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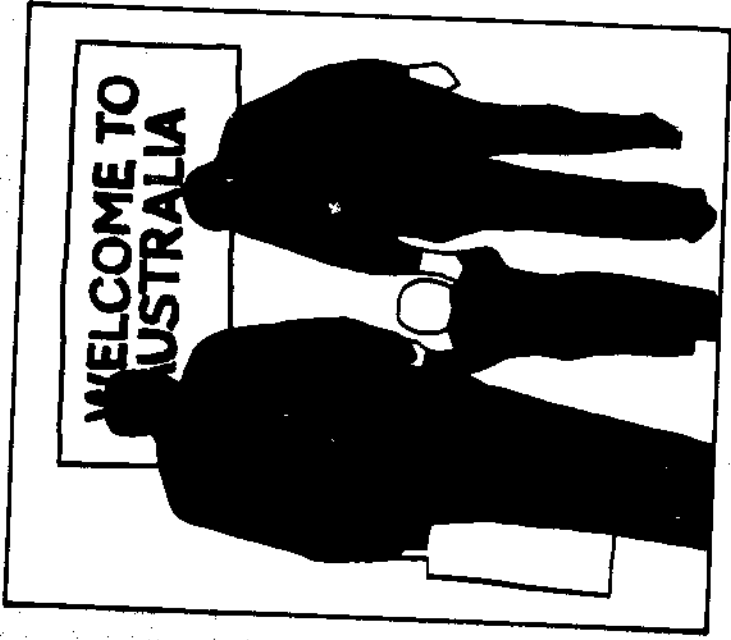


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# The Strength of Tradition

Stories of the Immigrant Presence in Australia



edited by R.F.Holt

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Dedicated to David Martin who wrote:

### Roots

Some men can only love  
The country of their birth,  
But some are not like that,  
Their hearts have wider girth.

All trees have but one stem,  
Yet some have many roots;  
Don't judge them by their bark,  
But judge them by their fruits.

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Indeed there is a woman, about her height, wearing a red dress and white shoes. Whom may she have seen off? There aren't so many people standing on the seafront, except for the odd dockers, customs officials and policemen. So she's naturally rather conspicuous.

Some people are throwing letters from the ship. The woman collects them as they fall ashore. One of them hits a steel pillar and slides into the dark waters of the Thyrranian Sea. There will be someone waiting for it in vain.

It's still there, floating, that white oblong, slowly getting heavier with the moisture that begins to permeate it... Perhaps it still could be fished out...

All of a sudden I'm gripped by fear; I feel, looking into the dark, that the end is close, too close. What's going to happen to me? What am I to become?

It is nine o'clock now and as if at a secret signal we all begin to wave and those on the shore wave back to us. From among the people standing about on the waterfront a man wearing a black mackintosh is suddenly seen to step out of the crowd, and like the red-coated woman, accompany our ship as it gets moving.

One of our fellow travellers cracks a joke: "They must have been hired as sort of funeral attendants - the man for our womenfolk, the woman for us men!"

But nobody laughs.

I have often recalled, since, our goodbye to Europe.

And now let me turn my hands, my palms upwards and ask myself: What kind of work shall I begin to do with them? And when?

## A Handful of Earth from Home

András Dezsery

One fine day, the rumour went round by word of mouth that you could buy earth from home. In the market place, on board the buses, at a number of street corners and Hungarian restaurants, an address was being circulated.

At that time I had delighted in collecting everything with a Hungarian slant: books, gramophone records, cushions, rugs, dolls, ashtrays; gradually assembling everything needed for furnishing a room. I called it my Hungarian room.

Its walls I decorated with Hungarian pottery and homespun fabrics. In a glass cabinet I displayed the best known statuettes coming from Herend, our world-famous porcelain manufacturer: Mrs Dery, the celebrated nineteenth-century actress; Csikos, the typical horse-herdsman, and others. In peasant pottery jugs I placed fresh flowers; Hungarian oil paintings hung on the walls that were daubed in green, and from which the windowsills jutted out painted a vivid cherry-red.

I was in love with that room.

On my next Saturday afternoon off, I set out to get my Hungarian soil.

At the address I had been given I found a house, the type of house that has thousands of exact replicas. My knocking was answered by a slightly-built, surly man, obviously keen on getting rid of me.

"I had some Hungarian earth, you're quite right. But I sold it all." And with that he banged the door in my face.

A few weeks later, curiosity and a sense of dissatisfaction at having been refused impelled me to return to the charge and knock once again at the door of that "two cents-a-dozen" house.

But this time I formulated my request differently.

"Could you help me," I asked, "to get at least a handful

of Hungarian earth; I want it so badly. Even a small handful would be enough, if it's genuine."

"I've just received a limited consignment," said he beckoning me indoors. I saw on his face that he realized I'd been there before. We were strangers no longer. In other words, the business could be discussed.

"I have available earth from different regions; which is your home county?" he inquired.

"I should like to have some earth from the capital; from the bank of the Danube, if possible," I replied, "from the Buda side, you know." And I added with a sigh, "More precisely from that quaint little residential district called the Tabán."

"Kindly wait a little while."

"Can I be of any help?"

"No, no. Just wait a few moments."

The deal done, I was ambling home with my little bit of earth. He'd packed it in a small, white plastic bag, tied round with a red-white-green ribbon in our national colours. I had to haggle with him to accept some money for it, because at first he sternly refused. I implored him to accept at least the refund of his out-of-pocket expenses. And I also bought from him a bottle of paprika sauce of his own concoction, as well as a bottle of genuine Kecskemét apricot brandy, which it appeared had been smuggled out of Hungary together with the sacred soil.

I showed my acquisition to a few friends, took it to my place of work, and finally transferred the earth with great care into a flower pot, making quite sure I didn't lose a particle of it.

Thanks to its presence the Hungarian room became even more pronouncedly a piece of my native land. No wonder I considered that potful of home soil a true treasure to be tended with utmost care.

I didn't want to plant anything in it. But I kept it damp like the other green plants around it. I loved it more like that

— alive with moisture — than I would have if it had all dried up.

My joy became even greater when, one day, I saw a tiny green promise, the tender shoot of a seedling, piercing the top of my good Tabán soil.

Today, I am a man in distress, a man deeply offended. With my arms and legs limp, I sit here, and I just don't know if I should laugh or cry. For the unexpected, tiny plant turned out to be the seedling of an Australian wattle.

"Allo, allo . . ." she repeated several times.

Christos kept silent. He recognized the voices of his brothers in the background and tried to picture the scene at the other end of the line.

"Allo." The voice was angry now.

A reply formed on his lips but he did not sound it. There was so much that he wished to tell his mother now. He felt lost and sorry for himself and wished that at this moment his mother could take him in her arms and let him cry in her lap as when he was a boy.

"Allo."

But things had changed. Christos was no longer a boy and his mother had grown hard, bony and adamant. They no longer shared the same life. It was simply too much of a defeat for him to tell her what she had prophesied from the beginning. She would find it out in time, he thought. No, he must not speak even though it left him with nothing.

The phone went dead. Christos kept the receiver to his ear until the last possible moment then returned slowly to his chair. He sat down and looked sadly about him. The objects in the room seemed to shrink from his gaze, and the light, so sharp and brilliant, appeared to illuminate the emptiness that surrounded him too clearly.

He sighed deeply and let his head fall back on the chair. He stared into the light above and was struck by the reflection of his own emptiness. He was weak, humiliated, pitiful and slightly drunk. His heart cringed faintly. He felt cold and knew that he was alone.

## Kapetan Nikola

Nicholas Athanasou

Sydney, 1948.

It was still dark when Kapetan Nikola opened the shop. He stepped inside and groped his way toward the light switch at the far end of the room. He traced a path around the sack of potatoes near the door, between the rows of sloping shelves filled with fruits of all kind and the counter on which lay the cash register, the sweets cupboard and the open sheets of newspaper, then edged his way carefully toward the wall. He trod on the leaves of yesterday's vegetables and heard them crackle drily underneath. The naked brightness of a hundred-watt bulb showed him the work he would have to do that morning.

He followed methodically the routine he had established over the last two months. First he swept the floor, then he went over it again with a wet mop; he wiped the shelves and the counter vigorously with a damp cloth. He restored the display of apples, pears and oranges, replacing any fruit that had fallen to the floor during the night. Then he emptied the rubbish into the garbage tin at the back of the shop, stored the empty bottles of soft drink into a box, carried in the milk and cut the double sheets of newspaper used for wrapping, into single sheets. His last job was to sharpen the knives which were used for slicing the vegetables.

Kapetan Nikola pulled out a packet of cork-tipped cigarettes from his pocket and sat down behind the counter to enjoy a smoke. He gazed at a mirror above the rows of fruit and brushed back an untidy shock of white hair that had fallen over his brow. He was wearing a collarless white shirt, buttoned to the top, and a pair of blue-striped trousers held by suspenders. He was not tall but broad shouldered, and his hands were thick and hairy. His immobile expression-

less face was thrown into areas that reflected the light differently. His cheeks were shiny and smooth, his lips, beneath a thick grey moustache, thin and colourless, and his eyes, dark and thoughtful. He stared fixedly at the objects before him and blinked deliberately.

His work took no longer than forty-five minutes but often, like today, he could stretch it to the hour. Now he had only to wait for Tony his son-in-law to return from the markets with a fresh load of vegetables and fruit. He had nothing to do till then. His daughter, Evangelia, and the other women employed in the shop would arrive in a few minutes to officially open the business. For Kapetan Nikola could neither speak nor understand English, so even if a customer had chanced to enter the shop, he would not have been able to help him.

Six months ago, he had left his island in the Aegean and emigrated to Australia. The war had devastated the small island, and most of the inhabitants had been forced to migrate either to Australia or America. During the war, he had transported refugees from Cyprus to Port Said in his own caique, and had managed slowly to scrape together the passage money to Australia for each of his six children. Why Australia? Simply because others from his own island, Kastellorizo, some even before the war, had already settled there and had sent back favourable reports of the country. So first, he had sent his eldest son to scout the land, weigh its people and plan his family's settlement. But in his first letter his son had written that this was no place for foreigners, "... Here, they work you in the markets for fifteen hours a day and pay you barely enough to live on. The people swear at you and laugh at your appearance... they hate your dark skin and the way you talk... I hate these people and their damned country...". Kapetan Nikola had pined his son but knew that there was little else he could do. His son was young and would adapt quickly, and he had expected the letters which followed to be more hopeful. Once his son had become reasonably established in the new country, Kapetan Nikola sent out his four daughters, singly or in pairs, and with this injunction to his son: "Find them husbands, men from our own island." So each girl had been matched either while en route or soon after her arrival in Australia.

He had been the last to come himself. For now that the war was over, there was trade in neither people nor goods among the islands. Everyone had spoken of bad times and even worse ahead. Before the war, Kapetan Nikola had seen good times, sailing regular trade routes between the islands and even venturing as far as the mainland, Cyprus and Egypt. But the islands were now for the most part deserted, and what little trade existed was taken over by the big companies with their larger and more efficient vessels. On Kastellorizo, just a handful of people had remained, and Kapetan Nikola had sat in *kafeneria* filled with only the oldest men. Almost every week, he had found himself farewelling relatives or friends setting out for other countries. They would embark saying, "We shall see you in Australia. Don't you worry Kapetan Nikola. This will not be the last time." His family had sent numerous letters clamouring for his presence, but he had continued to postpone departure. He had been reluctant to leave the things he knew so well. Finally a generous offer was made for the caique, and Kapetan Nikola found that he could delay his departure no longer. He had gone the rounds of all his friends and relatives to bid them farewell. He had felt them slap his back and toast him one more time; he had listened to their well known stories and had wondered whether he would ever hear them again. His cousins had cried and embraced him. His own voice had choked and the tears had flowed slowly down his cheeks. And before leaving, he had walked down to the pier and had gazed at his caique for the last time. The brass of her wheel had shone in the moonlight and her masts had stood bare and tall. The rope had been pulled taut, the caique had groaned to be set free, and a gnawing sense of emptiness had overwhelmed him as he had felt in his heart that this life was over and he would never know it again.

Kapetan Nikola took out his pocket watch to check the time. It was almost 7:30, time for his daughter to come down from the rooms above, where they all lived together. He extinguished his cigarette and began to whistle a Greek melody, but he seemed to run out of puff half-way and could not end it satisfactorily. He moved to the window and looked out through its misty pane at the early Sydney morning. On

the other side of the road, two women stood at a tram stop, talking to each other. They signalled a tram but it raced past them, ignoring their angry shouts and gestures.

He was about to turn away when he noticed that one of the apples in the window display was missing. He picked another from the box behind him and gently tried to wedge it between the others. But he succeeded only in upsetting the balance completely so that the apples went tumbling down. Kapetan Nikola swore aloud. He began to gather the apples but when he had collected an armful, did not know what to do with them. He placed them on the counter nearby; then, just as he turned round to collect another armful, he spotted some of these apples rolling toward the edge. He dropped what he had and turned to stop them — but not quite in time. Five of them had already fallen to the floor. Kapetan Nikola swore aloud again.

"What are you doing there?" a shrill voice cried in Greek from the back of the shop.

Evangelia, Kapetan Nikola's daughter, strode into the room, paused, and surveyed the disaster with outraged authority. She was a slim young girl with a smooth olive complexion and thick, wiry, chestnut hair. Her lips were compressed tightly into a thin angry line as they regarded the hapless Kapetan Nikola. He looked so awkward there, beside the counter, his arms outstretched in both directions to prevent more apples running off the edge.

"Father, what are you doing there? You've wrecked the display. Why are all these apples on the floor? Look, they're all over the place. Now they're soft and have been opened. We won't be able to sell them if they've been opened. You know that."

From the moment his daughter had entered the room, Kapetan Nikola had been expecting this tirade, and to some extent, he felt he deserved it. But his attention was strangely less taken by his present embarrassment as by the Greek word that his daughter had used for "floor", *flori*, a borrowing from English, rather than the correct word *patoma*. He let her continue until she had worked off most of her indignation.

"Well, haven't you got anything to say, father? At least do something!"

"Come here and give me a hand, daughter, and stop gabbling away! Come on!"

She appeared satisfied that her point had been made and went over to help him.

"But what are you trying to do?"

"I was trying to rearrange those apples. That's all."

"Oh silly, it's always like that. You can never get that row filled tight."

"How was I to know that?"

They checked if any apples had escaped their notice.

"No more?" she asked.

"None."

Kapetan Nikola watched in silent resentment as his daughter began to check and rearrange what he had already done that morning. She chatted about her sister's baby and Kapetan Nikola agreed that he did look a little like him. They stood facing one another. Evangelia seemed to pause deliberately before saying, "Listen father, Tony and I have been thinking. We don't really need your help that much in the mornings. We're very grateful that you do it, of course, but if you'd rather stay upstairs and rest in the morning, we can always get someone else to do this. It wouldn't cost much, really."

Kapetan Nikola looked kindly at his daughter. Yes, she meant well by it. She was a good girl. But how long had she been wanting to say all this? He tried to answer in as unconcerned a voice as possible:

"No use throwing good money away, girl. It's really no trouble. And I've little enough to do now anyway."

She shrugged her shoulders; she said "All right . . . ." but asked him to think about it anyway.

With order restored, Evangelia cheerfully kissed her father and ran up the stairs, promising to bring him down a cup of Turkish coffee. He was about to light up another cigarette when the door opened and the Australian shopgirls, Moya and Sandra, entered.

"G'day pop, 'ow are ya?" said Moya, the livelier and more friendly of the two.

"'Allo Moya, 'allo Sandra."

Sandra did not acknowledge his greeting but walked

"Good. I suppose I'd better get in there. They like to see the owner of the shop, you know."

"Won't you be needing me this afternoon then, Antoni?" Kapetan Nikola asked before Tony could turn to disappear.

"No. Don't think so. Why don't you go down to the Leski in town, Pop? Anyway . . ." Tony added in English, but he did not finish the sentence as he noticed two more customers were entering the shop. He followed them inside. Kapetan Nikola watched the short steps of the retreating figure and thought to himself, "Yes, I cannot help but like this man. Even though he leaves me here with my mouth open, gaping like a fool. For he will ensure that my daughter's future in this country is secure. Besides, it is the way of people here — to act like that."

The tram lurched down Anzac Parade, rocking its passengers back and forth monotonously. Kapetan Nikola sat at the back of the tram staring absently out of the window. He was now dressed for the Leski, having added a grey vest, a striped coat and a wide black hat. Whatever Kapetan Nikola knew of Sydney had been learnt from this tram route. He had come to recognize each of the streets, the shops and the pubs along the way. He had tried to guess the message of posters on billboards and the sides of buildings. He enjoyed the colourful illustrations of oversize jars of food, packets of biscuits, tea and cigarettes. He particularly liked the paintings of sporting events and beer glasses that decorated the walls of pubs.

As the conductor drew near, Kapetan Nikola prepared the exact change for the fare. He turned to face him and got an impression of a dark blue uniform, a badge, smooth white skin and a wide ill-formed mouth.

"Ox-for Stree," he pronounced very slowly.

"You'll need more than that, mate. Fares 'ave gone up. 'Aven't you heard? Costs thruppence now."

Kapetan Nikola did not know why the conductor refused to accept his two pence as all the others had for the last two

months. He could not understand what the conductor was saying. He repeated, "Ox-for Stree."

"Look mate. Fares gone up. No good this," and he pointed to the coins in Kapetan Nikola's outstretched hand and shook his head, "Need more — thruppence," and he indicated this by raising his middle three fingers, "three — sabee."

"But Kapetan Nikola could not see why things should change today or any other day. He still believed that the conductor could not understand his poor English and he repeated even more slowly, "Ox-for-t Stree."

The conductor tore off a threepenny ticket and pushed it under Kapetan Nikola's nose.

"Thruppence, see you bloody wog. You ignorant old dago. Why don't you bloody well learn English!"

Kapetan Nikola recognized the words of abuse. He pushed away the conductor's hand and pulled out an extra penny. The conductor took the money and purposely dropped the ticket onto the floor. He walked away grumbling to himself.

Kapetan Nikola bent down to pick up the ticket. He fingered it nervously with his thumb. He looked out the window but now found it difficult to recognize the landmarks. The colourful advertisements whose meaning he could only guess now seemed to mock him. His mouth felt dry and he was strangely conscious of his own breathing. It was somehow too deep and too loud. He could feel nothing but shame for his ignorance and hate for all Australians and this conductor in particular. He looked down wishing to avoid the accusing stares of his fellow passengers. But it was not his fault. He had never wanted to come to this goddamn awful country. He could not speak English. So what? Could they speak Greek?

With relief, he escaped from the tram at Oxford Street. He crossed the road and walked up a narrow set of stairs into the Kastellorizian Leski. This clubhouse was little more than a large upstairs room into which were crowded five or six round tables with chairs and a tiny bar that served coffee, spirits and beer. Smoke rose heavily from several tables where the men were playing cards, backgammon or just talking and drinking together. Kapetan Nikola nodded to one or two of his friends, refused an offer to join in a game of cards saying



that he did not feel like it, and then went up to the counter where he ordered a coffee without sugar.

"Yassu, Kapetan Nikola."

Kapetan Nikola turned to meet a short old crony with a bald head, a prominent fleshy nose and a wrinkled blemished face. He saw that he was drunk again.

"Where have you been since Sunday, Niko?"

"Yassu, Manoli. What do you mean, where have I been? It's only Tuesday today. I can't spend all my time here, you know. I've got to help Antoni at the shop."

Kapetan Nikola did not often use gestures when he spoke, but this time, he waved his right hand impatiently and spoke in a loud voice to his friend. He was immediately ashamed of his loss of temper; he apologized and asked him more gently, "Did you see the doctor yesterday?"

Manoli nodded.

"Well what did he tell you?"

Manoli's face brightened.

"He told me to stop drinking. Can you imagine that, Niko — me without a drink? Otherwise, he said, my belly would get bigger. My son told him he'd do his best to persuade me to stop but, as you can see, he hasn't been too successful."

And here, he took another sip from a cloudy glass that was filled with ouzo and water.

"You ought to listen to him. You remember Kapetas back on Kastellorizo. He went that way. His belly grew to be as big as a house before he died. Remember, the doctor kept taking out fluid but it just kept coming back. It was awful to see."

"Yes, I remember. But he was much older than me."

"But he suffered for years, Manoli."

Manoli grew thoughtful and paused to take another sip from his glass. He seemed to gain fresh heart.

"Suffering eh! And aren't we suffering here now, Niko, with nothing to do all day except play cards, drink and wait for death?"

"Shut up, Manoli. You're talking donkey shit."

"No listen," and here he touched Kapetan Nikola on the chest with one of his fingers that was wrapped around the

glass, and brought his face closer to that of Kapetan Nikola to whisper confidentially:

"Today my son said to me, 'You're a pisspot, dad, a bloody pisspot.' You know what that Australian word 'pisspot' means, Kapetan Nikola? A 'metho', a drunkard. He called me, his own father, a 'metho'. I went after him with the first thing I could lay my hands on, a hammer I think it was. And do you think he begged my forgiveness like a true son? No, he twisted my arm and wrenched the hammer away. He pushed me off and told me to go to my room and sober up. And I wasn't even drunk, Niko, I swear it. I couldn't believe it. What are our children coming to in this country when they begin to swear at their parents and even raise their hand against them!"

When Kapetan Nikola did not reply, Manoli stared at him for a while before asking softly, "You're not drinking, Niko?"

"No."

Manoli moved off to annoy the backgammon players with the same story. One of these players, the former policeman on Kastellorizo, a dark fat man with a bald head was angered by his intrusion and shouted at Manoli to go to hell. Kapetan Nikola took pleasure in watching this man play backgammon. He took every loss as a personal affront; he revelled in each victory, pointing out the superiority of his play and his opponent's mistakes, but cursed the dice when he lost.

He concentrated wildly on the game, never raising his eyes from the board but staring at the position of all the men and holding his breath at each roll of the dice.

The kafetzi returned with his coffee and a glass of water.

"How's it been, Kapetan Nikola?"

"Not too bad. Yourself?"

"All right."

He carried his cup to the only vacant table in the room and sat down to enjoy a smoke with his coffee. For a brief moment, the odour and taste of the coffee, the sight of the men playing cards and backgammon reminded him of the quiet sleepy *kafeneion* he had left on Kastellorizo. Yes, if he were to close his eyes the sounds would be the same. He heard the roll of the dice over the board, someone curse his luck, a murmured bid, cards being shuffled and the loud

caïque would blow her shrill little horn in greeting, and the ship like a dying god would sound a deep mournful reply.

He followed the line of warehouses until he reached the end of the fence. At this end, there was a wharf to which were tied a number of lighter craft, then further on, a jetty where a few misshapen fish hooks and some leftover bait wrapped in newspaper were scattered.

He sat down on one of the pylons at the water's edge. He took off his hat and was grateful for the cool breeze that refreshed his brow. He watched the traffic cross the bridge, a tug butt its way madly across the harbour. He listened to the screeching of the gulls, and in the distance followed the bright lights of a ferry as she approached the quay. In Kastellorizo, he had often sat for hours by the water, enchanted by the perfect stillness of the evening. He had felt so tiny before that huge dark expanse of sea and sky; but it seemed to give his life a sense of design to think that he, too, was part of such a moment; he had felt at peace with the world — content.

He looked across the bay toward the North Side where the square yellow lights of the houses and flats betokened warmth and comfortable living. He smiled at the irony which left him alone, out in the cold. But this was as it should be, he thought, for he was the outsider here, the man with the funny looking hat who could not speak the language and whom they laughed and swore at in the street. The cold sobered him more than he wished. His smile no longer seemed natural but rather weak and foolish. Not for the first time, he found himself regarding his life critically and demanding to know in what direction it was leading him. But his answers were always the same. The life was different; the people were different. Here he searched vainly for things to occupy his time. In Kastellorizo, at least his days had been full; and moreover, he had been somebody. Kapetan Nikola. It had been enough just to say his name. Everyone had known him.

He had never expected one side of the world to resemble the other. There, he had made his living with sail and motor, pursuing a retreating horizon he had never expected to capture. Here, he stood face to face with dirt and grey, the

work of fruit shops and markets, and the insults of strangers he had no wish to understand. It was as if what he had been pursuing all these years in the Aegean had suddenly turned about and devoured him.

He paused to watch a launch pass in front of him. In its wake it blew a cool spray that thrilled his cheeks. His neck felt stiff and he threw back his head and looked up at the night sky. But he could not identify any of the bright stars; the constellations were different in the south. He sighed aloud and felt the heaviness of his body; his heart was empty. Not since he had seen his caïque for the last time had he felt this way. For now, as then, he understood the void and knew nothing would ever fill it.

He turned his eyes to the dark waters below him and watched the moonlight play on the surface. It had always seemed to him that the dark waters of the night concealed a secret, and that if he were to gaze long enough at the rippling surface, the waters would open and he would be granted a glimpse of the mystery. Now he considered discovering the whole truth. He shaded his eyes from the glistening water; his thoughts were strangely empty and he could hear nothing but the sound of the water gently lapping the pylons.

He groaned aloud. No, no, no, no. It was useless. It could never be. This was no solution for a Greek. His hands shook; he was sweating all over. He took off his hat and wiped his brow. He was surprised to feel the trail of two hot tears that had involuntarily run down his cheeks.

Kapetan Nikola sat there a while longer, rose, then walked slowly back the way he had come. He stopped once to listen to the night. The stillness was now complete.

have entered her head that he could possibly be wrong or unwise in the new land. She was proud of her husband not only because he held fast to the ideas of their fathers, but also because he put the welfare of his family first. He worked at General Motors in Dandenong during the day and in the evening in the kitchen of a restaurant, to make enough money to put down a deposit on a house.

Mrs Ekdom became a familiar sight outside the school building, waiting for the three girls, and then walking with them slowly down the street, past the Tech, nodding to other mothers who were also escorting their daughters. Now and again a group of Australian girls from the school sniggered at the Ekdoms and made provocative remarks to Sophie.

One afternoon the youngest Ekdom girl was the last to come out of the school, which was unexpected, for the Ekdom girls were generally among the first. Mrs Ekdom had become quite agitated and was about to send Sophie to look for the girl when she appeared.

"Where have you been? Were you kept in?" Mrs Ekdom asked.

The girl refused to answer until they were well out of sight of the school.

"I wish you wouldn't wait outside the door, Muma," she finally said. "We're big enough to go home ourselves, aren't we?" she addressed her sisters.

Mrs Ekdom looked at her youngest with some surprise. "You don't want me to meet you?" she repeated several times.

Then as she looked from one girl to the other her face assumed a tragic expression.

But it was not incidents like this but the buying of the house that changed the familiar pattern of their lives. Mrs Ekdom was compelled to get a job in a nearby clothing factory: the joint efforts of Mr Ekdom and the eldest son Jim who drove a taxi were not enough to pay off the house and to meet the family expenses.

There was the problem of the girls, now more serious than ever as far as Mr Ekdom was concerned. He said to Jim: "You will have to try and drop in after school."

## The Strength of Tradition

Judah Waten

Mr Ekdom did not accept the fact that he was living in a new country with different attitudes. He was still at home back on the small island off Rhodes, and not in the inner Melbourne suburb of Richmond. A short, fat man with a dark, soft face, he believed strongly in keeping a stern watch on his three daughters. The eldest, Sophie, who was sixteen years old, had been promised when she was only six to a man on the island before they had migrated to Australia. The amount of the dowry and the final settlement had been put down in black and white.

There were also two sons, one a child of four and the other, the first-born, a young man of twenty-two with stiff black hair and long sideboards. He was also expected to marry a girl from the island, this also having been arranged with her parents. But Mr Ekdom did not attempt to exercise any tight control over his son. Indeed he believed young men should sow their wild oats before marriage, unlike the girls, who were only to start their sowing on their wedding-night, and never, ever, to stray from the family patch.

Mr Ekdom reared his children on that doctrine, giving his wife strict instructions to meet the three girls after school or if she was unable for one compelling reason or another, she was to make sure that they all arrived at home together. The girls were never to dawdle on the way, and above all they were not to talk to the boys from the Tech, only a couple of hundred yards away from the Girls' School. Mr Ekdom had heard some alarming stories about those boys. Most of them had motor cars or motorcycles and they were girl-mad. Mr Ekdom could hardly bear to think of what could happen to his daughters, the eldest in particular, if they were not properly policed.

Mrs Ekdom acquiesced without a murmur. It would not

"I'll try," Jim said. "But you know I could be at Tullamarine or anywhere at that time."

As Mrs Ekdom had found a lady in the street who was prepared to look after the little boy, Mr Ekdom thought that perhaps she might also keep an eye on the girls.

"Not possible," said Mrs Ekdom. "Mrs Patseis looks after twelve small children already."

It was all very depressing for Mr Ekdom who could not stop worrying about his daughters. But now and again Jim stopped outside the house and went inside to see what his sisters were doing. He was harsher with them than were the parents. He would not permit them to look into the street, let alone walk or play there.

"That's not fair," the youngest protested.

"If you won't obey your brother you won't obey your husband," he said aggressively.

Sophie turned on him.

"Sometimes you sound very silly," she said.

He became angry and threatened to hit her if she contradicted him again. He raised his open hand as if about to strike.

"Don't you dare," she said, fearlessly looking him straight in the eyes.

He stepped back, but he continued to make threats until he left the house. Sophie had surprised herself: she was expected to obey him, especially in the absence of their parents. Yet she hadn't: was it because she had acquired new ideas at school? She did not ask herself this question, but she was determined she would never be subservient to him again.

Lately Sophie had softened towards those Tech boys who were always pestering her. Once she would not open her mouth, pretending she wasn't seeing them, but now she exchanged banter with them, even though her sisters were listening and casting sly glances at each other. Innocent though she was, Sophie was nevertheless not unaware of how desirable she was to the boys. She was a large, slow-moving girl, well developed, with big dreamy eyes.

There was one youth more persistent than the rest. He thrust a note in her hand. She read it quickly.

"Meet me here tonight at seven."

Her sisters stared at her burning face.

"Let's read it," one of them said.

"No," Sophie said emphatically, and put the note in her school bag.

At home her sisters prattled about the letter and the Tech boys, especially the letter-writer. Sophie angrily tore up the note in front of her parents.

"I don't even know him," she said.

They were prepared to believe her but they suffered some uneasiness on account of this incident. The girls were really unsupervised for most of the day now that both parents often had to work overtime as well. The responsibility of having a girl like Sophie on their hands would get too much for them. There was only one way to calm and safety, and that was to get her married as quickly as possible. Could they induce her husband-to-be to come to Australia soon?

"I will speak to his uncle," said Mr Ekdom.

Uncle Con had a prosperous catering business patronized by leading members of the community.

"Don't delay," said Mrs Ekdom.

"I'll go tonight," he said.

Mr Ekdom returned from his visit to Uncle Con with an excited expression on his face.

"Remarkable! He was about to get in touch with me to tell me that George would soon be coming to Australia," said Mr Ekdom. "A remarkable coincidence. A good omen I believe. George will be catching a plane that will come straight to Tullamarine."

"That's much better than having to change in Sydney," said Mrs Ekdom. "I've heard of people who got lost on the Sydney airport and missed their planes here."

She had suppressed her pleasure, afraid of tempting fate. Something could always go wrong at the last moment.

Sophie listened to the discussion as though she were an outsider. Until now she had never really believed in the reality of this husband-to-be, despite the photographs of him, a handsome, well set up man in his thirties. It was impossible: the very idea of such a marriage ran counter to all her feelings.

"Aren't you glad?" asked Mr Ekdom.

"But I'm still at school," said Sophie.  
 "But old enough to be married," said Mrs Ekdorm.  
 "I would like to stay at school and finish typewriting," Sophie said.

The news of George's impending arrival spread through the school. Several Greek girls congratulated Sophie who couldn't help looking proud.

An Australian girl said:

"I'll marry who I want, not somebody I'm told to."  
 "He isn't an old man is he?" still another girl asked, remembering that a foreign schoolgirl had been given in marriage to a man of sixty.

"No, he isn't," said Sophie. "He's good-looking."

"You're very lucky," came the reply.

Sophie wondered. She was going to marry a man she didn't even know. Yet she did not feel strong enough to resist her parents and repudiate the solemn contract to which they attached so much importance. In a vague kind of way she felt she should oppose her parents, but she was hardly cut out to be a leader of her sex in her community. She was torn by conflicting feelings and demands.

At last George arrived in Melbourne and a few days later he came to the Ekdorm house with his uncle. He was even better looking than his photographs, Sophie told herself. And he had good manners, better than those of his uncle who spoke loudly and was accustomed to giving orders.

George looked his intended up and down with an appraising stare. She was certainly a fine-looking girl, he thought. But the house, of which the Ekdorms were so proud, depressed him. The dowry arranged back home so many years ago belonged to goat and donkey days, not the present day of the car. What could you get for it in this country? Next to nothing, he thought with some contempt.

"Work is hard to get at the moment," Mr Ekdorm said.  
 "But I think I can get you a job in my factory. I have been promised --"

"I won't need it," George interrupted him. "I will go into business."

"He has a business head," said Uncle Con. "He has worked in Athens in the last five years. And in Munich."

When they left Mr Ekdorm looked a trifle puzzled. George was not quite the man he had expected. But as though to allay unexpected misgivings he said loudly:

"I am sure he will make a good husband."

Mrs Ekdorm nodded her head. Sophie said nothing. What could she say? She would go through with the marriage if only to make her father happy.

Within a few weeks George was installed in a tourist agency, apparently having had experience of that kind of work. He appeared at the Ekdorm house in a new blue denim suit. A traditional table was laid: cold fish with the skin on it, goat cheese, olives and imported Cretan dark red wine, and lamb with okra.

"A taste of our homeland," he said, praising Mrs Ekdorm. Mr Ekdorm managed to speak to him on his own before he left.

"About the wedding date," Mr Ekdorm began. "Will I speak to your uncle?"

"I will speak to him as soon as I have properly found my feet," said George.

As soon as the door shut behind George, Mr Ekdorm gloomily announced there was still no wedding date. For some reason Sophie who had been solemnly staring at the wall, suddenly became gay and laughed at everything.

But Mrs Ekdorm began to have many restless nights, frequently waking up to look out of the window at the high brick wall of the factory next door. One night Mr Ekdorm woke up to find her in tears.

"What are we going to do?" she asked.

George was invited to lunch the following Saturday. Mrs Ekdorm spent the whole of the previous evening preparing honey cakes, garlic pastes, and a special sauce for the dolmers, now rarely made in Australia, since women worked during the week like the men.

But though George had promised to come, thanking Mr Ekdorm profusely for the invitation, he failed to arrive. An hour passed before the family began to eat the delicacies.

The meal was no sooner over when Jim jumped up from the chair and shouted:

"I'll find him and fetch him even if I have to maim him."

He will not humiliate you," he shouted into Sophie's face. "Oh, no please," Sophie whispered. "He may have been delayed at his business."

"I will kill him," Jim declaimed.

His eyes were blazing and his stiff black hair seemed to be crackling with electricity.

However he did not move towards the door: it was as if he was acting out the first part of a ritual drama, a brother passionately defending his sister's honour.

Mr Ekdom settled the matter.

"I am going to find him and bring him here," he announced. "It is my responsibility, not yours," he added looking fiercely at Jim.

Mr Ekdom left hurriedly while the rest of the family remained at the table, as though still expecting George to walk in. But Sophie soon got up, unable to bear her brother's bloodthirsty talk. She went out on to the verandah and stared around, nodding to acquaintances but not encouraging them to stop. Her pride had been injured despite her ambivalent feelings about George. What would she say at school if he never came again? How would she explain the whole affair away? But maybe he would turn up at teatime. He could have made a mistake about the time.

Suddenly she saw her father in the distance, coming towards her. As soon as he caught sight of her he began to run clumsily across the street.

"He's left Melbourne, he's cleared out," he almost sobbed, a dull, uncomprehending look in his eyes.

"Cleared out," she repeated.

She should hate her father, she suddenly thought. He was to blame for everything. Intolerable recollections broke through. Yet it was just as well things had now turned out the way they had. She forgot her old anger with him: only loving kindness remained.

## PART 2

# The Second Generation

day he sat him — and a few other people — down, and told them some truths about George Montidis.

Looking for an image of himself as more assertive and aggressive than he was today, he finished up in childhood. He used to fight a bit as a kid, but what can a child, even if he is assertive, teach a man? There was a tendency also to glorify his childhood. People thought of him as the son of migrants who had exchanged rural squalor for an Australian inner city shum, who had brought him up repressively. He was someone who had been damaged by circumstances but had pulled through splendidly. It was all only a rewrite of history.

The worst that had ever happened was being called names. His parents were shopkeepers, petty bourgeois; there had always been food and money and clothes, even intellectual encouragement. Intellectual encouragement. Ha! Dictionaries and encyclopedias bought at Woolworths. He felt guilty that he sometimes let acquaintances go on about what it must have been like for him as a child. But finally he had capitalized on such patronage. Why not?

There was no message in childhood. He tried. But all there was just added up to a funk, the moody, cranky funk that everyone lives in as a kid. One thing. At least in those days he wasn't trying to please everybody.

If he had been true to himself he wouldn't be where he was today, sharing an office with a crazy woman in a crummy College of Advanced Education. Her and her doctoral thesis, her Marxist interpretation of D. H. Lawrence, and her troop of lovers who were always on the phone, and her empty sultana packers and yoghurt cups spread all over the place.

Was this what his father had wanted for him? They had such faith in education those old bastards. Get an education means use your brains not your hands like your father. Means cushy job. Easy money. Respect. It was possible that he himself had believed some of this stuff once, again, a case of reacting to others. What would his father think of Monica, if he were ever to come to the College? He could hear him now. She looks like a tart. But she's got the brains probably. Brains is everything in this world.

## Barbecue

*Angelo Loukakis*

He was glad to get away from the others and go for a walk alone. He walked close to the bank, having left them at the picnic area preparing the barbecue. He was supposed to be looking for wood but, after a few minutes, he had found a peaceful corner where the river seemed to bend around him to the left and right. He stopped and sat down. It had become a real question of just how much longer he could go on playing these parts.

In some ways it made sense to do what he was doing. Strategies were useful. But as a way of life? There were times when it was all of no consequence, when he felt it was just elaborate theatre, and there was nothing at the centre.

Others had done their bit too in giving him so many parts to play. It wasn't solely his doing. Not only were they roles that were desired of him, they were characters he was expected to play. Rounded and believable.

To his mother he was a perfect son. Classic case. The more he did to her the more perfect he became in her eyes, the more she loved him. To his father he was a scholar. To his wife he was friend and lover — she despised the use of the term "husband". To his colleagues he was an aspiring and quite talented but junior lecturer in sociology, particularly the sociology of migration. To the kids in the neighbourhood he lived in he was, because of his dark and swarthy looks, a wog. To his in-laws, an enigmatic but likeable sort of a chap.

Why did he accept all this quietly? Well, to some extent it was out of his hands. People were lost without a definite view; they imposed it on others. And it would get him nowhere to go around challenging people's prejudices or expectations all the time. At the age of thirty he was tired enough. Anyway, some things he could live with. Like his old man's idea that he was a scholar. But it would help if one

No. If he had been true to himself he would be doing something else. What? ... A fisherman ... The thought made him squirm. An undergraduate crying on Linda's arm. Linda who wouldn't love him. He told her that it was too much, the falseness of the social world which demanded that he be this or that, do this or that. She'd asked him — How would you live your life then? A fisherman, a man in a boat, he replied. All so dramatic. But there was a drive for a simple life.

What was so complicated about what he was doing now? He was a sociologist. Really only like a stamp collector or a census taker. You have the form, the page, you stick in the stamp, the information, you add it up. Conclusions. That there are thirteen stamps from Antigua in my album. That there are approximately 532,000 Italians or 460,000 Greeks in Australia. This is what they think, according to my surveys, my study. This is what they do. Nothing very complicated about life as a sociologist. Easy in fact. Except that he felt guilty about the people who made up the numbers. The two who were his parents had worked hard — not that they'd made any money — and yet the amount of physical effort they'd expended in their lives worried him less than the loneliness he saw in them. They had no friends and their only acquaintances were customers. On the other hand, whenever he had confronted them they always said they were happy enough.

It could be that he was just being obsessive about their being unhappy. An idea about personal misery. That was the real obsession. In the West everyone was obsessed with their own psychic state, and the whole thing had reached the proportions of a social neurosis. In so many instances what counted for personal misery was just so much bullshit. What about real suffering? He worked with people whose greatest concern in life was whether their latest dinner party had been enough of a success, whether they should have served an Australian red instead of the Beaujolais (in deference to that latest resurgence of pride in things Australian), or whether their dumb thesis was going to get a first or not.

If they weren't lonely why did they want so much for him and Julia to come and live with them? They were being

unnecessarily demanding. He tried to translate that into language they would understand. He couldn't.

Across the river from where he sat was another little barbecue area, the park was full of them. On either side of it the bush was quite thick. It was like an island. He watched the natives wandering around, gathering wood, lighting fires, preparing food, eating, sleeping. Some of the older ones were laughing, some of the younger ones were crying.

He remembered that he too was meant to be participating in a barbecue. The wood. He looked around quickly and saw that there wasn't much around. He stood up and walked to the base of a nearby tree where there were a few small, broken branches. But instead of picking them up he lowered himself against the tree trunk and pulled two or three bits close to his side. He wasn't ready to go back just yet. The company wasn't all that appealing.

He was tired of the Crofts, Peter and Alice. He had been a student with Peter, what they once had in common was no longer that obvious. They weren't often in Sydney. Peter was Canberra-based, doing research for Foreign Affairs, and it had been his idea to have this get together. They were Catholics, according to their variant definition of that religion, a deviant definition no doubt according to the Church. Alice looked like a folk singer, long blonde hair and still wearing kaftans and sandals.

His father would never believe that Peter worked in Foreign Affairs. Peter with that owl face and those glasses, wearing Bermuda shorts and long socks. To his old man Foreign Affairs was big time. Heroic figures. A conversation on that subject nearly always led to talk of Herb Evatt, his father's only Australian hero, to talk of his work for the UN, and how Robert Menzies had finally destroyed him. He had not been a typical Aussie, that one. He had welcomed the migrants.

All those lectures he had heard as a kid about the bad deals Greece had collected at the end of every war. At Versailles.



At Yalta. How the old country had never been given what it had been promised by England or the Allies. Foreign affairs? It's all crooked business, dirty business. Peter? Doesn't look like anything much, looks like a school boy to me.

But then even the old man's idea of school kids was so wrong. He looked across the river again. They all had short shorts and thongs and T-shirts, like the kids in Glebe where he and Julia lived. Wonderful kids they were. Last week going to the post office, one of them had said something to him that hadn't been said to his face in years. He had brushed past a little girl of about ten standing outside near the boxes. As he pushed the door to go in he heard her say "Wog!" And when he turned they took off. He was a fool to think all that was finished.

It occurred to him that this was one reason he needed all the academic friends he had acquired, and the enlightened middle class in general. They were a kind of protection. He despised their empty indignation and their politically correct views, but their willingness to accept him was useful in a way. They took him seriously enough, and in return he added colour to their lives. A bit of the exotic. He had an interesting background they all liked to question him on.

What was that background? What did his origins and his ancestral culture mean here under these trees on a river bank in the Royal National Park? What did it matter if you were Greek or Turk or Yugoslav or Italian, or Anglo-Irish or whatever, in this place? If you took it as other than rhetorical he supposed the answer depended on who was around. It didn't matter to him, but it might matter to a racist if you were a Lebanese or whatever. Because if you were the latter you were likely to be disturbing the peace with that noisy music and chanting and dancing. Nature here was not that much of a leveller.

But whatever nature was doing now had no philosophical significance, the sun filtering through the tree overhead and sounds of the bush were simply making him drowsy. He looked at his watch. He had been gone about twenty minutes, though he could find no energy to raise himself. There was still time.

There wasn't really. A minute or two later he decided he'd better get a move on and so, picking up the few sticks next to him, made ready to go back. He had walked a little way along the grass by the bank when he saw Peter coming towards him. He was pleased that he had been come upon while looking as if he was doing what he was meant to be doing, rather than lazing under the tree. He could say he was late because wood had been hard to find.

"Where've you been? We thought you'd been kidnapped," Peter grinned at him.

"By Aborigines from a lost tribe living hidden in the bush?"

"Yes. Something like that."

"Of whose tribe I'd become a member and renounced my white ways?"

"Yes! Yes!"

"No! That's not what happened at all. Wasn't much wood."

"Oh. Right. We've started the fire with what we found around near the pits. What you've got there will help though."

Thanks Peter, he felt like saying. He could do without the positive reinforcement.

He walked alongside Peter for the rest of the way back without speaking. They entered the clearing with the barbecue pits and the two women, seeing them coming, began to clap and cheer. Peter took a bow.

He felt foolish having brought such a small amount of wood. More so because some of the other picnickers had heard Julia and Alice's carry-on and were looking his way. He noticed one fat specimen in particular who kept on looking. He was wearing a T-shirt with an indecipherable message on the front, his mouth hanging open as he absently turned the chops on the grill plate in between stares.

Going to their own pit, he inspected the fire Peter had started earlier with help from Alice and Julia. It had burned down to embers all right, but there were not enough of them for the amount of meat to be cooked. He was a little angry for some reason and felt like blaming someone. The people he had fallen among (or was it chosen?) were so incompetent

at ordinary survival. For all their faults his parents knew how to perform simple, useful tasks like getting a fire going properly.

"Needs more wood, I think," he said.

"Are you sure?" Alice asked him doubtfully.

He let a few seconds pass, doing his best not to show any emotion. When he finally replied "Oh, yes," he spoke with as jolly a tone as possible. In this mood, he needed to keep himself under control. Peter came to him with the skewered meat on a plate.

"Ready to go?"

"Not really. But we can put some more wood in if it dies down." He took the meat from him and arranged it on the grill. The others stood near and watched him do it. There was a chorus of hoorays.

"Oh God!" Julia exclaimed. "I'm so glad I married a peasant!"

"Yes. It must be very nice to have someone who can do practical things," Alice added.

"I think that was meant partly for me George . . . if it wasn't then these women are very nasty. Sarcastic almost, wouldn't you say?"

"I wouldn't know. I'm too innocent a lamb."

Alice looked at him quickly, this was an opportunity not to be missed.

"Greek lamb!" she shouted.

"Enough!" He raised his arm in a grandiose manner, pretending to be a general quelling noise from the ranks. But the word was more than half-meant. He wished they would shut up.

He turned the meat and looked up at the ridge across the river from where they were standing. Six years ago, while on a university geography excursion inspecting that ridge's formations, he first spoke to the person who was now his wife. Not having seen her in lectures or tutorials, he had been unaware of her existence until that day. And this afternoon he didn't know whether to curse or bless geography. Curse or bless Julia.

"Say hello to her, Father," he remembered muttering in Greek to his old man when he first took her home. He

thought he would have to do the same with his mother until she spoke without prompting. "Hello love," she'd said, not wishing to be thought impolite. They didn't know what she was, what she meant. Correction. His mother knew. This Australian girl brings trouble to our house. She comes to take my boy away. How right she was.

To please them, or to escape them, or to take the best course, or whatever, he would get married. Julia wanted to get married. While she had sets against many things, she had no set against marriage. "Just think! All the Greek food I'll be able to eat!"

Julia was a Hellenophile. In the early days that was the basis of their seeing each other. Going to restaurants, Greek plays. Reading Plato for the courses in government they were taking. Come to think of it, she was the first person he had known who wasn't Greek who knew something about the culture he came from and wasn't indifferent or hostile.

For her he had pretended to be more Greek than he actually was, or felt like being. It was pretty hard for a boy who was born in Balmain. So many things he did for her. Like going to the library to find out about Greek Orthodoxy, the religion he had been baptized into, knew nothing about and was constantly questioned on by Julia. The rituals interested her, the Easter services. The memory of educating himself in things Greek to please her made him wince. Playing-acting was all it had been, all it was.

From the time he had slipped into playing parts things had begun to go wrong. That was the beginning of the end he had reached now. Weighed down by things he would have to throw off. If that meant people too, OK he would do it. He would begin by dropping the makeup and the characterization.

"Hey, what about the food?" Julia asked in the back-ground.

He tilted his head in her direction, looked back at the meat, then faced her.

"Two minutes."

"Great, we're starving."

You're starving, he thought, I'm doing worse than that. However, whatever I choose to do, and whatever new way I

manage to find, I won't punish anyone. There is a personal, existential question to be settled here. Any chaos caused will be caused by others. I will wander away from the noise and emotion like Mr Magoo. Smiling. Unaffected.

As they came to him to have the meat shovelled onto their plates he remembered that Mr Magoo was short-sighted. Something to avoid. In reality, there were so many things to be sorted out. He hoped to have some time alone after lunch. Then he would sort them out. The time had come.

Everyone had eaten with relish, they all approved of his efforts. He too had eaten well. His appetite was larger than he had suspected and the wine they had brought had helped him into a better state.

With the last of the food gone, Peter and Alice arranged themselves on a blanket to take a nap. Julia took it upon herself to clean up. Gathering the scraps into a bag, she headed for the bins which were some way off near the entrance to this area.

He took the opportunity to find his own spot a little closer to the water. He settled himself and pretended to be asleep. When Julia returned she came to where he lay. He was aware of her looking at him for a few moments, then going away. He was relieved that she hadn't stayed.

Opening his eyes again, he noticed the ring of small, decorative trees artificially planted around the edge of this barbecue area. The natural growth, the original trees of this clearing stood behind them, towering in the background. The old and the new . . . The old and the new. Everything fell somewhere between being old and being new. Introduce human will and you have the origins of conservatism and radicalism; we want to keep things as they are, we want to change, to begin again.

Julia was part of the new. There was no point in worrying her with things finished, as he'd done so much of late. Represented by an ageing mother and father, much of an older period was finished, what they stood for being gone or of no use any more. But what do you do about them? Old

people's home? Not possible. They wouldn't go. He wouldn't put them there anyway.

"In Greece parents and children live together. When a son marries he brings his wife to his parents' home and they live together. When the parents die the son will have the house for his own, to raise his own children. That's the way to do things."

Is it? How foolish and dogmatic it all sounded. How many arguments he'd had with them. That way of life makes no sense here. People don't live with their in-laws if they can help it. Julia wouldn't want to do that, and he didn't blame her either. Not that she wasn't without her own definitions of right behaviour.

He couldn't hold Julia to account for anything though. Her definitions were attempts, tentative, she always had their best interests at heart. She was a good woman. She had her flaws, as did the best of them. She got too fired up over politics, women's questions, international problems, her area of responsibility was too large for her to do much effectively on any one matter. She used up a lot of emotion. But she was kind. A bit of a culture vulture. But generous, very generous. If she were in need of anything, it was a pruning job. This was something he felt himself to be in need of more than anyone he knew.

Really, that's it, isn't it? To cast aside all those definitions that finally trap one. All right, begin. No particular order.

This food business for one. Why was he always cooking lamb on skewers for everyone? It wasn't such a terrific meal, Greek maybe, but not so fantastic. He was bored with the culinary emphasis in life. And bugger the *baclava* too. From now on, it's Chinese, or whatever. It wouldn't do harm to profess occasionally that he didn't like Greek food.

And what about being typecast at work, where it was naturally assumed that he was desperately interested in studying the lifestyles of fellow migrants? Simple. He would apply for something else. Anything. Go back to teaching high school, that would be of social significance.

They would have to live with less money sure enough. Perhaps Julia could go back to full-time work. It could be organized. Parents? A new job would probably mean moving

away, and if it means interstate so what? There's the parent problem answered. Fending for themselves emotionally could be the best thing to happen for them. They're survivors, they'll keep. Get right away from them and their expectations and demands. Other people had done that sort of thing, there was no reason why he couldn't.

Friends. What friends? If he no longer played the migrant who had struggled and made good, the people who were impressed with that sort of thing would disappear from around him anyway. The Crofts and such-like were, let's face it, just tiresome. They didn't really care what happened to you. If something were to happen to him, what would they offer? Sympathy. At least the Greeks would lend a helping hand. Even money.

He stopped for a moment. Those kinds of comparisons can't do anymore either. That was part of the plan, that the cultural idea was bullshit.

The plan is OK, the will had been engaged. What about acts, getting started? When? How?

He wondered how Julia would react to such changes, especially those she might interpret as personality changes. He would explain that they weren't, these were answers to the question of how to live. Carrying on about things Greek would have to end. They would have to find other interests. And these interests were non-essential. When she was alone with him she was warm and gentle, she had humour. He hoped he related to her in similar ways. It was only other people that brought our what little there was which was annoying. They were at their worst when people like the Crofts were around putting pressure on them. Julia thought she had to compete or she would be put down. From now on they would keep right away from the superficial. And excise the unimportant.

Among the trivia they would have to abandon was the terrace house in Glebe they were living in. Living there was nothing more than a concession to the lifestyle of the people he and Julia had worked with over the last few years. The trendy, young, middle class. There was absolutely nothing he could see to recommend bare, sandstock, brick walls and shaggy pile carpets. One shed sand and dust, and the other

collected it. Very fashionable. He would be more content in a fibro shack with lino on the floors, and a radiator instead of a smelly, open fire. That sort of place would be more likely to feel like a home. A real home is what was needed.

Going to restaurants three nights a week would be completely out, and he would take up a sport to get fit. Enough of the sedentary life.

Right. What matters — A decent marriage, free of interference from acquaintances and relatives. A decent home. Decent friends. Work that is satisfying and useful. Health. Heart.

What doesn't matter — Play-acting. Pretence. The upwardly-mobile. Sociology. Trying to please everybody. High culture. The culinary arts. Ethnic culture (including Australian). The past. The past. Things from days gone that weigh one down.

He looked up from where he lay. The river was cool and flat, a few slow ripples, the afternoon light reflecting from the surface. The other bank fifty metres away. The ridge beyond covered in green.

He looked behind him. The Crofts seemed to be sleeping. Julia was sitting up, cross-legged, contemplating something. Her hands were in her lap. She was playing with her fingers.

He stood straight up. The moment had come. He took his shirt off quickly. He kicked his shoes off. Behind him he heard Julia shout "George! What's the matter?" She sounded frightened.

He went to the edge and dived in without hesitation. He would swim to the other side. A few metres out he turned to see them standing at the bank he had left. Julia shouted again. "George! George!"

He stopped for a moment.

"I'll see you on the other side! Talk to you then! I love you!" he called out in reply.

Turning again, he stroked slowly towards the other side.