because Mr. Papandreou counseled my taking a peremptory line with the Minister of Agriculture concerning the inscriptions. This suggested a rather hazy grasp, on his part, of Greek Government structure not to speak of diplomatic procedure, and accordingly is seemed to confirm what I had heard about his not being involved in any way in the political game. Luckily Mr. Petrounakos of the Greek Mission gave me a less suicidal alternative, namely to burn more midnight oil preparing yet another polite statement about what John and I were trying to do, and send this off where it would never be heard from again. I remember thinking that I might just as well have sent it to someone sitting on a log in a rain forest chewing betel nut.

At the end of April a letter arrived from Anarghiros which lifted the fog:

"As a result of our continuous inquiries to the Ministry for Co-ordination, through our Member of Parliament, the Inspector of Archeological Affairs at Myconos received from the Ministry an answering letter which immediately was communicated to Syra and a copy of it came to our hands.

A translation of this copy is enclosed from which you will see that, despite our efforts, we did not manage to persuade the Greek Government to approve the land transfer permit, at least as far as the 250 appr. stremmas is concerned, owned by the "tall brothers" which includes GRAMMATA.

We are proceeding to further inquiries to sort out whether the application of the other 'old man' is approved and if so, please let me know if you are still interested to get this land only. In this case, of course, we will have back again the problem of 'the

path' but we shall try to sort that out, probably by giving a compensation to the owners. Naturally, that is only an assumption but as soon as we get a definite answer regarding the second application I will report to you.

In the course of the study of our deal I have been informed by various people especially Mr. Provelengios and Mr. Papadopoulos that the difficulties have arisen because *you* are an American or rather *Foreigner*. Should the purchaser be a Greek there is a great chance that the land transfer permit would be approved. It is well known in Greece that all foreigners who wish to buy land, for any purpose, they can do it more easily by financing a Greek, whose name will appear in the deal applications, and in actual fact the owner of the land will be the financier. This again is a matter which only you can decide and if you are interested I will try to get more details of the procedure."

I turned to the enclosed translation of the Ministry's communication — Protocol No. 1771, dated 14 April 1965, addressed to the Archeological District of Mykonos; *Subject:* Land transfer in Syra. Certainly there was no mistaking the meaning of this document. The preamble cited the application for transfer, the section of law 5351/1932 about Archeological places, and a decision taken by the Archeological Council in February. The operative paragraph said:

"We *do not* approve the requested by Voutsinos Brothers land transfer permit of the Archeological place 'GRAMMATA' in Syra, in which there are numerous inscriptions of the Roman and Byzantine periods, because by the proposed selling of such land for private enterprise, a very important Archeological place will be destroyed."

In the upper left-hand corner the office originating the protocol was identified as "Kingdom of Greece, Ministry of Coordination, Archeological Service." At

the bottom on the right was the signer's name, "The Minister, G. Mylonas."

To Anarghiros I wrote back: "Until I have a chance to discuss the situation with my son I will not be in a position to answer your specific questions. However, I can assure you that we are not disposed to give up too easily at this stage . . ."

This was no better than a lie as far as I was concerned. "Disposed to give up" described my first reaction precisely.

But then I thought: surely there must be *some* highly influential person, like for instance the one whose fascinating daughter seemed to be a good friend of my son's, who would be willing and able to intercede effectively for us with the Archeological Service and get it to change its ruling.

And while I was still considering this, came the third impulse: to go and talk to the Archeological Service of Greece myself. This final impulse was not born of reluctance to connive and pull strings, assuming we could, or of any special confidence in my own powers of persuasion. Rather it stemmed from my lack of faith that a third party would ever be able to get all the essential details to stick in his mind.

The acquaintance I had recently formed with Petronnakos now stood me in good stead. I showed him the protocol. Since it stated (somewhat to his surprise, I noticed) that the Ministry of Coordination was where the Archeological Service was located, the person I should see was either the Alternate Minister or the Deputy Minister of Coordination. He knew them both. Either one would give me a sympathic hearing.

On a Wednesday — it was May 5th — I sent a private cable to my friend Gustavo Duran, the United Nations Resident Representative in Athens, asking him to get me if he could an appointment with either one of those two Government officials, that Friday if possible (I wanted to lose a minimum of time at my desk) or otherwise next Monday morning. Next day, not knowing whether I would be commuting back home that

night or flying the Atlantic, I carried a light bag with me to the office instead of my usual briefcase. In the cable office I found my reply from Gustavo: "Arranged appointment with Andreas Papandreou Alternate Minister Coordination ten May 12.00." So I carried my bag home again that night, and on Saturday night I boarded a plane for Greece.

John Zarras was surprised to hear my voice on the phone Sunday evening, and when I told him what had brought me to Athens he said I must be mistaken: the Archeological Service couldn't possibly be in the Ministry of Coordination. I could only reply that I was holding the official document right in my hand and that that was what it said. He invited me to come to his office first thing in the morning to look into the matter further. I had not kept up with his latest moves and learned only now that he had become a Counsellor in the Ministry of Coordination.

He himself had not altogether kept up with one aspect of where he had moved to, and though the error in the street number he told me to go to seemed trivial on the face of it, it was good for several hundred yards on an Athens street and forty-five minutes or so of wasted time to a non-Greek-speaking foreigner trying to get untangled. Once I reached him, however, things moved rapidly. He placed some phone calls and we visited several offices. Three important pieces of information came to light in short order.

First, and most startling to me, the Archeological Service was not in the Ministry of Coordination at all — Zarras was quite right about it — but in the Ministry in charge of the Prime Minister's Office, my official-seeming paper to the contrary notwithstanding. (Only later, when I managed to get a copy of the Greek original, was this mystery resolved: what I had been sent from Syros was a mistranslation.) In short, I had come all the way to Greece to talk to the wrong Ministry!

The second piece of information unearthed by Zarras was that in any case the only man to talk to about my problem — never mind what Ministry he was in — was the Director-General of the Archeological Service itself. This was John Kontis. Zarras got me an appointment with him for 12.30, uncomfortably close to my noon appointment with Andreas Papandreou a mile away but the only time he had open.

Thirdly, the law governing archeological places did not actually forbid the sale of the land (I took careful note of this) but only prohibited certain acts such as building on the land, digging in the vicinity of it, or denying access to people who wanted to come there.

For the rest, my invaluable friend took a sober view of the situation that John and I were now in. After our unhappy start — with an official document against us — the process of getting back on the right track would probably take weeks and require the services of an agent, very likely a lawyer, to follow up the case step by step in Athens.

Somewhat mournfully I considered the stubborn lock of dark hair still crowning Zarras' head. I could think of no good reason to disagree with such a diagnosis except for his euphemistic use of that word "weeks." Half an hour later I had joined Gustavo and we were on our way to the now pointless meeting he had taken such trouble to get with the Alternate Minister of Coordination. All we could do in the circumstances was to apologize for taking his time under false pretenses and explain how the misunderstading had come about. Gustavo managed this with such flair, however, that what began as a fiasco ended as a minor social occasion. Andreas Papandreou on his part could not have been more cordial and kept us for some time talking of America and Spain and the United Nations and economics. Gustavo having mentioned that that was my field, too, the following bit of dialogue unfolded with all the inevitability of Greek tragedy:

I: "I don't suppose you've seen my new book on full employment?"

He: "The thing that I regret most about my job here is that it makes it so difficult to keep up with the economic literature."

I: "I'll ask the publishers to send you a copy, anyway."

He: "You are very kind. I would be delighted to have it."

When he finally accompanied us to the door he said he would phone Kontis or else the Minister in charge of the Prime Minister's office — who was not any longer (this seemed a good omen) the one who had signed Protocol No. 1771 but his successor — and would say a good word for my project.

When Gustavo and I, just on time, reached the low building that houses the Archeological Service of Greece, there were guards posted who looked us over suspiciously before they would let us in. Once inside, we found a less nervous atmosphere.

"*Kalimera*" (good day), said one secretary.

"*Perasteh*" (do go in), said another, ushering us into the innermost sanctum.

For a man who had been shot at earlier in the day by an infuriated antique dealer, Mr. Kontis himself seemed quite cool and collected — and, again, very cordial. So he and I earnestly assaulted the language barrier (Greek discourse being out of the question, and my French not subtle enough for this occasion) and somehow with Gustavo's help and that of a Mrs. Ninou, a Mrs. Kanto Fatourou, and later also a Miss Assimakis, that barrier was surmounted.

Even so, the hour we spent was one of struggle. Mr. Kontis first said that it was illegal for archeological places to be owned by anyone but the Government. To this I replied, as diplomatically as I knew how, that somehow the present private owners seemed to own it and that anyway I had somewhere heard that the really illegal thing was wrong utilization, denial of access, and the like, which of course we had no intention to engage in.

Seeing that this appeared to be making some impression, I launched into an explanation (eloquent enough in English, whatever it may have sounded like in the translation it got) of the purpose that had brought

John and me to the Cyclades in the first place. I pointed out that the statement in Protocol 1771 that by a sale of the Voutsinos land to us a very important archeological place would be destroyed was evidently based on a misunderstanding of the intentions of my son and myself. Far from destroying this archeological place, we would do everything possible to help preserve it. Moreover we would make some personal or financial contribution toward the recording of the inscriptions if the Greek Government was interested in that. Finally I begged him to note that we would be only too happy to make an appropriate reservation in favor of the Government at the spot where the inscriptions were, just so long as this did not deprive us of the right to buy the tract of land as a whole.

I had brought with me a couple of exhibits which I now laid before him. One was a copy of our Grámmata survey map on which I proceeded to draw in the very small area where I remembered from our search in the *Anna* that the inscriptions had finally turned out to be. The other was that same enlarged color print from Peter, made from a picture he had taken close by the Syringas spring. In the foreground beside an irregular picket fence my biggish son stands with a beret on his head and a pack on his back, and looking past him you see the Grámmata point and the whole of the surrounding area spread out most handsomely in the distance below.

What is more, any archeologist could see from this picture that the Grámmata rock was not another potential "dig" like Halandriani. Many of the National Archeological Museum's little statues and artefacts found on Syros and dating from the Cycladic period must have come, I ventured to point out, from Halandriani. (I might have added, had I known it then, that Chrestos Tsountas, excavating in a number of the islands at the close of the last century, found some five hundred graves there; it was his richest site.) Unwittingly — for our exploration of the tricky surfaces of that marble point had not been really thorough — I described the area covered by inscriptions at Grámmata as being even

smaller than we later found that it was.

I believe it was the color print that tipped the scales in our favor. Eventually Mr. Kontis said that, if I would put all that I had said in writing and would let him borrow the photograph as well, it so happened that there would be a meeting of the Archeological Council of Greece the next day at which the matter could be discussed and settled one way or the other. The Ephor of Antiquities of the Cycladic Islands was coming over from Mykonos and would be among those present. He was the person who, if my proposal were to be accepted, would come to Syros to make an on-the-spot investigation to determine how much of the land should be reserved.

"It is amazing to me," remarked Gustavo as we were saying goodbye to each other on Vasilissis Sofias Avenue just outside, "that a man would go to such lengths as you do for such a far-away piece of stony land." "Yes," he conceded when I told him that a man of his sensibilities must surely understand the impulse to find a place that was very beautiful and make it still more beautiful by planting trees, "yes, I can appreciate the pine tree; and I can appreciate the eucalyptus tree; and perhaps — I am not sure — I can even appreciate such a thing as the fig tree; and I can appreciate the olive tree very much."

"You should have known," the man whom Ernest Hemingway once called a military genius concluded, "my friend who was a general in the Spanish Civil War. Spain, too, is a place with many kinds of green vegetation. But to my friend in his campaigns there were just two kinds: wheat, and trees. If it came only up to here, it was wheat. If it was higher, then it was a tree. My friend was really interested in the beauty of cities. I think perhaps he was right."

So in the afternoon I postponed my return flight by one day and wrote a longish letter to Mr. Kontis. Then I spent quite a time locating a typist and also finding a store that wasn't entirely out of typewriter paper, as several nearby stationery shops as well as my typist herself happened to be.

Early next morning, as agreed, I delivered my letter with its numerous supporting enclosures at the Archeological Service, drawing the attention of a secretary whom I had not seen the day before to my final paragraph with its plea for speedy action. ("Inasmuch as I must return to New York on Wednesday morning, and as I also feel it to be rather urgently necessary to assure the prospective sellers of land to me, as well as my agent on Syros, that the Greek Government is not opposed to this transaction, I would be most grateful for your early consideration.") With some difficulty I managed to get her to seek and obtain instructions for me to telephone back at noon to see how matters then stood.

When I did telephone from the offices of Don Motz and Nicholas Triantaphyllidis at the Embassy, I learned that the meeting of the Archeological Council had been called for two o'clock, but unfortunately I also found myself trying to communicate with someone who absolutely could not get it through her head that I wanted to know the *outcome* of this meeting before I returned to New York. In fact she proceeded to find that every method I suggested for obtaining this information was quite impossible. I was tempted to ask her if she would mind my reading about it years afterward in the Archives. It was a dark moment.

Eventually she relented and agreed that I could be admitted at 2.00 (she would be leaving at 2.05) and that I would be allowed to sit there until 4.30 if necessary. She could not guarantee, however, she said, that Mr. Kontis and the other members of the Council wouldn't just leave by a side door without speaking to me once their session was over.

Nicholas now wanted me to lay this difficult matter before his stepson, an archeologist who expected to be soon commissioned to Mykonos himself. Accordingly we visited the hospital where the stepson was to be operated on a couple of hours later ("they won't let me have my coffee now," he said with some irritation) and went through the whole business once more with him. He took a rather stern view of my prospects — in the

circumstances I thought it was nice of him to talk to me at all — but then he grew less severe and agreed that my letter to Kontis appeared to remove the objections. He ended by saying that there really was no fixed rule: the Council just decided each case on its merits.

I found that I still had time for a cup of coffee and a sandwich before returning to the spot where the fate of our project was to be decided. Arriving there about two minutes before the appointed hour, I was lucky enough this time to be processed more sympathically. In a little while I was introduced to Mr. Kontis' chauffeur who promised not to drive away with him after the meeting without first warning me. A bit later I was given a chair and, since I wanted to make use of the time by writing a report to John, a table as well. Hardly had I begun to write, however, when one of the members of the Council came out of the room where they were meeting and told me that they had no objection to my obtaining the land as long as I allowed free access, did not build on the land, and so on.

"Can I get that in writing?" I asked.

He replied that they would be issuing a paper to supersede the other paper in about a week he thought. He then popped back into the meeting room. A few minutes later I somehow managed to convey to a guard by means of gestures and sheer telepathy that I wanted that photograph back, and soon after that he too went into the room and got it for me.

"After the normal quota of gloomy-to-harrowing moments," the letter that I finally sat down in my hotel to write to John began, "this trip became an assured success around 2.30 this afternoon." Near the end of the letter I wrote: "I placed a phone call to Frieda Vitali in Hermoupolis as I was starting to write, and finally the call came through just a couple of minutes ago. I asked her to pass the news to Baroutakis and try to line up a town house for Sherleigh and me and you from the middle of July."

6

The Long Antielimax: Phase Two

The house on Demosthenes Street had to wait for us until early August. This did not matter particularly; what did was that by the time we got there we had had further setbacks that made our goal seem almost as far away as ever.

The calendar of the annual summer session of the Economic and Social Council in Geneva is planned just about as tightly as an automobile assembly line, but there is this important distinction, that any delegation that wants to can generally manage to upset the plan. It so happened that one chose to do so this year.

"The French translation was sent late and arrived only three days ago. We cannot discuss the matter now."

This remark was not original — I myself had often heard it before — nor was it accurate — though out of conventional courtesy it was allowed to go unchallenged. But for several weeks the extent of the consequent delay in the part of the schedule in which my own responsibilities centered remained entirely unpredictable, as I was obliged to report by letter and cable, and finally by telephone, to parties concerned but not present.

Through May and June and now on into July the pressure had been slowly rising in the compartment of my extra-curricular interest which was waiting for good news about an archeological reconsideration and a soil

survey. Finally in mid-July Don Motz sent me from Athens what I joyfully took to be the long-awaited archeological clearance. Glancing quickly at the English translation (which I knew must be by Triantaphyllidis and hence trustworthy this time) my eye noted the new preambular reference to the Archeological Council's decision taken immediately after my emergency visit to Athens, and secondly the vital conclusion that

> "we approve from the archeological point of view the sale of land located nearby the 'Grammata' harbor of Syros Island, the rights of which are litigated by (a) Yoannes and Antonios Voutsinos and (b) Georgios Zanne Dalezios inhabitants of Ano Syros . . .".

The paper was dated 3 July 1965 and originated, on the face of it, in the Ministry to the Prime Minister. Reading no farther I shoved it back in the envelope, put this in my pocket, and went off happily to attend a meeting.

Unfortunately I discovered later in the day on closer inspection of this revision of Protocol No. 1771 that my elation had been premature, inasmuch as the Archeological Service went on to tell the Ephor's Service of Antiquities in Mykonos that the sale stood approved

> "with the exception of the cape area where the ancient inscriptions, till the recess of 'Grammata' harbor, the landmarks of which will be designed by you, under the condition that servitude will be legally acknowledged by notarial deed for the benefit of the State for the approach to the archeoligical site through the area under consideration sale of which is permitted, on which erection of buildings is subject to the control of the Archeological Service."

Whatever else this might mean, it certainly suggested the interpretation that we were debarred from the whole of the Grámmata cape. In other words Paper No. 2 of the Archeological Service, obtained at the cost of so much effort as a replacement for Paper No. 1, was still unsatisfactory. I must have groaned audibly as this realization sank in.

All the same, we were lucky that any official paper whatever connected with our little interest got issued at this time. On the fifteenth of the month King Constantine dismissed his Prime Minister, George Papandreou, precipitating a Constitutional crisis. Soon large crowds were demonstrating for Papandreou in the streets of Athens and other cities and battling the police.

John had been able to delay his vacation by only a week when mine became bogged down, so he arrived in Athens ahead of Sherleigh and me instead of behind us. Eventually he got an appointment with the man who had had our request for a soil survey so copiously explained to him already. Most recently I had asked Don Motz to try to arrange this survey (as well as the Ephor's visit) for the first part of August, and Don's letter to me on the day Papandreou stepped down said he would first like to know if the plans for my trip were firm. Don was too considerate to mention that the Catacousinos offer was by now almost a year old, or that matters might have been easier all around if only the archeological problem had not arisen to delay approval of our land transfer until the very moment of a governmental crisis.

Now Mr. Athanasatos, speaking English perfectly, welcomed John to his office with great cordiality and proceeded to express doubt that anything could be done. The problem was: how could the Ministry authorize a survey for a *private* party? John said that Grámmata could be considered a demonstration project, and good for U.S.-Greek relations. Athanasatos rang up the American Embassy and asked for Triantaphyllidis.

Nicholar T.: "They are investing money to improve Greece, so it's only natural for the Ministry to take an interest. The soil expert should report to the Ministry, which should send a copy to them."

Athanasatos: "There are other areas presumably more in need of a survey than the Grammata section of Syros."

Nicholas: "But no one has offered to improve those other areas."

Athanasatos excused himself to go to the office of the Minister. Returning, he explained to John that the Minister did not want to act until the situation in the Government grew clearer — a matter of three or four days. It being then Friday, he suggested that John ring him up on Tuesday.

We discussed the situation carefully that evening after my arrival with Sherleigh from Geneva. Our plan pretty much pivoted on the soil survey — we had difficulty imagining going ahead without it — yet on the whole it seemed better not to stay in Athens waiting for the crisis to resolve, since that might take a long time. On Monday, the second of August, we took the boat to Hermoupolis. As matters turned out, it was just as well that we did, for on the fifth of the month, after days of tumultuous action punctuated by fist fights between delegates on the floor, Parliament rejected the Athanasiades-Novas Government, and four days after that it rejected an exploratory mandate given by the King to Stephanopoulos.

* * *

The little house that Frieda has obtained for us was situated part way up the Orthodox hill. On the crest far above it rose the Church of the Resurrection. Below it the stately church of St. Nicholas sat ensconced between a pretty little garden, featuring the monument of the Unburied Combatant of 1821 (the inspiration for every country's Unknown Soldier), and a bluff going steeply down to an arm of the sea — the one most used by swimmers on summer days and most saturated with *bouzouki* music on summer nights. From the port you reached this little garden in ten minutes of easy walking; you had several choices for arriving by way of the lovely miniature square graced by the *nomarchy* building, from which you then continued to mount past Anarghiros' house, or else you could traverse Miaoulis Square and go up (dodging a roaring motorcycle or two) by skirting the ruined theatre. Then in another five minutes of rather more twisty going, with the donkey droppings

somewhat more prevalent now and the cats a bit jumpier (making exceptions perhaps for the black ones which, being considered lucky, got slightly more favorable attention than the others), you came to Demosthenes Street and to our sandcolored house with turquoise shutters occupying a corner on it.

It took us a while to get the hang of the place — where to be in it at a given time and how to move around with the least mutual inconvenience. A prime factor to be borne in mind was that the long bathroom had doors at both ends but that only the door opening into the courtyard locked or even closed. The one leading into a dark storeroom and thence into the kitchen and finally to the front hall-sitting room with the icebox in it was simply a passageway for Maria (who was ours with the house) when she was bearing clothes or dishes to be washed. Or, equally, for her bright-eyed overweight youngest child — Tutu she called him — when he wanted to take a bath. Another consideration was that the armoire was in the uninhabitable room — uninhabitable through no fault of the house or its proprietor, since the source of the stench was in a drain somewhere outside under the street. Yet another point was that the room where John slept was the passageway to our dining room and the court, unless you went by way of the kitchen, storeroom, and bath.

Then, too, the upper deck of the courtyard with its water cisterns and spindly jasmine bush was the principal headquarters for all the cats in the neighbourhood. Consequently, unless we locked the strategic outer bathroom door, it seemed impossible to keep those thieves from descending the steep ladder (unseen although in full view), sneaking past the horrible old sponge that somebody had hung suggestively on the stucco wall, entering over the bathmat, and raiding our kitchen's ill-protected stores. Finally there also arose the question of locks in a more general sense. By custom and perhaps necessity it was mandatory to leave nothing, not even the shutters, open. The front door, the bathroom door, and the dining room door into the court all had their

individual massive locks and one-of-a-kind keys, and it would have taxed the wisdom of a clan of Solomons not to get locked into or out of part or all of this house from time to time.

But the real problem was the communication aspect of the *menage*. With dictionary and phrase book in hand, and with John not always somewhere about to provide her with technical assistance, Sherleigh conducted a truly remarkable eampaign of sounds and gestures that got through to Maria well enough to keep us all fed. This was the more noteworthy in that Sherleigh, in spite of being herself a renowned culinary expert, stubbornly refused to concede the outstanding quality of Greece's cuisine. Partly out of respect for her judgment and partly no doubt from observation of Tutu and other Greek fat boys, and of Maria whose dress (measured as it hung on the line) went to 82 inches around the middle, I did permit myself certain gastronomic preeautions. In restaurants I would ask for *ligo lathi* (just a little oil) or even *ochi lathi* (none).

Maria had soft brown eyes that filled with tears of sadness or joy at unexpected moments. She also was immensely interested, as was Tutu, in everything that the rest of us did, and by way of reciprocation she would pull up her skirt suddenly to show you (Sherleigh, that is) her sear. Then she would kiss Sherleigh, and she and Tutu would shout to each other to let off steam. Or on other occasions she would shout to Tutu telling him not to wake us up with his noise. Tntu did a number of very useful things such as fetch eakes of ice from the store. He was very close to us in every way. When in the house his idea of staying at a distance seemed to be to scrutinize my face through the wrong end of my binoculars from a distance of two feet.

Nikos, Maria's husband, was a barber and, as I found, a very good one. Maria said that he liked to go fishing in his spare time and would bring us some fish. This prospect pleased us all but the catch never materialized as far as we were concerned. After a while Nikos conceived the idea that John should bring him some electric

clippers from America — or, better still, should put Tutu through naval architecture school in England. It was a wonderful family.

Anyone who is engaged in learning a new language knows that it can be quite distracting to be continually asked to translate for others the sentences that are not the ones you had been quietly developing to spring on people yourself. This is the trouble that Sherleigh and I brought upon John, who bore up under it but was glad when evening released him for more enjoyable *ad-libbing* under the acacias and palms at the Pantheon cafe in the square.

Here in the circle of our friends — the Baroutakis and Papadopoulos families generally formed the core, with possibly a Krystallis or someone else joining in — John with his Greek jokes and songs and flair for the dramatic was the life of the party. An *ouzo* or two, the *hors d'oeuvres* provided free by the house, and perhaps a handful of pistachio nuts counted out carefully (for they were practically worth their weight in gold) by the vendor earrying his covered brass tray among the tables: this was the good, relaxed life. On Sunday evenings, moreover, the band regaled the paraders and us sitters with extraordinary musie (several tunes played at once, apparently) from the marble bandstand decorated with sculptured figures of the nine muses, and on any day of the week you could take a moment out to test your eyesight by trying to count the buttons on the vest of the statue of Admiral Miaoulis himself. No one would dream of going home for dinner — in our case, we might vary this with a table at a restaurant, probably down by the harbor where the ships eame in — until at least nine or ten.

Babi was now in the Navy and stationed in Crete, which put quite a new face on our interpretation problem. The candidate to succeed Babi was Stam, the son of a different barber, but it took Anarghiros less than twenty-four hours to find out that Stam was talking too much, so we never coneluded that deal. We had a bit of generously contributed help from Anthony Krystallis, the

scholarly younger son of the leading textile manufacturer, and later too from his elder brother Panagiotis, who worked for the firm. But for the most part we just struggled along, with John carrying the load, abetted by Anarghiros.

Having learned to say *kalimera-sas* and *cherete* I overdid the business of greeting strangers I met on the street. I should have realized that in Syros, which is not like some other islands, this is not done. Anyway, it was nice to be greeted back.

As a matter of fact, there are times when such rules of restraint must in any event be ignored — as in the case of the man who owned a little shop where he sold sweets on one side of the street and a little cafe on the other. He remembered my face from the year before and I remembered his, yet somehow, I don't know why, we didn't speak. This situation continued and became so embarrassing that he used to watch to see which sidewalk I was coming along on and then quickly if need be cross over to the other side and look away just so as to avoid catching my eye. Finally one day when I couldn't stand it any more I went into his shop and bought a small bag of gumdrops from him for three drachmas. This solved the problem. After that he stopped crossing the street unnecessarily, we always said *kalimera* or *cherete*, and both of us felt much better.

I seemed to myself that summer to be a prisoner of the telephone line to Athens. Even so, I managed to get in quite a few trips to Grámmata. When we went by boat, Anarghiros would be there and Sherleigh might come along too. The expedition would originate the evening before with Anarghiros trying to wring a firm commitment out of Yani of the *Anna*, or perhaps out of Vangeli, the man with the face like a Leonardo drawing, skipper of the slightly smaller *Agios Nikolaos*.

"Seven o'clock tomorrow morning in front of the hotel. Seven o'clock exactly. Wili you be there at seven — yes or no?"

The "marzine" pills I had discovered at a drugstore in Athens were my personal salvation. Even on reasonably calm days I had formed the habit of taking one as a precaution before we set out, with the result that I might be a little scared in rough weather but was never seasick. John, being younger, naturally had more pride. Remembering that he had been looking rather green on the *Kanaris* coming over from Piraeus, I offered him a "marzine," which he declined. We had not yet reached the northwestern cape before he was doubled over the side in the traditional posture. On the return trip he took a pill and felt fine; we made the last part of that run racing along before the menacing swells; Vangeli, leaning far out backward over the stern with one leg hooked over the tiller and the wind tearing through his yeliow hair, was singing like a madman at the top of his lungs. Net day John again borrowed a "marzine" from me but a local nightclubbing acquaintance of the outdoor type said no thanks, he never got sick. Shortly after making that remark *he* was hanging doubled over the side.

If the whisper of the wind was distinctly audible at daybreak it meant that the *meltemi* was rising, and would continue to rise until midday and then (if it stuck to the rules) would slowly subside until sunset. Unless we could manage an early getaway from Hermoupolis and a long day up at Grámmata before returning by dusk, this was a time to walk.

John and I walked in to Grámmata both ways — going as far as we could by taxi first, of course — and it kept us pretty lean. The donkey trail around the mountain past the farmers' houses was long and psychologicaliy a bit awkward at this particular moment because of the unsettled state of the business between them and us. The steep pitch down from the Syringas spring (to which the road had been precariously extended during the winter) left us still with four hump-back promontories to cross on goat trails before we reached "our" frontier, and then two more to Grámmata point itself. Back of one of the small bays, part way along to "our" land, was some fresh water of such dubious quality that we took very little of it. The fat grapes in the field at the bottom of the long descent, belonging to the owner

11. The wild beauty of the land.

12. Wresting some kind of living from the soil.

of the spring at the top, were another matter. We helped ourselves to a couple of bunches on the way back, having by that time emptied our canteens, and the eating of some of those grapes from time to time made the thousand-foot climb to the spring in the torrid heat a less exhausting matter.

Descending that path had its risks because of loose stones, and going down in the morning I thought that coming back up would be easier, but when coming up in the afternoon I revised my opinion. But the view from the top — as Sherleigh agreed with us the day we went there with a picnic lunch — was all that we had remembered it.

In anticipation of the visit of the Ephor from Mykonos, John and I tried to verify what Bent wrote (in the book we had not had a copy of until now) about the ancient inscriptions. Besides characterizing Syra as the bleakest of the Cyclades — with the most enterprising inhabitants — this famous traveler had a good deal to say about Grámmata:

> "By far the most interesting expedition we made in the remote parts of Syra was a weary long mule ride over the mountains to a spot at the north-west corner, where perhaps is the very place where Hercules was reported to have conquered the north wind. [Obviously it had not stayed conquered.] The goal of our ride was a point called Grámmata Head, from the fact that it is covered with inscriptions . . . A wilder bleaker ride I never had, even in the Cyclades . . . Though Syra itself might be brown and arid [however], with occasional streaks of red from the nature of the soil, yet the halo of hazy blue islands around us, the sparkling of the sea, and the clearness of the air, dispelled all feelings of gloom, and made us realise that in those days when Syra was 'teeming with fertility' it must have been a paradise upon earth. No vegetation did we come across anywhere save aromatic scrub over the hillside, and the ungainly bulbous *squilla marina*, a source of considerable traffic in this locality. It was the 1st of December, and the sun was very hot. What must this shadeless place be in the dog-days?"

After discussing the reputed longevity of the inhabitants of Syra (a muleteer said that "an old woman died at one hundred and thirty only a short while ago; in former years people lived so long that the aged had to be thrown down a mountain cliff") as weli as other matters such as the pattern and sound of the goat bells, a cave "where 2000 sheep and goats are kept at night," and the ancient words and accent still retained by the herdsmen who volunteered to guide him when his muleteers lost their way, Bent went on as foliows:

> "After a ride of four hours we came to our destination, a long strip of marble which runs into the sea like a bird's beak, and shelters a little bay from the fury of the north wind . . . This tongue of marble is in three places covered with very neatly cut inscriptions placed on flat spaces of marble which slope down to the water's edge. Some of them are very old, but most date from the Roman and Byzantine epochs . . ."

From here on (we found out later) Bent's account leans heavily on the text of *Inscriptions in Syros*, published some ten years before by the young doctor and anthropologist, Klon. Stephanos. Bent continues:

> "Taking the pagan ones first, we find most of them to be simply names. Mithres of Sardia is the only one which conveyed anything to our minds . . . Again we have the names of those who used this tongue of land as a point for observation . . . and various others . . . Then again we have epigraphs in memory of friends, perhaps those who had been lost at sea; prayers for good voyages for the writers and their friends; thanks for preservation from shipwreck, principally to Asclepius; for example, 'We in the Milesian ship, thank Ascelepius'; and lastly, farewells to friends.

Many of these epigraphs refer to a temple of Serapis, which must have stood at this point, though all traces of it have been obliterated. Doubtless here many a hecatomb has been offered to propitiate this god, that he might send a favourable wind. Our herdsmen told us that quantities of coins were dug up here, and forthwith proceeded to dig. In a few minutes they produced some small defaced copper coins of no value, which they gave us. We next turned to consider the Christian writers, which are more minute in their information about men and ships, and are written in debased Roman characters, like those in use in the Byzantine school, and such as we see in use on the outside of Byzantine churches. Most of them begin with 'Lord help us! Lord save us!' &c., and then give the name of the supplicant, his father's name, his country, sometimes that of his ship, and occasionally, though rarely, they mention the month and year. There are about 100 of these, affording a curious coliection of names, occupations, and countries . . . showing what a popular place of resort once was Grammata Bay, now lost almost to the world, for hardly anyone in Syra has heard of it . . . After a hurried lunch among the epigrams, we started on our weary way back across the mountains, returning, as our herdsmen affirmed, by a somewhat shorter way close to a church called Syringa, where is a fountain of healing water which is bottled and sent abroad."

Much of this filled John and me with wonder as we scanned the place on the marble point — there were indeed three such areas, as Bent said, not very far apart — on which the inscriptions were to be found. Most of all we marveled how so much of what could still be seen on the rock in Bent's day could have vanished (apparently) since. Preserved for millenia, why should so many of these inscriptions have then disappeared in less than a century? If the blistering process so evident today on those sloping marble faces had recently accelerated,

what (with the centers of air pollution so far away) was the explanation for this? Or did our eyes — and our deficient scholarship — deceive us? We vowed that at the right time, if ever the land became ours, we would bring an archeologist out on a leisurely visit to make a new careful study.

When Mr. Zafiropoulos, the Ephor, arrived from Mykonos with his young lady assistant, we went to Grámmata in the boat. Arrived there, he took his eyes off his assistant and looked about him with considerable interest. The two of them exchanged comments about a few dim inscriptions that he pointed out to her or she to him, after which he went systematically to work with a string, measuring the cape as a whole. John and I helped him with this and noted that the cape was something like three hundred yards long whether measured on the inside, to the first sandy beach, or along the rim of rock that slowly climbs on the outer side to the place where it rises abruptly to assume the form of a truly spectacular cliff. I concluded that the total area lying within the boundaries that we marked out must be about six acres — say twenty-five *stremmata*, roughly.

Having designated the landmarks, as per his instructions in the protocol, Zafiropoulos made a businesslike statement to Anarghiros, whose English was equal to informing John and me that the Archeological Service would let us have ali but that piece.

The Ephor's ruling came as no surprise, but suddenly I realized with dismay that there was nobody present whose language attainments were equal to the task of rendering my objections to it in Greek. To my mind, if the Greek Government once took over the whole cape, it was practically a foregone conclusion that some day the Archeological Service, Tourist Service, and Bureau of Roads would get together to lead the public in droves down to the newly constructed *bouzouki* parlor and hot dog stands on Grámmata Point. To this there could be no objection in principle. (I was to realize this even better later on, when I learned that Marcos Vamvakaris, the "father" of that haunting musical style, was born in

Syros). Still, John and I did not want to be involved there in a very different kind of project when that happened. On the other hand, if the Government took only the actual area covered by the inscriptions — which amounted to perhaps one-fifth of the total — that would be a different matter. No *bouzouki* parlor would be apt to be built if it had to have a glass floor to let people see what the inscriptions said.

I was close to despair over making myself understood — what we wanted, let alone the reasons for it — when suddenly the young lady assistant said something that made me realize that her resources in English were greater than I had thought.

"The Goverument does not want to do such a thing."

"No," I said, "but some future Government might," and with redoubled energy I went to work explaining to her over and over that we had the same desire as the Archeological Service did to keep the whole place unspoiled. We wanted, though, to buy all of the surface area of the cape except for the part actually covered by historically valuable inscriptions. This took a lot of repeating but at last she got what I was driving at and I saw her face lose its puzzled look and light up. Zafiropoulos' face was not as expressive as hers but, when she had finished explaining our intentions and desires to him, it too underwent a degree of change.

Out came the string again and we carefully measured the smaller area within which all but a very few of the inscriptions clustered. Then we climbed aboard the *Anna* and went back to Hermoupolis where by unevenly bad light I typed out a letter to Zafiropoulos saying:

"I write to confirm our mutual understanding . . . As you know, my interest in buying the cape area at 'Grammata' in addition to the adjoining land is the same as the interest of the Archeological Service, namely to keep this cape area with its ancient inscriptions from being injured or changed. Accordingly I agree and undertake in connection with the purchase of this land:

a) not to change in any way (by building, digging, planting or otherwise) the cape area as a whole, extending from the tip of the eape to 270 meters inland and from the tip of the cape till the end of the stony grounds which extend along the coast and as far as the beginning of the deepest recess of the gulf;

b) to recognise the ultimate ownership of the state in the area 85 metres by 60 metres on the inner side of the cape which you have found to represent the archeological area in the strict sense.

Assuming that you concur in the foregoing statement, I would appreciate it very much if you would take steps to expedite the necessary official approval of the transfer in question by the Archeological Service."

I had been hoping that Zafiropoulos would confirm these terms to me on the spot on behalf of the Archeological Service, but he evidently lacked plenipotentiary power, and so John and I remained still uncertain, when he left for Athens, about the ultimate outcome.

* * *

Now the time had arrived when we had to face up to the delicate problem of boundaries in general. The trouble with last year's survey was that it had left more than one alternative open on the northern side, and in any ease had estimated the included areas so roughly that the total amounts we would have to pay to the farmers, at the agreed price per *stremma*, was deeply obscure. So Anarghiros went to work to persuade the Old Man and Big Hands to let me pay for having a careful re-survey made to get rid of the obscurities. They were suspicious at first but said in the end that they saw the point and would agree to abide by the new, more exact findings. Then the surveyors quoted us prices for making surveys and maps of varying degrees of refinement.

"In any case, you realize" — so they said, according

to Anarghiros' effort at the translation — "it has to cost more because it is so far away from town."

Somewhat appalled by their charge for a full treatment complete with contour intervals, I settled for something less grand which would still assure us, I gathered, of unmistakable lines and certified estimates of how many *stremmata* were in fact included.

The little open boat we engaged in Kini for this undertaking went slowly chugging its way up along the coast. Luckily the weather was calm, for, what with half a dozen members of the surveyor's team plus Anarghiros and John and me plus Father Demetrius, we had standing room only and very little freeboard.

Altogether it took us two days to complete the job of marking rocks and measuring the several miles of lines. Some of the red paint went over last year's splotches, which by now varied surprisingly in their degree of dimness; the rest of the series — for this time we numbered them in sequence from one end to the other — found new places to go. Many of the painted rocks were quite small. I picked one up to show Anarghiros how easily our boundary could be moved fifty yards to the east or west, but he said that in Syros that kind of thing wasn't done. A goat bleated at us and dashed off to the top of a hill.

John and I had decided we definitely wanted some land that sloped to the north as well, to give a wider range of conditions in which to try out our land renewal schemes. For this reason considerable time went into the measuring of land at the back, beyond the top of the ridge. It was while we were all back there that the dull thud was heard that John and I thought nothing of at the time. Later we learned that a man fishing with dynamite in Grámmata bay had fallen on bad luck and blown himself to bits. Some of this land Barba Yiorgi clearly wanted to sell to us. Some that appealed to us more Voutsinos then wanted to sell, to keep his end up, but this land we later discovered was jointly owned or claimed by so many distant cousins that the legal problems involved in a transfer looked very formidable.

9. Northern village.

10. Construction equipment.

11. The wild beauty of the land.

12. Wresting some kind of living from the soil.

13. On our land.

14. Only the humming sound of bees.

To spell the hot work, some of us swam in the wonderful clear water beside the Grámmata Point. Father Demetrius was first in, stripping the brown robes off his swim trunks in an instant. He also gathered sea urchins along the rock, showing John how to open and eat them, and he led the expedition that went in the boat to the base of Syringas and returned with what I thought was an astonishing load of grapes to take just like that.

Late on the second afternoon, seated on a ledge at the top of the ridge above our hypothetical eastern boundary, I looked down at the three coves of Grámmata and thought that it would be particularly nice, if, as John had said, we could round out our thousand *stremmata* by buying also the promontory beyond this third beach — the left-hand pincer of the crab that the coast line formed when seen from the heights. Vangeli, the Old Man's easy-going stepson and presumptive heir, told Anarghiros that this piece could be readily added if we liked. Later on the Old Man said that it couldn't. There was then no time left for measuring it in any case.

As sequel to this very pleasant communal toil the surveyor and one of his draftsmen a few days later produced in their office on a large sheet of paper our fascinating second map. This showed six areas altogether. Nos. 1 and 2, Dalezios land, and No. 3 (including the cape), belonging to Voutsinos, all of which fell within the limits definitely agreed upon with John the year before, added up to only 645 *stremmata*, nearly two-thirds owned by Dalezios. No. 4, the piece that Dalezios wanted to sell us just behind the main ridge, was rated at 101 *stremmata*. The two remaining areas, designated MP-1 (the snarled-up Voutsinos parcel) and MP-2 (again Dalezios) also lay back of the ridge but ran down to the western coast, and these amounted to 47 and 60 *stremmata* respectively. I found out that "MP" stood for "maybe perhaps." John, his vacation time running out, was already by then on his way back to America. The surveyor suggested to me that it might be a good idea to put in some concrete-and-iron markers, and drew me sketches of them.

In retrospect it appears that the way we really spent our time on this visit to Syros, I in particular, was in trying to make telephone calls to Government offices or, for occasional variety, standing by to receive a call in return. This process began on the Tuesday on which Mr. Athanasatos had invited John, back in Athens, to get again in touch with him — that was the day after we arrived on the island — and it continued with hardly a let-up for more than two weeks or as long as my stay lasted. It was tedious and, our pretense to the contrary notwithstanding, rather discouraging work. This was no fault of the telephone company or the apparatus; the service was prompt for the most part and the connections were generally good.

We would come up the stairs to Theodoros Papadopoulos' office — say Anarghiros and I as a minimum task force for the occasion, if we felt that John could be spared — and would set to work. I have here and there climbed quite a few flights of stairs that seemed to be on the point of deciding to lean over backwards, but never have I known one quite like this. Having made it to the top, shaken hands warmly with my vigorously smiling, confidence-inducing lawyer, and settled into his deep leather arm-chair, I would wonder whether today the boy who would promptly show up carrying the tray of coffee and *nero* would get to the top too. He always did, and we made space on the piled-up desk for the glasses and the little cups.

Anarghiros and I could communicate to a limited extent, especially in English, but Papadopoulos and I not appreciably in any language. The system was that Papadopoulos would place the call and then settle into a long discussion with Anarghiros, of which I understood nothing. This being rather boring, I would go out onto the little balcony to survey the scene below. When the call came through Papadopoulos would ask if the speaker or anyone else within reach spoke either English or French, in which case he would hand the phone over to me to carry on from there; otherwise he himself, or sometimes Anarghiros, would continue the effort.

There were variations on this procedure, of course. On one occasion when for some reason there was more than the usual need for each of us to be aware of what the others were saying, Papadopoulos' very striking blonde niece Angelica arrived to act as interpreter. Or again, it was sometimes more convenient, in view of his other business, for us to do the phoning from Frieda's office instead. Frieda might be having coffee, or giving an English lesson, or teaching a young assistant a way of working with lace, or selling souvenirs to tourists, or going over the accounts of the youth hostel, or perhaps doing several of these things at once, and besides she might be about to distribute tickets for a concert to be given by a company from Athens, or just back from discussing with the judge the case of the young French tourist who took the money from his companion. But she would with the utmost cheerfulness place calls for us and then ring back five minutes later to ask the operator what was holding things up.

The substance of what we learned from all these calls was that Mr. Athanasatos was ill, or was out of the office and we should call back later, or was out of Athens but was expected on Friday and we should call back then, or possibly that the speaker did not know who we were and had not been given any message (the one we had previously been asked to call back at that time to get). Or — after Zafiropoulos left and we started also trying to reach Kontis to find out whether the arrangement made with Zafiropoulos and set forth in my letter to him had the approval of the Archeological Service — what we learned from our calls might be that the man who knew all about the matter was Mr. Kontis' assistant, Mr. Doumas, but that he was out, or that Mr. Doumas supported our views but the Archeolological Council had not met recently and no one could tell when it would.

I must say that, on the occasion when John finally spoke on the phone with Athanasatos himself, and introduced me to him, the Director General could not have been nicer about it. At the first sound of his voice I thought well of him. His difficulty was that he felt

that the order for our soil survey had to have the signature of the Minister of Agriculture himself, and, since there was still no government, there was also no Minister. Indeed, Athanasatos leaned so far to our side as to say that he had no doubt that, once a government was formed, he would be able to get the new Minister's signature and have the survey team in Syros within four days.

On August 18th there were rumors that a government had in fact been formed. I had no way of knowing, of course, that Tsirimokos, the King's newest premier-designate, would in his turn have his cabinet rejected by the Parliament, and theoretically I should perhaps have waited to see if the survey team would not arrive on Sunday, the 22nd. Instead I decided to return with Sherleigh to Athens the next day in the hope of grappling more sucessfully with our problems there at close range.

I also decided, however, that the moment had come to make a capital investment, as a gesture of faith in ultimate triumph over all our difficulties. The size of this investment — I paid 85 drachmas for the suitcase (at about 30 drx. to the dollar) plus 3 for the lock—did not necessarily fully reflect the size of my faith, either. Into this bag I put the following:

for Mrs. P: 1 blue denim shirt, 1 blue dungarees, 1 blue pullover shirt, 1 red cardigan, 1 blue and white striped skirt, 1 blouse, 1 pair shoes, 2 pair sneakers, 1 bathing suit, white socks, etc., 1 bandanna, night-gown, underwear, hair curlers, nets, hair spray and pins, emery boards and nail polish remover, thread, spot remover, typewriter paper, 5 paperback books.

for John: 1 pair khaki trousers, 1 red and black striped T-shirt, 1 swim trnnks, 1 swim helmet, 1 pair shoes (with iodine bottle inside), 2 air mattresses.

for me: 1 pair trousers (sailing blues, stained), 1 blue work shirt, 1 pair shoes, 1 cap (Paros), 1 swim trunks, 1 swim cap, 1 L.L. Bean pack.

Anarghiros invited me to leave these valuables in his keeping. When I picked up the bag its handle came off, but we bound it with a heavy cord and stowed it away in his attic.

* * *

The timing wasn't propitious. Fresh conflict on the streets of Athens by night portended the return of stormy days in Parliament. Furthermore, thanks to my persistence, allowance had to be made for the fact that by now I must have been inscribed in the official Greek list of pests to be avoided at any cost. It even amused me to speculate that there might have been created a special category of super-pests reserved for me and my son alone. Still, in spite of such considerations, Athens proved more frustrating than ever before.

I first went to see young Mr. Doumas, as arranged by telephone from Syros, and Zarras went with me. But then the Archeological Council's scheduled meeting was cancelled for want of a quorum, Doumas fell ill, and Kontis, working in his office nursing a broken hand (or shoulder: the interpretation varied), was always too busy to see me. Even though I luckily encountered Elias, who was about to leave for Syros to visit his aunts, and he rendered my telegram to Kontis asking for a three-minute appointment into idiomatic Greek, it made no difference. So my last words on this subject were with yet another secretary, Miss Panegiotidou, who promised to keep the American Embassy and the Service's own staff member, Triantaphyllidis' stepson, informed when anything happened.

Meanwhile Athanasatos was reportedly not in Athens, although apparently expected back from day to day. So after four days of this (and of scanning the headlines about the fighting far away between India and Pakistan), I wrote him one more letter and hand-carried it to his office. This one began:

"In view of the lapse of time since the soil survey of the 'Grammata' area of Syros was first proposed, I should like to list for your consideration some of the points involved."

Such further recapitulation actually struck me as pretty superfluous by now. Nevertheless, one of the points that I listed was that I was now ready either to buy the land immediately or to tell the owners that I was not interested in buying, depending on what the soil survey should show. Another was that the survey would greatly help John and me to determine proirities. Yet another was that, although I now was obliged to return to America (regrettably without having met him), my agent in Syros (I gave his name and address) stood ready to guide the survey party and make all other arrangements.

Finally I realized that Athanasatos would be justified in still marking time, even with his own Minister's signature in hand, if *Kontis*' Minister should delay in signing a satisfactory archeological protocol. The best I could do about this was to arrange with Don Motz for him to ask Athanasatos not to wait for the other Ministry but to go ahead on the assumption that the archeological question was already settled. For if there should be an unexpected upset on that, he could quote me as prepared to reimburse the Ministry of Agriculture for the cost of the survey.

I had been home six weeks when Don Motz wrote me that he had heard from the Prime Minister's office that the archeological clearance had been granted. His letter was handed to me as the French delegate was protesting for the sixth time in the newly established Special Committee that the French version of the Secretariat report was inadequate. However, there was no piece of paper to prove what Don said, and this worried me considerably for a month longer.

Then one day in mid-November, somewhat fatigued from having just come from a meeting which was wrestling with whether or not to express concern over the World Population Explosion, I received from Anarghiros a handwritten translation of a new Protocol No. 14686. This protocol was issued on September 28, just after Stephanopoulos in another try had won majority approval for a cabinet and the government crisis had ended. It cited my letter to Zafiropoulos, the

report he himself had written, and a decision of the Council taken soon after, and it said to the Mykonos Archeological District, over the Minister's signature,

> "We let you know that we *allow* from the Archeological Law point of view only, the purchase by Mr. John Pierson of the land where the rocks with the ancient inscriptions are situated, covering a length of 90m. and a breadth of 60m. around them with the condition, appearing on the agreement, that on the above mentioned area (sic) no work will be undertaken which might change the natural surroundings, e.g. building of any new erection, planting of trees without the permission of our Archeological Service."

Although I could not quite fathom why this time, in Paper No. 3, the Archeological Service appeared to restrict me even less than what I had agreed was quite right, I emphatically had not the slightest desire to seek any further amendments.

Instead I had a recurrence of the feeling that our project was like a tent in a high wind, no sooner pegged down at one corner than it pulled loose at another. Or it was like my desk in the old days in Bangkok in the gust of high wind that always came just before the afternoon rain: there were never quite enough little paperweights to keep all the papers I was working with anchored, and some of them would start blowing around the room. For in Anarghiros' letter transmitting Paper No. 3 were these hair-raising words:

> "One of the owners, George Dalezios (the 'old man'), because by the accurate measurement of his land, this was found to be less than 800-1000 stremmas, as we had originally told him his land might be, he has doubts about selling and *insists* that he wants the sum of . . . drachmas (1000 str. worth!) for parts 1 and 2 in the map. He argues that we told him that he was going to get . . . drachmas and he agreed selling the land only for that amount, whereas to-day with the new measurement he is getting less.

> Hence you must bear in mind that on this point we are going to have trouble with the overmentioned owner, because he tells me now that otherwise he is not selling. I am of the opinion that we should accelerate our actions because the farmers change their minds from one day to the next. In order to persuade the 'old man' that our view was . . . dr. per stremma and he would be paid according to the number of stremmas he owned, I came in contact with him many times but unfortunately he has made up his mind . . ."

In short, instead of a price of x per *stremma*, and consequently a total of 1000x altogether to *both* landowners if (and only if) they actually sold us 1000 *stremmata*, the Old Man had shifted the basis entirely and was now pretending that our agreement called for *him* to get 1000x for a *part* of a total which in itself was certified to be far *less than* 1000 *stremmata* — indeed, to be precise about it, for 418 *stremmata* by the map. That the farmers were restive about the new delay Anarghiros had told me already in a previous letter, but it was a bold strategem that the Old Man, or more likely Marigoula, had finally devised, knowing no doubt the hurry I was in and the compelling reason for it.

What was to be done now? I held yet another long-distance consultation with John, after which I wrote Anarghiros and cabled Don Motz. In the cable I said:

> "Syros farmers now upping price. Difficult negotiate without soil information. Grateful your advice re prospects soil survey."

In the letter I wrote that we certainly wanted the farmers to get 1000x altogether, but, also, we wanted to get 1000 *stremmata*. Consequently I asked Anarghiros to offer 1000x for all six areas (including the "maybe perhaps" ones) shown on the map plus enough further land on the promontory east of the third beach to round out our desired total. I also told him that he could drop the last stipulation if he had to and fall back to offering

1000x for the 853 *stremmata* contained in the six measured areas, but that he should not concede more land than that without lowering the total offer. Whether it would do more good than harm to offer the farmers now the originally contemplated option payments was a puzzler which would be easier to solve once we had the timing of the soil survey in mind. So I held back the letter for a few days hoping to add a postscript on the basis of a cabled reply from Don; then I had to send it anyway and just ask Anarghiros to use his own tactical judgment.

Don failed to answer because he had gone to Washington for consultations. In mid-December, however, as I was hammering out the draft agenda for the next meeting of those expert advisers who would be coming to New York from the four corners of the earth, I heard from Nicholas, who said:

> "Although Mr. A. is willing to help, the Minister of Agriculture does not think that at this moment such a survey could be carried out by people of the Ministry. Mr. A. suggested that we had better wait for some time. In view of the uncertainties with regard to time required for such a survey, I would like to suggest the selection of the soil chemists, not working for the Government, who could give us equally valid reports."

A week before Christmas, after several sleepless nights haunted by visions of possessing a large tract of land that erosion had impaired beyond any redemption, I cabled to Anarghiros:

> "Have decided to go ahead without soil survey. Offer owners full payment late January on terms stated my letter November twenty-fifth."

Just after this my work took me through Rome, and through Athens where I picked up some germs, to Addis Ababa and after that on to Bangkok. The vigorous germs from Athens were troublesome for a long time.

7

The Coming into Possession

When the third summer was at hand, and the bell rang for what John and Sherleigh and I earnestly hoped would be the last round of the battle for the land at Grámmata, we decided to forgo a house and base ourselves on the Hermes Hotel. I arrived there first. The noon-day heat brooding over the Aegean was stifling but my spirits rose as I sighted that fine old wreck of an island. Soon I was studying its symphony of dark and light rocks from close by, and then the fast *Apollon*, new to that run, let loose its booming horn and raced the last mile into port.

Not only was Babi on hand to brief me that evening before going back to his naval station in Crete, but, as I soon discovered, Anarghiros had solved my whole interpretation problem in depth. For small and medium talk there was a dark-eyed, attractive young Syriot named Dora, home from her studies of English and stenography in Athens. Dora would stand by for our call, always smilingly ready to help us, and between times she would bring me bunches of jasmine. (Later she also bestowed her smiles and her jasmine on Sherleigh and particularly, for some reason, on handsome John.) For the denser, more technical work, Anarghiros had Professor Kyriakis waiting in the wings — the man who I knew had been responsible for the English renderings of Anarghiros' letters to me when Babi was away.

Professor Kyriakis was a real master. The only problem he had in being an interpreter was that he himself became so interested, apparently, in what I was saying that he would merely nod and say "yes" and forget to put it into Greek for those with whom I was supposed to be having my discussion or negotiation.

However, at the moment when I stepped ashore all that I knew was that we had had another half year of attempts to communicate and negotiate from a distance, and that these attempts had perhaps at last been successful. Anarghiros had kept my blood pressure up by sending me the Old Man's impossible new counter-offer — which the Old Man defended by asserting that the land areas involved were really larger than measured by the surveyor — and then himself (Anarghiros) telling me "I think that with the delays there arise many matters which would have been avoided if they had been settled from the beginning. You must have also in mind that the sellers are expecting an answer as well as the closing of the transaction." I replied by formulating my final offer ("beyond that, I am no longer interested in my Syros project") but asking Anarghiros to get better terms than that if he possibly could (he did). I also asked him to get signed and witnessed statements from the farmers that they would sell on the terms they agreed to orally. "I too," I told him, "am very tired of all these delays — as you know, they have not been caused by me at any point in the whole long process — and I want to know promptly, yes or no."

Six weeks passed. "Because of the seriousness of your instructions," Anarghiros wrote, "I considered it useful to call my son Haralambos from Crete, who, getting a permission, came here, and I showed him your letter." There was not much more to his message, but at the end it said: "I really believe that shortly I shall be in the pleasant position to inform you about the complete and clear property of the sellers as well as the satisfactory terms according to your letter."

The silence from Syros after that lasted more than three months. My letters went unanswered. As far as I

was concerned, Anarghiros might as well have been an astronaut walking alone in space — on a broken tether. Tired of being in the dark I got Elias to ask another uncle who was then on the island to ask Anarghiros to inform me immediately about the status of the deal, since I planned to leave for Norway within two weeks. Anarghiros replied by cable: "Received Elias cable and expect your arrival for arrangement." Somewhat annoyed I shot back: "Hope arrive Athens July fifteenth Syros about nineteenth if contract is agreed but must have definite information before leave New York July second. Please cable particulars." With only three days to go I had Anarghiros' final cable in hand:

> "Owners agree for contract everything ready until now expecting your arrival for further actions be prepared for closing transaction."

Babi now filled in for me the blanks in this story as we spoke in low voices at a table in the lobby of the Hermes, trying to avoid being overheard by nearby strangers who on their part were obviously trying to listen in. I understood better now about the delays. For when the titles were searched it was found that someone named Perris owned a small bit in the middle of lot No. 4, the additional land that the Old Man had agreed to sell us beyond the ridge. And no sooner was Perris persuaded to sell than it transpired that five heirs of a man named Baxevanakis owned a more substantial piece of the Grámmata cape itself, close by the inscriptions.

Whether or not this surprised the Voutsinos brothers as much as it did my lawyer and notary, it in any case started a quest for five more consents and signatures. Luckily the two heirs living in Athens signed up quite quickly, and the two in London followed suit not long after. But the fifth turned out to be a sailor lying in a hospital bed because of a shipboard accident, and he was quite unable to sign anything for a long time. Meanwhile because my letter had demanded signed statements from Dalezios and Voutsinos, Anarghiros went through the tedious business of negotiating the long-deferred

pre-agreements, which, however, were over- optimistically drawn up on a two-months basis and lost their validity before they could come into effect.

Shortly after that — and I was by then already in Athens — the Old Man died. This was saddening news. He had the dignity of his years and his profession, and John and I had come to think of him with exasperated affection.

Anarghiros interposed to enable Babi to give me the very latest bulletin. Barba Yiorgi's heirs, Marigoula and Evangelos, fortunately wanted to go through with the deal. However, they had sent word that morning that they preferred to wait for six months so as to be able to pay their inheritance tax before they got the money from me! At this culminating point in our conference we adjourned it. Outside could be heard the whistle announcing the departure of Babi's boat.

Papadopoulos and Provelengios were at that moment in a huddle in the notary's office.

"It's against the law," said Papadopoulos (of course in Greek).

"Anyway" (Provelengios speaking) "even Amerieans — even these Americans — would never do it."

It was good to learn later on in the evening that they had composed a letter to Vangeli in which they said that his delaying tactics, far from saving him and his stepmother any money, would have the opposite effect, subjecting them to a further retroactive inheritance tax and a penalty tax in addition. It was even better to get Vangeli's oral agreement, three days later, to sell at once. Barring some upset before or at the signing, it would seem that the land was now ours.

Evidently the legal warning had been persuasive. And/or, as I also found out one evening while Father Demetrius was driving me over to Kini in his new Fiat car — for *ouzos* there and dinner back in Hermoupolis, on me — the thing that had been persuasive to Vangeli was the Father's advice.

"Easy! *e molto pericoloso*!" I protested as we swept at crazy speed down the steep mountain curves.

Father Demetrius laughed. "I can drive this road at night even without my lights," he said, shifting down into our least lame language of communication, French.

As the drawing up of the ponderous contracts of sale was expected to take five or six days and actually took much longer, I had time for a trip by boat to Grámmata, and for other assorted activities. The boat trip was in the *Anna* again, now skippered by a veteran sailor named Kyriakos who was to me the very picture of the wily, redoubtable Ulysses. Even the curl of his nose was right if a miraculous escape from danger was what you had in mind. In dumb show he asked me if this — sweeping the bare hills all about Grammata bay with his hand — was mine.

"*Malista*" (yes), I replied, "to there" — pointing.

"*Oraia!*" (beautiful), said Ulysses.

"Best for fishing, best for everything" was the way John said, on another occasion, that Kyriakos put it to him.

The other member of this particular party was a retired cartographer of great experience named John Roussos, who went bounding up the hills like a goat in spite of his seventy years. Some time later, just for friendship, he made John and me a beautiful contour map.

I returned to Athens for several days, mainly to clinch arrangements, begun on the way out, for a preliminary survey for water. From New York I had written again to Bramao at FAO/Rome, and he wrote back that Dr. David Burdon, Project Manager of the United Nations Special Fund's groundwater hydrology project in Greece, advised me to contact the people in the Institute of Geology and Sub-Surface Research, which was part of the Ministry of Industry, in Athens. Secretary-General of Industry Politopoulis said yes to what I asked, and it was soon officially settled with Drs. Zachos and Papakis that an Institute hydrologist would come out to Syros on August 9th, just after John's arrival, to make a three-day preliminary reconnaissance at my expense. This could be followed up some time by a more detailed survey, with test drilling, should that be warranted.

The experts whom I met in Athens on this and other visits were generally not very optimistic, I noticed, that any underground water *would* be found. I myself, having talked further in Hermoupolis with Mayor Vafias and having borrowed back from him for closer study the United Nations desalination report which I had sent to him earlier, was rather less hopeful about it than before. According to this report, there were some 2500 wells on the island (practically all in the southern part) but salinity was making inroads and only about one-third of these were in use. For the increasingly brackish municipal water circulating in pipes the metered charge was 20 drx. per cubic meter. The widely used extra-expensive well water brought from springs and wells by truck or horse or donkey in containers cost 75, 150, 300 and even 500 drx. One-fifth of the houses in Hermoupolist had rain-water cisterns on their roofs. A few large cisterns existed outside of town, and there was some talk of damming up one or two of the valleys, a major deterrent to this being the high percentage of loss anticipated from evaporation and silting. Then there was the water brought from the island of Poros in large plastic bags which were towed through the sea; somewhat surprisingly ships in port could buy this for the same price as the municipal water — 20 drx.

So now there was the mayor's struggle to obtain a desalination plant. As he told me, for us he hoped that wells would solve the problem, but he had to concede that recent probes in various parts of the island had entirely failed.

While in Athens this summer I also drove out to admire the re-afforestation project of the Friends of the Trees Society on Mount Hymettus, of which I had heard so much. But I was not able to meet at this time the Society's inspired President, Mrs. Kaity Argyropoulos.

In the Agricultural Attache's office at the Embassy a major topic of discussion was the Holstein calves being brought to Greece under the American aid program. There was interest also in a new milk pasteurization plant said to have been started in Syros; I

promised to dig out some information about this.

And I was drawn, as a moth to the flame, into making now another long, futile effort to speak with Mr. Athanasatos about the possibilities of arranging for a soil survey at Grámmata on some basis. Finally one day I muttered something to one of the Director General's secretaries over the phone about how I would consider it a breach of courtesy were he to come to New York in two successive years, meanwhile writing me a whole series of letters, and were I then to fail to make *some* arrangement to see him if that were his request. Then I was ashamed, for I had some inkling of how busy a man he was, serving as Greece's chief expert in the Common Market agricultural policy talks on top of all his other duties.

Back in Syros I learned that now Vangeli was making a new try. While he still agreed provisionally to sell immediately rather than wait, it was only right, he argued, that I should pay his inheritance tax.

"*Lipon, tha i-meh thios pithicou*" (well, I'll be a monkey's uncle), I reacted to this, to the astonishment of Anarghiros, Papadopoulos, and Dora. Evidently my arduous studies of spoken Greek were bearing fruit — of a sort.

My team swiftly beat down this new idea of Vangeli's, and the tedious drafting of the contracts very slowly proceeded. It appeared to me that the time for the closing was actually receding day by day. I did not now dare go anywhere near Grámmata for fear of somehow upsetting the delicately balanced situation. But I thought I might go looking for the young English geologist who was studying the unusual metamorphic rocks between our land and Syringas; or, better, take some long walks to other parts of the island — for instance to the cave of Pherecydes, the master of Pythagoras. Pherecydes is credited by Cicero with having had the first idea of the immortality of the soul, and is also supposed to have died of being consumed by lice. I inquired of Christos Binopoulos, an agricultural engineer, if there were not a young naturalist somewhere about who might go

walking with me and tell me the names of the various plants.

To this he replied in the negative without a moment's hesitation. "The people of Syros," he told me emphatically (in French), "are not interested in the land; they are interested in the sea."

As a general proposition that was undoubtedly true. A considerable number of farmers were wresting some kind of living from the soil; probably those raising and exporting cucumbers and tomatoes were doing it best. But the great majority got their livelihood from the sea — being mostly on merchant ships and seldom at home at all, or some of them manning the fishing boats that went out in the evening, and some working in the shipyard and the floating dock, or serving in the navy.

There were also a few urban industries to provide employment — some small textile factories, an emery mill that processed those ores from Naxos, a flour mill, a small fish-processing factory, not to speak of the electric power plant. Retail trade and services were, of course, much in evidence, and small-scale craft production. In dark shops all over town many things were made, from furniture to *loukoumia*. A bent old mechanic in a tiny hole-in-the wall cluttered up with old cigarette boxes containing assorted old screws, nails, and washers could fix your typewriter. The brother with whom Frieda lived made store teeth.

Anyway, I found that I didn't have time for long walks because I had to spend a couple of days clearing Sherleigh's blank checks and pills. The blank checks arrived in a much larger quantity than expected. Before we could get them through Customs, where everyone up to the highest official sitting behind his large desk in his large office under large portraits of the King and Queen pored through enormous tomes in an effort to decide what classification they came under and how much duty I would have to pay, an official of the Post Office and I had wasted half a day.

Immediately after this I was notified of the arrival of the pills. My wife had reordered these from a Connecticut doctor by a cable which described their purpose

because she couldn't recall the name. Here the problem was different: the Post Office wouldn't release them to me without approval from a local doctor and the Health Department. They did show me the package — on which I saw the name of the pills, which in turn enabled my wife to buy some immediately at a *pharmakeion* down the street — but the running down of the necessary medical clearances for the imported supply used up another day and a half.

Finally I took Sherleigh for a day's excursion to show her Naxos, as she had shown me Mykonos the year before. Baroutakis was very nervous about this. "The farmers will not wait," he reminded me. "Will you be back tomorrow evening, yes or no?" Actually we almost did fail to return on time to meet the schedule of events as it was now shaping up. This happened because the steamship line without any advance notice chose the very next day to put the *Apollon* into drydock and scrape off the barnacles. Luckily the *Elli* came along from Amorgos and we got back to Syros on her instead, only a few hours late.

* * *

The labour of drawing up the contracts was now at last nearing completion. Professor Kyriakis borrowed the contract for the Dalezios transaction and spent a full hour — there were eighteen closely written pages of it — giving me an oral translation of what it said. Some advance understanding of what I was soon to sign had seemed to me a desirable precaution. I found that this *magnum opus* from the hand of Provelengios had a few surprising cross-currents but that I ("John of Charles") certainly agreed with what it seemed to be getting at. So now it was almost time to send for the money while the Voutsinos, Baxevanakis, and Perris contracts were rounding into final shape.

Getting ready to make the payments had begun for me in New York even before Anarghiros had wired me to arrive "prepared for closing transaction." I scraped together into my bank account the sums I thought I would need, borrowing some extra to be on the safe side. Then I went to talk to my banker about the mechanics. It would obviously not make sense to put large sums into my Hermoupolis account in advance and be unable to take them out again if I wanted to. On the other hand, I knew that if and when I came to need the drachmas I would need them quickly.

He said to me that we should arrange a signal in the form of a special cabled message from the Hermoupolis branch of the Commercial Bank of Greece. We rehearsed this signal carefully and the action to be taken as soon as it was received, all of which was written down and placed in a special file to guard against failure of memory or his own absence on vacation. How long would it take me to get the drachmas after the cable went out, I asked — would it be about two days? "Less than that," he told me; "when we get a cable order we respond on the same day, not the next."

I still did not fully grasp the mechanics of payment, supposing naively that I would be able to hand out checks drawn against my Hermoupolis account as soon as the farmers actually signed, post-dating these drachma checks, however, just enough to enable the signal to be sent and the cash to be drawn on the day of closing. Papadopoulos straightened me out. "That's illegal. The payment must be in cash at the moment of signing." Then, seeing my consternation — for I had become infected by Anarghiros' worry that the farmers would still back out at the last moment — he went up the street to my bank and returned with their guaranty to me which in translation read:

> "In reply to your oral request, we acknowledge you that according to the laws in force nowadays and since you are a permanent inhabitant of a foreign country, it is possible to cancel remittance from abroad in your name and return the money to the sender of it."

So now the stage was set. At 9.30 on Thursday morning the 4th of August — the morning after Sherleigh and I got back from Naxos — the prearranged signal went

out by full-rate cable from the Commercial Bank of Greece, Syros Branch, addressed to my bank in New York. The farmers were advised to stand by for a closing on Saturday morning, the time they would normally be coming to town in any case. I myself stood by to take some of the credit for a small but useful demonstration of how expeditiously things get done in an efficient, advanced country, even if the same could not always be said of Greece.

The anguish that slowly engulfed me during the next five days and a half was indescribable. No money came. On Friday Anarghiros was still saying his usual business-like "good day" and walking away confidently when anyone stopped him on the street to engage him in conversation about our affairs; by Monday morning he was staying at home as much as possible and, when he and I did get together, I thought I could read even on his haggard face the incredulous look I had thought I detected on the faces of the bankers, the notary, and the lawyer some time before. "Can it be," this look said or so I imagined, "that there *is* no money and that we, who were not born yesterday, have for two long years allowed ourselves to become more and more the dupes of a strange American practical joke?"

Of course I sent agonized follow-up cables, and between all of us we scarcely allowed the cable office, the bank's head office in Athens, or even the Post Office to have a moment's peace. I thought of that little old Western Union man setting out on his bicycle from some place like White Plains to carry my message down to New York, but this didn't seem convincing. "I just can't understand it," I said to Sherleigh for the hundredth time as she sat skimming the olive oil from her plate of lentil soup and we tried to reconstruct what might have gone wrong.

On Tuesday morning we prepared at the bank this telex message:

> "Cannot understand failure receive funds requested in Comerzbank cable from Syros 4 August or reply my two cables 6 August. Delay is wrecking all my plans. No explanation in Syros or Athens. Precisely what action did you take and when? Reply to Syros."

Early that afternoon, however, before this was transmitted, the bank's head office in Athens telephoned to say that the funds had just been received from New York. So Anarghiros shook himself out of his trance and began the complicated, weary long operation by which it was still just possible to arrange for the closing to take place the following morning with everybody present.

I never did feel that the research my bank in New York later did to find out the cause of the fiasco was a hundred per cent successful. The root cause of much of the delay, however, was undoubtedly the fact that the message that actually reached my uptown branch of that great banking institution from its towering headquarters on Wall Street said to send the money to the Commercial Bank of *Iraq*.

One of the consequences of this shattering delay was that when the capable young expert with the sudden smile from the Institute of Geology and Sub-Surface Research arrived from Athens on Monday evening, as I had requested, it was not yet possible for his water reconnaissance to get properly under way. But he and John — who had just arrived too — went up in the *Anna* on Tuesday nevertheless and looked at our land from offshore, merely taking the precaution of not setting foot upon it.

This was not as much of a waste of time as I had supposed that it would be. As Athanasios Dounas explained in very good English to John, and repeated for the benefit of the rest of us, including his own pretty wife, at our *souvlakia* dinner in the Square that evening, the thing he was hoping to find was some places where bands of marble would cut across the valleys between our hills. Water permeates marble but it cannot get through the other locally prevalent rock, a kind of schist, unless there are unexpected fissures. Thus, at

the bottom of a band of marble where it crosses a valley most of the winter rainfall that has sunk into the ground before reaching the sea is likely to come to rest. And from the boat he could see three such long marble bands and had already concluded that locations could be pinpointed in our third valley for digging wells that would find a large part of such amounts of groundwater as our land with its modest watersheds might possess.

This was good news. I liked his cautious optimism. Next morning, Anarghiros agreed, it would be all right for John to take Dounas all over the land itself, even while its owners were engaged in transferring their claims to me at the signing ceremony.

* * *

The great day dawned. By half past nine I was at our notary's office with Anarghiros and Sherleigh, waiting. First came Marigoula, dressed all in black with a shawl over her white hair, weeping, accompanied into the room by Vangeli. One by one the others arrived — Papadopoulos, a Baxevanakis, Perris, Father Demetrius, Professor Kyriakis, another Baxevanakis, and so on. Those of us already there would stand up, shake hands, and then sit down again. Provelengios sat behind his desk shuffling papers. The size of the gathering grew. Already by nine-forty-five everybody I could think of seemed to be on hand except the Voutsinos brothers. I wondered what was to happen next.

Provelengios exchanged a few words with Anarghiros and Papadopoulos, whereupon we all filed out and moved in a small procession diagonally uphill to the office of another notary whom I had never met. Greeting me, this notary thanked me (according to Professor Kyriakis, at my elbow) for what I was doing for the island. Then he adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses, spread the contracts out on his desk, and waited.

Now Antonios (Big Hands) Voutsinos and his elder brother John made their appearance, to my relief, and the second notary began to read. Papadopoulos stood

alertly by, watching the text as it was read, but the rest of us found chairs and sat — Marigoula and Vangeli, two Voutsinos, two representatives of the Baxevanakis family, Perris, someone to countersign for *him* when he made his mark, Sherleigh and I, Kyriakis, the lawyer for the Dalezios interest (who had to be there, at my expense, to satisfy legal requirements), the two notaries, Father Demetrius, Frieda, the second notary's secretary, and two or three others whose connection with the proceedings I could not guess.

The notary read in a good strong voice, accompanied by a low humming noise close by my ear produced by Professor Kyriakis as he gave me the almost simultaneous interpretation. There were interruptions from time to time as the notary stopped — usually in response to a shout of "*ochi*" (no) from one of the owners — to enter a small correction in the margin. Interruptions were also caused by donkeys sticking their heads in the window to find out what was going on, for peddlers would halt their carts to join other passersby in listening for a while to the notary. At one point a belligerent individual forced his way through a side door in a powerful effort to persuade the notary to take up a different piece of business with him. Again, the notary would stop to receive messages brought by messenger and would write out brief replies. His secretary kept gigglIng loudly in an inane way until finally a messenger brought her her lunch and she settled down to munching.

The notary's voice droned on and on. Suddenly without any warning John Voutsinos arose from his chair and made a move toward the door. Probably he could not stand all this reading any longer, or else he and Big Hands right beside him had had second thoughts about the bargain they had struck. In an instant, however, Papadopoulos and Father Demetrius had seized his arms and dumped him with little ceremony back on his chair, where he remained, muttering in a whining sort of way.

About noon a murmur ran throughout the gathering as one of the tellers from the bank, Zorbanos by name,

arrived carrying a bulging satchel. A chair was at once found for him and he sat down quietly with the satchel between his knees. A little later the reading finally stopped and the signing got under way. For my part I signed the four contracts, the pages of them, and the corrections. Altogether, according to the count that I did my best to keep, I signed my name in that room ninety-eight times.

Now, after the signing, Mr. Zorbanos opened the satchel and took out of it packet after packet of hundred-drachma banknotes — to me and doubtless to some of the others present the largest and finest display of money we had ever seen. After he had counted out this money, and Father Demetrius recounted it, it got distributed around rather quickly and the former owners made for the door without further formality, some of them however stopping to shake my hand.

In the nearly empty room I said good-by and thank you to Mr. Athanasoulis, the second notary. Then I went to the bank where I waited for Papadopoulos and Anarghiros to bring the tax receipts and other necessary papers. Then I signed my name eleven times more.

It was one-fifteen by my watch. Sherleigh and I had a quick lunch in the Hermes Hotel, after which Anarghiros and I took a taxi to Kini where Kyriakos had brought the *Anna* and was waiting to take us to join Dounas and John on the land. *Our* land: I told John we no longer had to cross our fingers when we called it that.

* * *

Entering the square on his way to the Pantheon for a cup of coffee, Anarghiros was accosted for the twentieth time by someone who wanted to know what the Americans were going to do with their land now that they had bought it.

"This is fine weather," Anarghiros replied, "Good day to you."

Mayor Vafias invited us to write an article for his newspaper, telling of ourselves and our aims. The assignment fell to John, who wrote a straight story with not much in it for those who wanted to believe that we had a fantastic money-making scheme up our sleeve, nor indeed for any who might prefer to hear about a well-rounded program of economic development and uplift generally. Thus he said in a typical passage:

> "Now, science has shown that by planting trees and carefully tending them in the early years, man can gradually restore the fertility of worn-out soil and build new soil where none is left. The Piersons do not claim to be soil experts. But expert techniques are believed to exist for doing economically what they propose to do. What is needed now, they say, is for someone to take these practical techniques and apply them to a piece of land like the one at Ta Grámmata. They think someone should make a start."

No doubt the editor, too, found the material a little dull. As printed, the story started out with a paragraph telling the reader that it could now be stated that we did not intend to open a nudist colony, as some had supposed.

As a matter of fact what we did intend to do, if we could just find some water and also banish the goats, could be stated too, at least in a general way. We would set out a few olives and fruit trees. We would get a large block of land into forest if that could be done. We would have a try perhaps at the difficult business of establishing grasses somewhere as well. We would keep a "leave alone" area for the aromatic scrub and the bees that made the miraculous honey (of which Vangeli brought me one day a bucketful, possibly because his beehives now suddenly found that they had no legal right to be on my land). And some day we hoped to build a small house. On the other hand, how we would go about these things was by no means clear.

After one more series of attempts to obtain a soil expert, public or private, from Athens had come to nothing (in spite of unceasing efforts by Triantaphyllidis), we turned to Binopoulos. Would he be willing to make

a short study and advise us on the soil possibilities? He said that he would but that first we must tell him what we really had in mind: "*quel est votre but*?" In any case he could tell us right away that without water we would be able to do nothing. It also seemed pretty clear to him already after a first quick inspection of our land that, as far as the planting of fruit trees was concerned, we would have to dig individual holes with dynamite and scrape the soil together to fill those holes.

We would also have to keep out the goats; without that all of our efforts at reafforestation would be defeated. I told him that the farmers as a condition of selling me the land had made me sign a statement that I would not hold them responsible for any damage their goats might do to my property, up to the time when I had built a fence. But building fences, Binopoulos pointed out, was difficult and expensive; therefore perhaps we should ask the Forest Service to declare the whole area a reafforestation area, or else indemnify the owners for getting rid of their goats, and in one of these ways have done with the problem once and for all.

Stone walls were what looked just right to John and to me, and of course we hoped to build them with local labour. We didn't need Father Demetrius to remind us that we now had some obligations to the local population. But the contractors in town had decided that the Americans were made of money — an illusion which the arrival of some friends on a yacht on the day of the closing did nothing to dispel — and somehow no bids we could get from them for doing anything at all were less than fantastic.

Was there then a solution in having the neighboring farmers get together to build us the walls in their spare time? — another idea of the Father's, which he, however, dropped when someone called his attention to the problem of compensation for injuries sustained in such work. Did this apparent *impasse* mean, then, that we should forgo the traditional stone walls altogether and go talk to the makers of wire fences in Athens?

One day Father Demetrius drove John and me and

our guest Balatsos over to the far side of Mount Pyrgos to interview a young farmer who lived only about an hour's fast walk (for him) from the Grámmata land. The idea was to sound him out for a future job of planting and watering trees and perhaps of becoming some day the man to watch over our place on a year-round basis. My canny friend Anarghiros Balatsos, a shepherd's son risen to be bailiff of the Noel-Baker estate in Euboea, was exactly the open-faced, statesmanlike man to conduct an investigation like this.

Stepping ahead, the Father stood alone on a slight eminence thrust out from the side of Pyrgos, looking like an Old Testament prophet, and loudly called the man's name. His call rang in the wide clear air and came echoing back to us. Then down on a terrace in a vineyard many hundreds of feet below us, a figure dwarfed by the distance waved and called faintly back. The Father's voice imperiously summoned him to come up.

He was hot when he arrived. "*Ti theleteh, Patehra?*" (what do you want, Father?). Balatsos, intervening, talked briefly and easily with him about his work and his plans.

Balatsos asked him why he stayed on a farm in Syros while so many other young lads went to Athens or emigrated or went to sea. The answer was that the life had suited his father and his grandfather and it suited him; he didn't like changes. Did he like to experiment with new methods of cultivation? No, he didn't; the old ways were best.

"A good boy and a good worker," Balatsos concluded his report to John and me, "but timid in his mind. Certainly not the one you are looking for."

I concurred. Who knows what we might be dealing with some years hence? — irrigation water at small cost from the sea? New layers of soil created as if by magic? All serious agricultural production concentrated in urban centers, leaving beautiful land to be used in other ways?

Since the time for us to return to America was now almost at hand, John brought up again, and I was glad that he did, his project of sleeping out for at least one

night at Grámmata before we left. We made our preparations and alerted our captain, Kyriakos, for this final trip.

"*Meltemi*," we said to each other on the morning of the day we had chosen, for the water was moving uneasily in the sheltered harbor. In view of the timetable we had arranged, however, we were not greatly troubled by thoughts of the wind. By four o'clock, when we planned to go up, the wind would be easing off for the night, and early next morning it would not yet have gained much force before we got back.

Nevertheless it seemed to me that there was something a little ominous that afternoon about the black look of the water and the white crests here and there. Kyriakos nosed the *Anna* close in along the shore, cunningly taking full advantage of every headland to gain us partial shelter from the gusts that came at us from the north and the north-northwest. But at the point known to sailors as Kaloyeros (from its lifelike accidental stone figure of a monk seated in meditation where that headland rises against the sky) the coast line curves somewhat sharply away to the west, and beyond that point we found no more shelter from the wind or from the waves, which were large and powerful.

John and I had stopped talking and now stood side by side in the waist of our ship, forward of the engine hatch, holding on for balance to the hinder edge of the cabin roof. Our eyes scanned the waves ahead on our starboard bow. From time to time I glanced back at Ulysses — Kyriakos — standing in the stern by the tiller. Always he gave me his special look of positive unconcern and that classic gesture of the hand to reinforce it. Once we crashed down so hard on the far side of a crest that I wondered if the *Anna's* timbers might not have suffered from it. Still if he had any such idea his face never showed it. We must have been by then about at *Scala*, a place where we later conceived of a new way of reaching our land from the back, and so avoiding the trip around the northwest cape entirely, on days when a gale blew from the south or southwest instead of the north.

Once around the far corner we ran mostly before the waves, and the tension lessened. In Grámmata harbor there was calm. Kyriakos put us ashore with our equipment, confirmed that he would be back for us an hour after sunrise, and headed out at once on the return course, looking, I thought, as unconcerned as ever.

We cooked and ate our meal on the beach by the cape and watched the light fade from the succession of rounded headlands stretching away purple and brown in the distance. A fisherman rowed his small skiff around one of the nearer capes. The scent of the *phrygana* was still perceptible although far fainter now than before. When the sun was gone from the sea a lovely amethyst light clung to the stony upper slopes of Mount Syringas. Then the stars multiplied in the sky and brightened incredibly. There was little wind. We lay on our air mattresses pointing out to each other the stars and the constellations we knew by name, and exclaiming at the shooting stars. Then I was satisfied but John continued to study his star charts with his flashlight.

I awoke not long after midnight with sand in my teeth and my hair and my air mattress deflated. The wind was up again, moving in strong sudden gusts that seemed to fall on us from the heights in back of the beach. Though we gained some protection from flying sand by wrapping T-shirts and sweaters about our heads — we didn't need this clothing for warmth — we slept only fitfully at best for the remainder of the night.

We were eating a cold breakfast when Kyriakos rounded the low marble point ahead of schedule. As the *Anna* drew nearer we could see that he was drenched to the skin and wore on his brave sailor's face a look that was not the same.

"*Poli thalassa*" (heavy sea), he said when we were on board. With no more comment than that but only a decisive shaking of his head as he swung an arm toward the northwest cape around which he himself had just come, he set a course in the opposite dlrection, to the south. We understood then that it was his intention to return to Hermoupolis by going around the long way

and keeping in the lee of the island as much as possible.

There was an awesome quality about the sea on this day. For the first hour and a half — past Kini and on past the tourist spots in the southwest corner — the waves were going with us but our sturdy engine kept us from taking any mountains of water in over the stern. It was sobering then, as we rounded that corner, not to find the expected shelter but meet the shock of waves coming from almost dead ahead, as though the wind now had in it more east than north. We made slow progress after that. For more than an hour we fought those waves, pitching and pounding. We were all of us drenched and had the pump running continually. Kyriakos, unwavering at the tiller, would almost disappear as a sheet of spray engulfed him.

I thought when we reached the little bay at Vari that surely Kyriakos would run in there and drop anchor. Instead he kept on. So, around the southeast corner and then due north toward Hermoupolis we beat our way, Kykiakos with uncanny skill taking the waves just right and always gaining such barely noticeable shelter, precious nonetheless, as the right position in relation to even a distant islet or headland could afford. John and I were by now for the most part frozen into braced positions on benches in the *Anna's* small cabin. One of the window squares at the front end of the cabin, smashed by a heavy sea, let the spray in on us, while the door to a locker just underneath it tore loose from its hinges and kept slamming about on the floor in a tangle of fishing gear.

Just when it began to seem to me that our ordeal could never have an end we suddenly reached water that was distinctly quieter, and I found on coming out of the cabin and peering ahead that we were almost up against the beach of Donkey Island. Only a comparatively narrow strait — a thousand yards wide, perhaps — now lay between us and port. The houses clustering on the twin hills of Hermoupolis were there in plain view.

I felt — I may have been mistaken — that Kyriakos hesitated before starting off across that murderous final

stretch of open water. For here at last there was nothing whatever to check the wind howling down from Tinos a dozen miles away, and here, too, we had no choice but to race for our goal with the waves full on our beam. Several times I was sure that the next towering wave or the one behind that was about to swamp us.

There was not a great deal to say as we shook the hand of Kyriakos after we got to the dock. "*Efkharisto*" was the best I could do, or, in other words, thanks. "*Kalos naftis*" (good sailor) said John, which was a fair statement and certainly very much to the point.

Epilogue

One day the next spring two experts on soil and trees from the Mountainous Economy Service borrowed a shovel, cut a small profile from a hillside on the Grámmata land, and squatted beside it for a long time carefully considering the soil and the weathered rock underneath it. The shovel belonged to the Greek God, as a pair of American girls recently arrived on Syros had dubbed him. The Greek god and his keenly involved brother, working with dynamite and according to Dounas' report and map, had struck water in the first of our wells the day before. This was several days before the colonels' coup made dynamite hard to get.

Our soil was of fine quality, the one who was a soil scientist told me cheerfully, pocketing some of it for more detailed chemical analysis later, and it was deep enough to rule out the need to blast any holes for individual trees.

One of my most trustworthy friends is a man with a lifetime of farming experience in Connecticut. He and his wife came by on a visit about that time and together we walked up and down and around the Grámmata hills. "My," he said finally, "that is interesting land! I must say it presents quite a challenge to you and John and the trees."

When the well was completely finished, everybody tasted the water even more seriously. "Fine! Only a *little* salty," we decided.

"Wonderful!" we concluded when the time came to stand beside our second well and pass the tin cup around. Marigoula, now our neighbor, later told me the same

thing. She had walked the five rough miles over and back in order to try it. In Athens a government man said, double-checking his chemical tests: "better than the water we get from Marathon."

During the worst winter in the memory of anyone living on the island, the Greek god and his brother lived in a tent and built our fence. Their final labour was a work of danger and daring, an extra barrier on the ledge half way up the cliff.

Drawn by our water, the goats took this challenge in stride, circumnavigating the face of the cliff above and below the ledge. So far as I know, only one of them — a disgrace to his species — fell and died on the way. "Poison them," we were advised. However, we tried another strategy, which I might divulge at some future date. This seems to be working satisfactorily for the time being.

It also appears that the land at Grámmata does indeed belong to me. "You may have bought it and paid for it," said the Forest Service just now, "but under Greek law, since it never was cultivated by the former owners, it probably belongs to us." Some of the fine print in my contracts nevertheless deflected this untimely thunderbolt.

So today Dimitri (not Father Demetrius, but one of his spiritual sons) is setting out our first trees and giving them water. I help him. He puts each little tree in its pre-dug hole and carefully fills in the dirt. I hold the thin plastic pipe that runs from our cistern, a collection of old gasoline drums pumped into from well number two. As Dimitri works, his keen, weatherbeaten farmer's face is both grave and amused. The wind rises and our little seedlings whip back and forth. Even our stiff young olives bend and quiver.

Calculations show that at the rate of planting planned for this winter we could cover the entire plantable part of our land in thirty years — assuming the trees all live. But our plan was revised the moment we got the bids for digging the holes. At our present actual rate it will take five hundred.

Then-birazi (never mind) . . . we are on our way.