

Contents

Acknowledgements	v	
1	The Search for a Horse	1
2	Ahmed Paşa	13
3	Villagers	25
4	Over the Mountains to the Sea	35
5	A Few Sleepless Nights	47
6	Şimşek	65
7	A Turkish Telephone	75
8	Şimşek, Chumpie and the unjumpable tree	77
9	Guardian of the Mountain	93
10	The Betrayal	101
Transition	106	
11	Greece, Ktima Litsas	107
12	Maria	117
13	You, I love you Maria	127
14	Italy	145
15	Pioneer-Lead	151
16	Beautiful Italy	155
17	The Rough and the Smooth	163
18	Spirit of the Mountains	171
19	Wine Harvest	179
20	Last Days in Italy	183
21	France	187
22	A Night at the Zoo	195
23	Marcel and Raymond	199
24	Last Days in France	207
25	At the End of a Rainbow	215

Şimşek, Chumpie and the Unjumpable Tree

He pointed out the path to Guzelçami which led on to Davutlar. It looked very rough indeed, and an old shepherd on the top said it would be madness to go to Davutlar that way. Go by the road, he said.

Then my guide took me around the enormous acropolis, which had a view so commanding that at once it became perfectly clear why it had been sited there. From a strategic point of view it was quite impregnable. We then started the descent of the cliff on a zigzagging path, inches wide. Why was he doing this to me? We rushed back to the pansy on, where I arrived pouring with sweat. He proudly announced we had done it in two hours, ten minutes. The last tourist took three hours: and a further two days to recover. The last tourist, he added, gave him three thousand lira.

The blacksmith came at six thirty and was the best I met in Turkey. Ahmed Paşa needed a complete new set and was a brute to hold. The shoeing performance lasted for three quarters of an hour, and I wound up with a nail in each leg and indeed still have the scars. We had a delicious meal with some villagers, who were curious about Chumpie, which made a change from the endless enquiries about the cost of the horses. They seemed to find it hard to grasp that she actually chose to travel in this way when there were perfectly good buses. I think, at the time, Chumpie did too.

Diary Entry: 11 May

Set out from Priene at six this morning. Cool. Both horses going well. We found the mountain pass Hassan told us about and rode high above the plain. Stopped for a three hour lunch break overlooking the coast on the northern side. Ahmed Paşa lay flat out underneath a huge old conker tree. Şimşek lay down under a bush. Chumpie sketched. Afternoon ride to Davutlar, then to the sea where we found grazing and a pansyon with a shower and bathroom, which was wildly exciting. Events for the day: Stallions very racy, chased three mares.

Everybody was much refreshed after a night's sleep, and we made good headway along the shoreline. We set out late in the morning but it was cool moving along the beach toward Kuşadası. The horses were enjoying

Saddletramp

being near the water again, and just after skirting a rocky outcrop, Şimşek gave Chumpie a dunking. It was deliberate. He took her further out into the water than I had walked in front with Ahmed Paşa, and being that much shorter was a good bit closer to the surface. Just as a good swell approached, he sat down. All her paintings, all her paper, her clothes, everything she wore were drenched. It was very funny. Chumpie didn't understand. Şimşek was delighted. Chumpie was bolshie for two hours after that.

We had to stop to dry out all her stuff, which gave me an opportunity to de-tick and swim both horses. In the mountains behind, they had picked up a lot of fast-moving, blood-sucking flies, that attach themselves to any shady part of a horse, particularly right beneath the tail. They were quite impossible to kill and even if you squashed them between thumb and forefinger, they would fly away, land on some other poor beast. They were foul things. We called them by their Latin name, 'arsehole flies'. Both horses had their quota of ticks too.

I learned another technique of de-ticking Ahmed Paşa, who was more prone to them than Şimşek. I found that by roping the off-side hind then walking round to the other side, gently lifting the off-side hind with the rope, holding it over his back, but carefully so it didn't bite into him, you could then de-tick the horse from the nearside. He couldn't kick, since one leg is off the ground. If he toppled, you simply dropped the rope. It worked rather well. I was also able to apply nail varnish remover to ticks that were well bedded in, and they pull off in minutes following the application. Chumpie brought the stuff with her; it was very effective. All that, and a roll in the sand, and the horses were bugles.

Our arrival in Kuşadası brought us into contact with a lot of traffic, which we were unprepared for, although we had met trucks crabbing towards us in a shroud of diesel fumes. Here it was worse. There were a lot of tourists, and it became obvious that we would have to leave as quickly as possible since, if we stayed, we ran the danger of the horses running amok in amongst the crowds, who undoubtedly would submit large accounts for damages. A stallion is a tricky beast at the best of times, but two stallions, both too big for their boots in a town full of tourists all of whom wanted to stroke them, was little short of madness.

Şimşek, Chumpie and the Unjumpable Tree

We found ourselves a bolt-hole up behind the town and left before dawn the following day.

Even then the night had not been without its problems, since Ahmed Paşa had been released from his tether by some idiot, and found the nearest mare. Şimşek had had to be found an un-jumpable tree and had squealed himself dumb when Ahmed Paşa disappeared. But we did learn something of interest, which was to save us trouble: there were loose horses at Ephesus. Had we not known that we would have ridden straight into Ephesus, and into trouble. Neither of us wanted to stay in Kuşadasi. It had a brassy cosmopolitan air. When you have been living with a horse for a while, the commercialisation feels shallow, silly. You're better off with the horse, and everyone else, better off without you.

We rode through the silent streets as the sun rose. There was no one around. We passed the great caravanserai, now a snazzy hotel, past the harbour then out along the coast road, cutting off again onto tracks, paths, heading north. We were aiming for Pamučak, from where we could easily visit Ephesus and Selçuk. As we rose above the shore, a cool wind caught us, and we saw the little village down in the sweep of the bay. A short day's ride. It gave me time to reflect on the trip.

Travelling with horses heightens your senses. You arrive and depart at a pace men have moved at for centuries, which Crusader and adventurer would have recognised. You get bitten by the same bugs that would have bitten them, your horse shies at the same rock maybe theirs would have shied at, or tenses at a mare, as theirs' might. He stumbles and you spill off, just as they would have, and you get scratches that refuse to heal and you keep hitting them again and again. You get rope-burned hands, and get preoccupied by the things that would have preoccupied them: the grazing, the water, whether it's brackish or drinkable, and you eye mountains for accessible paths, ways across. You look at rivers for fording places, long beaches for ease of riding. You have little idea of what is round the next corner, but unlike being in a car, you have time to think about what is likely to be there. You worry about your billet for the night, where you will camp, whether anyone will see. Intelligence of your surroundings, you gather swiftly.

When you approach a village or town, you look at it closely, for high points, low points, the nature of the place and usually, you sum it

Saddletramp

up right first time. In a car, it comes and goes, and you never even feel it.

As night falls you find your grazing, water and food for your horse. Then, you feed yourself and lastly when you tie your horse at night, you trust you have tied him securely.