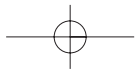


BIRDS  
WITHOUT  
WINGS



ALSO BY LOUIS DE BERNIÈRES

The War of Don Emmanuel's Nether Parts

Señor Vivo and the Coca Lord

The Troublesome Offspring of Cardinal Guzman

Captain Corelli's Mandolin

Sunday Morning at the Centre of the World

Red Dog

BIRDS  
WITHOUT  
WINGS

Louis de Bernières

SECKER & WARBURG  
LONDON

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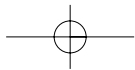
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THE CAT

She was licking  
the opened tin  
for hours and hours  
without realising  
that she was drinking  
her own blood.

Spyros Kyriazopoulos



I

The Prologue of Iskander  
the Potter

The people who remained in this place have often asked themselves why it was that Ibrahim went mad. I am the only one who knows, but I have always been committed to silence, because he begged me to respect his grief, or, as he also put it, to take pity upon his guilt. Now that he is mad, and the sun has long since dried the rain that washed away the blood upon the rocks, and there is almost no one left who recalls the lovely Philothei, it seems to me that no one would be betrayed if finally the truth of it were known. With us there has been so much blood that in retrospect none of it seems believable, and it cannot matter much if finally I tell of the last misfortune that fell upon Philothei, sweet-natured, Christian, vain and beautiful.

There comes a point in life where each one of us who survives begins to feel like a ghost that has forgotten to die at the right time, and certainly most of us were more amusing when we were young. It seems that age folds the heart in on itself. Some of us walk detached, dreaming on the past, and some of us realise that we have lost the trick of standing in the sun. For many of us the thought of the future is a cause for irritation rather than optimism, as if we have had

enough of new things, and wish only for the long sleep that rounds the edges of our lives. I feel this weariness myself.

We are in any case a serious people here. Life was merrier when the Christians were still among us, not least because almost every one of their days was the feast of some saint. Little work was done, it seemed, but at least their revelry was infectious. Our religion makes us grave and thoughtful, dignified and melancholy, whereas theirs did not exact much discipline. Perhaps it was something to do with the wine. For them it was a precious and sacred thing, because they thought it was something like the blood of God, whereas for us the pleasure of it has always been soured since the Prophet of God forbade it. Peace be upon him, but I have often wished that he had decided otherwise. We drink, but we dislike ourselves in drinking. Sometimes we did drink with our Christians, and caught their high spirits in the same way that one catches malaria from the chill night air, but, left on our own now, there is a sadness seeping out of the stones of this half-deserted town.

Ibrahim the Mad was one of our most entertaining when he was young. It was said that there was a smile at the corners of his lips from the moment of his birth, and from early boyhood he was a specialist in inappropriate interjections. To be precise, he perfected a repertoire of bleats that exactly mimicked the stupid comments of a goat in all its various states of mind; a goat that is surprised, a goat that is looking for its kid, a goat that is protesting, a goat that is hungry, a goat

that is perplexed, a goat that is in rut. His most popular bleat, however, was that of a goat that has nothing to say. This bleat was the perfect parody of unintelligence, empty-headedness, inanity and harmlessness. If you want to know what it sounded like, just go up past the ancient tombs to where the limepit is. It is in the wild ground near there that Ibrahim the Mad still watches the goats, even though he is no longer sane. You should beware of his great dog. It is a very fine animal that takes each goat back to its owner every evening, without Ibrahim the Mad having to do anything at all, but it is a somewhat ready-fanged dog that recognises a stranger straight away by the smell. If you cannot find Ibrahim there, then listen for the sound of the kaval, and follow it. He blows it so sadly that it makes you stand still and go into mourning. He does not bleat himself any more, but listens to the goats as they wander from shrub to shrub, and you will soon recognise the bleat of a goat with nothing to say.

Ibrahim used to do it quite suddenly in the middle of a conversation, or at a solemn moment in a ceremony, and when he was a small boy his father used to beat him for it. One day he even interrupted the imam, Abdulhamid Hodja, who was making some interminable point about the law, which was one of his habits, may he rest in paradise. This was under the plane trees where the old men sit in the meydan. Anyway, Ibrahim crept up behind a tree – he was about eight years old – and bleated quite suddenly when everyone else was listening quietly and respectfully. There was a shocked silence, and then Ibrahim giggled and ran

away. The men looked at each other, and Ibrahim's father leapt to his feet, his face flushed with anger and shame. But Abdulhamid was a good-natured man who was naturally dignified enough not to have to be concerned about offences against his dignity, and he put his hand on the other's sleeve. 'Don't strike him,' he said. 'I was bleating myself, and now someone else should have the chance to speak.' Ibrahim's father was called Ali the Broken-Nosed.

The men were puzzled by the imam's tolerance of such disrespect, but the word spread that the imam considered that there was something providential in the irreverence of the boy, so from then onwards his mischief was accepted as one of the normal hazards of life. Back in those days Ibrahim was a friend of my son, Karatavuk, and I can truly say that he was not mad at all, he was merely framed by God in a comical way. If you want to see him as he is now, you don't have to go up to the tombs, now that I come to think of it. Just wait until he returns with the goats, and the great dog delivers them home for the night. Ibrahim the Mad knows the name of each goat, but apart from that his head is empty enough to rent.

They say that, for a madman, every day is a holiday, but they also say that insanity has seventy gates. It is true that many of the mad are happy, as you can see by the idiots of this town who sit on the walls and grin and piss themselves, but I know that the gate through which Ibrahim travelled was the gate of unconquerable sorrow, and that his mind remains a cataract of grief. I think that back in those days many of us were

maddened by hatred because of the war with the Greeks, and in all honesty I include myself, but Ibrahim was the one among us whose mind was disengaged by love.

Ibrahim blamed himself, and if I had been one of her brothers or one of her other relatives, I would have come back from exile and killed him. The peculiar thing is, however, that nothing would have happened to Philothei at all, if other things had not been happening in the great world. So it is my opinion that the blame belongs more widely, not only to Ibrahim but to all of us who lived in this place, as well as to those in other parts who were bloodthirsty and ambitious.

In those days we came to hear of many other countries that had never figured in our lives before. It was a rapid education, and many of us are still confused. We knew that our Christians were sometimes called 'Greeks', although we often called them 'dogs' or 'infidels', but in a manner that was a formality, or said with a smile, just as were their deprecatory terms for us. They would call us 'Turks' in order to insult us, at the time when we called ourselves 'Ottomans' or 'Osmanlis'. Later on it turned out that we really are 'Turks', and we became proud of it, as one does of new boots that are uncomfortable at first, but then settle into the feet and look exceedingly smart. Be that as it may, one day we discovered that there actually existed a country called 'Greece' that wanted to own this place, and do away with us, and take away our land. We knew of Russians before, because of other wars, but who

were these Italians? Who were these other Frankish people? Suddenly we heard of people called 'Germans', and people called 'French', and of a place called Britain that had governed half the world without us knowing of it, but it was never explained to us why they had chosen to come and bring us hardship, starvation, bloodshed and lamentation, why they played with us and martyred our tranquillity.

I blame these Frankish peoples, and I blame potentates and pashas whose names I will probably never know, and I blame men of God of both faiths, and I blame all those who gave their soldiers permission to behave like wolves and told them that it was necessary and noble. Because of what I accidentally did to my son Karatavuk, I was in my own small way one of these wolves, and I am now burned up by shame. In the long years of those wars here were too many who learned how to make their hearts boil with hatred, how to betray their neighbours, how to violate women, how to steal and dispossess, how to call upon God when they did the Devil's work, how to enrage and embitter themselves, and how to commit outrages even against children. Much of what was done was simply in revenge for identical atrocities, but I tell you now that even if guilt were a coat of sable, and the ground were deep in snow, I would rather freeze than wear it.

But I do not blame merely myself, or the powerful, or my fellow Anatolians, or the savage Greeks. I also blame mischance. Destiny caresses the few, but molests the many, and finally every sheep will hang by its own

foot on the butcher's hook, just as every grain of wheat arrives at the millstone, no matter where it grew.

It is strange indeed that if you should wish me to tell you how one young Christian woman died by accident in this unremarkable place, you must also be told of great men like Mustafa Kemal, and little men like me, and you must also be told the story of upheavals and wars. There is, it seems, a natural perversity in the nature of fate, just as there is a natural perversity in ourselves.

I wonder sometimes whether there are times when God sleeps or averts His eyes, or if there is a divine perversity. Who knows why one day a man drowns because a deep hole has been carved in the fording place of a river, where men have passed safely for centuries, and there was no hole before?

To speak selfishly, let me say that what remains with me, and hurts me, after the memory of the cruelty and unreason has been laid aside, is the pain of having maimed my favourite son, Karatavuk. I will always be pained by the manner of his wounding, because I brought it on him by my own hastiness, and this after he had managed to survive eight years of war unscathed! It is astounding that I did not fall mad like Ibrahim. I think of my son constantly, with his upright nature, his great loyalty and his excellent humour, and I am proud that he has been able to find an honourable way to earn his living, now that he cannot follow in my footsteps as a potter.

There are many here who say we are better off without the Christians who used to live here, but as for

me, I miss the old life of my town, and I miss the Christians. Without them our life has less variety, and we are forgetting how to look at others and see ourselves. Also, since they took their icon of Mary Mother of Jesus with them, there are some who think that we have had less good luck than we did before.

I am a potter, but I am also renowned as a maker of proverbs. I have noticed that when the Christians were here I invented light-hearted proverbs, but now that they have gone, I invent serious ones.

Since those times of whirlwind the world has learned over and over again that the wounds of the ancestors make the children bleed. I do not know if anyone will ever be forgiven, or if the harm that was done will ever be undone. Enough of this, however. The story begins, and he who slaps his own face should not cry out.

2

Iskander the Potter Remembers  
the Birth of Philothei

The imam visited Philothei on the day of her birth, which occurred in the early summer of the thirteen hundred and eighteenth year after the Prophet's removal to Medina, which by the Christian calendar would be, if I calculate correctly, in the year 1900.

Philothei was the great beauty of the town, and in her short lifetime this caused her more difficulties than it brought compensations. It has sometimes occurred to me that God only bestows extreme beauty upon those to whom He wishes to bring misfortune.

The birth was, I suppose, unexceptional. The mother had drunk from a bowl engraved with verses from the Koran, and in which further verses had been dipped for extra assurance, and had slept with a cross on her belly for at least a week. In addition, a woman had gone for Mihrimah Efendim in good time. Mihrimah Efendim was our midwife in those days, and no one was more deeply versed in the arts of birth. She was, as they say, of a certain age, and was tall and fat, with hair on her lip, and her mother and grandmothers had been our midwives since the first counting of time. All of us had arrived safely thanks to them.

We always knew that a birth was close when Mihrimah Efendim processed through the town with her staff of office and her two attendants bearing the birthing chair. I myself was born through this chair, and so were my own children, and I daresay that others will be born through it for a thousand years more, if God wills. It was made of propitious walnut, and the rim was solid, although polished by so many women's thighs. Many men made crude jokes about what that rim had seen. The chair had strong arms, for a woman is as strong as a man when she suffers the pains of birth, and she proves a surprising knowledge of obscenities.

Philothei came into this world when the southern wind was bringing lewd thoughts and insomnia from Arabia. I remember this because I myself was unable to sleep, partly because of the restlessness of my wife and children upon the floors and divans, and partly because of the dogs outside that had set up a howling in unison with the shrieks of the mother of Philothei. Even out in the courtyard, wrapped in my cloak, I lay sleepless, looking at the stars, and so, finally, I decided to walk about the houses.

It was a night when there seemed to be commotion even in corners where nothing was amiss. I felt malice in the air, as if there was a spirit, risen from Gehenna, that was also walking in the town. In this place there are many who die without fulfilling their obligations; they are like shadows who drift ineffectually.

I was unable to resist walking towards the sounds of the parturition, and I passed the window of the

Christian schoolmaster, Leonidas Efendi, who was writing furiously by the stinking light of a wick floating in a bowl of olive oil. This teacher was a bad character, stirring up trouble. In those days all of us spoke Turkish, but those who could write did so in the Greek script. This Leonidas, however, was one of the ones who was fussing and campaigning, saying that the Christians should speak Greek and not Turkish. He forced the children to learn the Greek tongue that to them was like chewing stones, and he stirred up resentment in them with stories about how we Osmanlis had taken the land from the Greeks, and that the land was rightly theirs. I have heard it said that this place belonged once to a people called Lycians, and that the Greeks took it from them, so why did this teacher not tell the children that all land is originally stolen? Why did he not say 'Let us find the Lycians, and give it back'? That schoolmaster was like too many in that time, the kind who toss water into a pan of smoking fat, so that others, as well as themselves, are burned. I am reminded of the tale of Nasreddin Hodja, who owned a buffalo with enormous horns. He had always wanted to sit between those horns, thinking that it would be like a throne, but always he had refrained. Then one day, when the beast was resting in the grass, he could resist the temptation no more, and he persuaded his wife to help him mount the horns. The buffalo stood up and tossed him into the air, and he came down hard, landing on his unfortunate wife, so that both of them were hurt. Nasreddin said to her, 'Sometimes, wife, we must both suffer for my desires.'

Besides being a troublemaker, that schoolmaster was scrawny, he came from Smyrna and so was not one of us, he wore spectacles, he put on airs and he never took a wife.

But I should return to the matter of Philothei. It so happened that I was outside her parents' house with many others of the curious when the screaming stopped and the delivery was completed. We heard the triumph and relief in the voice of Mihrimah Efendim as she cut the umbilical cord and cried out deeply, 'God is great, God is great, God is great.' It was our custom to name every female child firstly with the original name of the first woman who was with Adam in Paradise, and so when she called out that she named the child 'Havva' we all knew that the baby was a girl, 'an extra hand at the hoeing' as some people said.

The moment after Mihrimah Efendim cried out, I swear that the whole night was changed. The dogs ceased to howl, the moon broke out from behind the clouds, there was a scent of saffron and olibanum in the air, and a bulbul began to sing in the plane tree down in the centre of the meydan, where the old men sit in the day. I was contented that this new life had begun so well, but at the same time I confess that I could not help reflecting that everything that is born, is born to die. I was standing there wondering how long this person would live, and how it would die, when the father, whose name was Charitos, came out of the house to breathe the air of relief. I approached him and tapped him on the shoulder, giving him a cigarette that I had in truth just rolled in order to smoke it myself.

‘Salaam aleikum,’ I said, handing him my tinderbox.

‘And upon you be peace,’ he replied, and then added, almost as if he were worried by it, ‘It’s the prettiest child I’ve ever seen.’

‘That’ll be trouble,’ I said.

‘The women are hanging Bibles and Korans and blue beads and cloves of garlic all over the place,’ said Charitos with a wry smile, ‘but I expect it’ll be trouble nonetheless. Nazar deymesin.’

‘God preserve us from the evil eye,’ I said.

Later, after the muezzin had intoned the azan at daybreak, and everyone had done their prayers, a rumour began to spread out from her parents’ house, like the ripple of a stone cast into a pond, and soon there was another crowd of the curious who had gathered there to see her, to bring gifts and wish the mother a happy freedom, but also with the intention of marvelling at the reported prettiness of the child. It was one of those towns where everybody is into everyone else’s business, with the women swapping gossip at the wells and in the kitchens of each other’s houses, and the men doing the same thing in the coffeehouses.

Philothei’s family was a Christian one, but at that time we were very much mixed up and, apart from the rantings of a few hotheads whose bellies were filled with raki and the Devil, we lived together in sufficient harmony. Therefore it was not altogether to be wondered at that people of all sorts called at the door of that house bringing small presents of coffee, lokum, allspice and tobacco, in the hope of catching a glimpse of this

child who was becoming a legend before she had even uncrossed her eyes.

It had not been a particularly easy birth, as we had all known on account of the mother's wails, but even so a rich bed had already been set up in the selamlık, and the mother, Polyxeni, was propped up against cushions, smiling as she held her little finger in the baby's mouth, in order to console it for the temporary want of a breast.

I had dressed in my best clothes, I brought a gold coin, and I brought some tea flavoured with bergamot that my wife had grated herself. I duly inspected the child, drank my sherbet, and exchanged further pleasantries with Charitos, the father of the child, who was by now thoroughly tired after such a vile night of anxiety. 'God bless the mother's milk,' I said, wondering all over again how a woman can go through such hell, and then be pleased about it afterwards.

'We are going to call the child "Philothei",' said Charitos.

'Meaning?'

'It is Greek,' replied Charitos, 'and I believe that it means "Beloved by God" or "Lover of God" or something like that. Anyway, it is a very pretty name, and I am using it to remember my own mother, who also bore it.'

'You will have to ask Leonidas Efendi, the teacher who is such a keen speaker of Greek,' I said. 'He will tell you what the name means.'

'No, I will ask the priest,' declared Charitos, who, like me, had no time for stoop-shouldered opinionated

bookworms who did not even know how to harvest an apple. Charitos turned his weary eyes on me, and asked, very seriously, 'Iskander Efendi, will you do me a favour? Will you take a rag and tie it on the red pine for me?'

'You want me to make a wish for you?'

'Yes. This child of mine . . .' and he nodded towards the baby, 'you said a bad thing when you said that such a pretty child will be trouble. I hope that Satan did not hear you and get any ideas, although, to tell the truth, I had misgivings of my own. Please set my mind at rest; go and tie a rag on the red pine, and wish my child an easy life.'

'Charitos Efendi, of course I will. I will tie two rags, and wish the same wish twice. But first I must see the child a little better.'

Polyxeni moved aside her headscarf, revealing the infant Philothei, and I said, 'Indeed, very beautiful.'

I have to say, though, that in my opinion this business about babies being ugly or pretty, or just like their father or their aunt, is a very tiresome fabrication of the deluded. All babies look the same, and to me this particular one appeared to be a very babylike baby. I have had children of my own, and I cannot remember what any of them looked like when they first emerged into the light, except that they all looked like babies, and like nothing else and nobody else at all.

It was at this moment, when I was trying to be sincere about the beauty of this baby who looked exactly like a baby, that the imam entered the house.

Our imam at that time was in the very glory of his

life. He was about forty-five years old, very quick and energetic, his beard was long, grizzled and finely combed, and he combined the sharp black eyes of a bird with the hooked nose of an Arab. He still had most of his teeth, and his lips were thin, the lower one protruding further than the upper. He had made the haj twice, and was therefore a hodja twice over, and he had been a softa in the school at Stamboul, where he had qualified in his knowledge of the Sunna tradition. He was able to recite the entire Koran, and was therefore not only a hodja but a hafiz. Furthermore, as if all this were not enough, he had attained the initiation of no less than four Sufi brotherhoods, so that he was one who was amply enabled to return to God and be united with Him. All in all he was a mightily learned man, who knew more Arabic and Persian words than all the Arabs and the Persians put together. Sometimes one was resigned to understanding little of what he said, and sometimes he could speak for five minutes, filling his sentences with 'nonethelesses', 'however', 'notwithstandings' and 'on the other hands', and you would not know what he was aiming at until he clinched the speech with the final word. Such is the advantage of education.

Why the imam had chosen merely to be an imam when he could have been a qadi in the courts, or a mullah, or an âlim, none of us ever knew. It was suspected that he might have picked up ideas that did not suit the hard old men of the schools, but in my opinion he chose to be simply the leader of our prayers because he wanted to spend the most part of his time

with his hands in the earth. He was an ardent grower of vegetables.

His name was Abdulhamid Hodja, and the two great joys of his life were his wife and his horse, although it would be hard to say which he esteemed the more. With regard to his wife, he liked to quote the story of Nasreddin Hodja, who was asked when the end of the world would be, and replied, 'The world will end twice; once when my wife dies, and once when I die myself.' I cannot say that I knew his wife, since she came from another place. In those days it was forbidden by custom even to enquire after the health of another man's wife, or that of his female relatives, and consequently one knew nothing about them unless one was told. Everything has changed, now, and not all of it for the better. Nowadays, now that no woman wears the *çarşaf* over her face, it is impossible for a man with an ugly wife to boast of her beauty in the coffeehouses. Of course, the Christian women always had their faces unconcealed, and so their husbands never did have the opportunity to bluster, and many a Christian girl never became a bride.

The imam's horse, however, was a wondrously lovely, silvery creature that he named 'Nilufer', and upon which he lavished great devotion. He gave it a small breastplate in brass, which he polished, and which was engraved with verses from the Koran. He braided the filly's mane, tying it with green ribbons upon the ends of which were tiny brass bells, and he had a high, rich saddle that he had bought from some Yörük nomads who were on a journey through the

Bey Mountains. He washed and brushed the animal, anointed it with perfumes to repel the attentions of insects, and was often to be seen embracing it, whispering endearments to it with his arm about its neck and one hand stroking the velvet of its nose. The consequence was that the horse behaved with all the capriciousness and lack of humility of a Circassian mistress, but it always gave a lift to the heart to see him cantering upon it, with his white turban wrapped around his fez, and his green cloak billowing in his wake. He was a horseman worthy of our ancestors who came out of the East. They say that a man is most a man either when he is mounted upon his wife or his horse.

As I was saying, the imam appeared suddenly at the door, left his shoes with everyone else's, and entered the room in his habitually vigorous and lordly fashion. 'Salaam aleikum,' he said to all of us, and we chorused back 'Aleikum salaam' without pausing to think about it.

Naturally, he had come for the same reason as the rest of us, which was because he was bringing a gift, and was curious to see the beautiful child. He bent down and took the infant, holding it high in the air, and scrutinising its features as if he were divining something from them. At last he sighed happily, and recited the first lines of the Koran, which I recognised because I had once learned them myself, despite my ignorance of the Arab tongue. Then he put Philothei down, and bent over, and raised her hand to his lips, and kissed it. Later, her mother found a small crimson

blemish on the child's right hand, which she believed to be the exact place where the imam had placed his lips. Even the Christians, you see, believed that the imam was a saint. Certainly he had the forbearance of one, since he never took action against those vulgar and thoughtless Christians who had neither sense nor courtesy, who would throw lemon peel at him as a gesture of contempt, and hide themselves before he could recognise them. He could have caused them to be hanged, but instead he punished them by ignoring them. In his wisdom he had recognised that the worst punishment is to be beneath noticeability.

Before he left Charitos's house, he said, 'I wish you happiness with this child,' and then he went out, mounted his silvery horse, and rode away with the bright ribbons fluttering from the saddle and the brass bells tinkling at the reins.

'I wonder what he saw,' said Charitos, and I shrugged. I thought perhaps that he had had the same reaction as myself, namely that every birth entails a death.

The room was now very crowded, and people were beginning to blow thick clouds of smoke from their narghiles, and make a terrible racket in order to keep the evil spirits away. I have always hated this din and smoke, and so I made my excuses to Charitos, having to shout into his ear; 'I have work to do, a lot of clay to mix, I had better go. I will make you a water jug as a gift.' And then I remembered; 'But first I will tie two rags to the red pine.'

By now the town had burst into life, and I had to

make my way uphill through those cobbled ways that were barely wide enough for a donkey. It was as if the place were conceived before the invention of carts. Who knows when that was? At any rate, I had to jostle my way past women carrying water in jars upon their heads, past dogs insolently asleep amid all the hubbub, past pedlars, tradesmen, mendicants and craftsmen, and over the legs of the beggars whose sole function in this life was to shine the souls of those of us who kept them alive by giving them the alms that would perpetuate their idleness. They kept their eyes lowered as they outstretched their palms, since it is better for all of us if such gifts are anonymous. I went to my pottery, and took one of the rags that I had been using to wash off my wheel at the end of each working day.

The red pines stood in a group of five, halfway up the slope to the top of the cliff, very near the place where lime was dug out for the manufacture of mortar. They were lovely trees, with a rich bark, and branches that fanned out as if longing to spread their shade for we who were below. I like sometimes to invent proverbs, and one that occurred to me on that day, as I looked up at the boughs, was 'The man who seeks the shade of the red pine will be shat upon by doves'. There were always a dozen or so of those small grey doves with the black ring about the neck, very pretty, but also very generous with their bodily refuse. The good things in life are always accompanied by a detriment.

The lower branches were copiously hung with rags that represented the wishes of an entire town over

many years, and it was always a challenge to find a new place where a rag could be tied. Sometimes, when a wish had come true, the wisher would return and fetch their rag, so that they could use it again for another wish. In my opinion this displayed a certain paltriness of spirit, since a new rag is not difficult to obtain.

In those days I was still young enough to climb with agility, and I ascended to the very top of the tallest pine, where I tied my rag so that it would flutter like the pennant of a ship. The sun was already strong and bright, teasing out the scent of resin in the bark of the tree. The palms of my hands were covered with that tenacious, sticky, dusty black film that is caused by gripping such a tree when it is climbed. This irritated me, but then I reflected that it would be abraded away soon enough when I set down to my potting. A breeze stirred, and I forced my turban down a little harder on to the crown of my head. I could see some children playing in the waters of the ruined temple. No doubt they were tormenting the frogs.

I stayed up there for a while, making wishes on behalf of Philothei in between marvelling at the view of the town. To see such a place from above, particularly if it has a fine mosque and a church, is to be reminded that there is something miraculous in the falling out of things. In the early evenings I used to go sometimes to the top of the cliff where the land ends and the sea begins, because the golden dome of the mosque would sparkle in the scarlet light, and the smoke of all the cooking fires would carry up the delicious smell of roasting meat.

On the way down, hoping that they would be newly laid, I took four dove's eggs to bring to my wife, one for each of my sons.

What strikes me as remarkable, in thinking back, is that the birth of Philothei was the first and only time that I remember there being such a monumental fuss over the advent of a female child.