
MY FAMILY
AND
OTHER ANIMALS



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Academic Director

Nevin Öztürk

Retold by

Pınar Tankut

Illustrated by

Mehmet Akif Kaynar

Designed by

Emel Erbaş

YDS PLAZA

Küçükbakkalköy Mh.

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Ataşehir / İstanbul

Tel: 0850 288 35 00

Faks: 0850 288 35 09

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1	4
Activities	27
Chapter 2	29
Activities	48
Chapter 3	51
Activities	64
Chapter 4	66
Activities	87
Chapter 5	90
Activities	102
Chapter 6	104
Activities	125
Glossary	128
The Animals	137
About the Author	140

CHAPTER 1

This is the story of a five-year vacation that I and my family made in the Greek island of Corfu. It was going to be about the natural history of the island, but I made a mistake by introducing my family into the book in the first few pages. After they entered the story, they settled in and invited various friends, too. I had great difficulty in keeping the focus on the animals and not on my family.

I have tried to draw an **accurate** picture of my family in the following pages; they appear as I saw them. I should say that at the time we were in Corfu, the family were young. Larry, the eldest, was twenty-three, Leslie was nineteen, Margo was eighteen, and I was ten. We have never known my mother's age because she cannot remember her date of birth. My mother wants me to explain that she is a widow, for, as she says, you never know what people might think.

* * *

It was the summer of 1935 in England. July had gone by and there was a biting wind in the grey August sky. A sharp drizzle fell on the Bournemouth seafront. The gulls flew above housetops, crying in a bad-tempered way. It was the kind of weather to make anyone feel depressed.

That afternoon my family was not in great shape because the weather had brought us all illnesses. I was lying on the floor, labelling my collection of shells. I had a heavy cold and was **struggling** to breathe through my mouth. My brother Leslie, who sat by the fire, had a terrible earache. My sister Margo had acne all over her face. My mother had a bad cold and rheumatism. Only my eldest brother, Larry, was not ill, but it was obvious that he was **irritated** by our illnesses.

It was Larry, of course, who started it. Larry was the kind of person who would come up with new ideas and then step back and refuse to take the blame for the **consequences**.

‘Why do we stand this awful climate?’ he asked suddenly, looking outside at the rain. ‘Look at us. We are all ill and unhappy. And look at you, Mother. You’re looking weaker and older every day.’

Mother peered over the top of her book *Easy Recipes from India*.

‘No, I’m not,’ she said in an **annoyed** way, and went back to her book.

‘What we need is sunshine,’ Larry continued. ‘Don’t you agree, Les? ... Les ... Les!’

Leslie took out a large piece of cotton from one ear. ‘What did you say?’ he asked.

‘There you see!’ said Larry, turning to Mother. ‘It’s become so difficult to have a conversation with my brothers. Leslie can’t hear what you say, and Gerry can’t be understood because of his cold. We must do

something about it. I can't write in such a depressing atmosphere. What we all need is sunshine.'

'Yes, dear,' said Mother, not really listening.

'I had a letter from my friend George this morning. He says Corfu is wonderful. Why don't we pack our bags and go to Greece?'

'Very well, dear, if you like,' said Mother, still not paying attention.

'When?' asked Larry, rather surprised.

Mother noticed that she had made a tactical error and slowly put her book down.

'Well, dear, I think you should go there first and **arrange** things. Then you can write and tell me if it's nice, and we can all follow,' she replied.

Larry gave her an angry look. 'You said the same thing when I suggested going to Spain. And I waited in Seville two months for you to come. No, if we're going to Greece, let's all go together.'

'I can't go just like that, Larry,' said Mother. 'I have to arrange this house.'

'Arrange? Arrange for what? Sell it.'

'I can't do that, dear,' said Mother, shocked. 'I've only just bought it.'

'Sell it while it is new, then.'

'Don't be ridiculous, dear,' said Mother. 'That's out of the question.'

So, we sold the house and left the gloomy English summer, like a

flock of migrating birds.

We all travelled light, taking with us only the things we thought were **essential**. The things in our bags revealed a lot about our character and interests. Margo's luggage contained lots of dresses, three books on weight loss, and many bottles of acne medicine. Leslie's had a couple of pullovers and a pair of trousers which were wrapped around two revolvers, an air pistol, and a book on guns. Larry had with him two trunks of books and a briefcase containing his clothes. Mother's luggage contained clothes and books on cooking and gardening. I had four books on natural history, a butterfly net, my dog Roger, and a jam jar full of caterpillars. Thus, we left England.

We travelled through France, which was rainy and sorrowful, Switzerland, which was snowy like a Christmas cake, and Italy, which was lively, noisy, and smelly. Then one evening we got on a tiny ship and moved from the heel of Italy out into the sea, and as we slept in our cabins, our ship **approached** Greece. We woke up at dawn and went on deck.

The sky was pale, and in the east the sun was slowly rising. Ahead we saw the silhouette of land. This was Corfu. It was difficult to make out the shapes of the land. Then suddenly the sun came up over the horizon, and the sky turned blue. We were now able to see the mountains, the green olive groves¹, the white beaches, and the gold, red, and white

¹ grove: a small area of land with fruit trees on it

rocks. When we were closer to land, we could hear from the shore the cries of the cicadas.

We left the noisy customs office and entered the sunny harbour.

Around us was the town, with multicoloured houses piled on top of each other. Behind us was the sea, smooth and unbelievably blue.

Larry walked ahead of us, with head thrown back and a **snobbish** look on his face, keeping a careful eye on the porters who tried to carry his trunks. Behind him walked Leslie, short and strong, looking like he was ready for a fight. Then came Margo, wearing a pretty dress and lots of perfume. Mother came next, but she was pulled to the nearest lamppost by Roger. Larry found two horse-drawn cabs, and had the luggage put in the first and got on the second.

‘Well. What are we waiting for?’ he asked.

‘We’re waiting for Mother,’ explained Leslie. ‘Roger’s found a lamppost.’

‘Dear God!’ said Larry. ‘Come on, Mother, come on. Can’t the dog wait?’

‘Coming, dear,’ called Mother.

‘Don’t be so **impatient**,’ said Margo. ‘The dog can’t help it. And anyway, we had to wait an hour in Naples for *you*.’

‘My stomach was out of order,’ explained Larry coldly.

‘Well, probably *his* stomach’s out of order, too,’ said Margo.

At this moment Mother arrived, and now we had to get Roger into the cab. He had never been in such a vehicle and treated it with **suspicion**. Eventually, we had to lift him up, throw him inside, and then hold him down. The horse was frightened by this activity and started to run, so



We left the noisy customs office and entered the sunny harbour.

we all ended up on the floor of the cab with Roger crying underneath us.

‘What an entry,’ said Larry angrily. ‘I had hoped to arrive in town like kings, and this is what happens.’

‘Don’t you worry,’ Mother said calmly as she straightened her hat. ‘We’ll soon be at the hotel.’

So our cab rode into town, while we sat on the seats and tried to give the appearance of kings that Larry **required**. Roger was being held down by Leslie’s powerful hold. Then we saw a group of dogs lying in the sun. Roger got nervous and started barking. The dogs immediately got up and started chasing after our cab, barking loudly. Our kingly pose disappeared as two of us tried to hold Roger and the rest madewild gestures with magazines and books at the dogs chasing us.

‘Why doesn’t somebody do something?’ shouted Larry.

‘Why don’t *you* do something instead of criticizing?’ yelled Leslie as he struggled with Roger.

Larry then rose to his feet, took the whip² from our driver’s hand, swung it wildly at the dogs, missed them, and hit Leslie across the back of the neck.

‘What are you doing?’ Leslie roared.

‘Accident,’ explained Larry carelessly. ‘I’m out of practice. It’s been a long time since I used a horse whip.’

‘Now, now, dear, it was an accident,’ said Mother.

Larry swung the whip again and took down Mother’s hat.

At that moment, the cab suddenly stopped outside the doorway of

² whip: a long thin piece of rope, attached to a handle, used for making animals move

the hotel. The dogs were around us. The door of the hotel opened and a very old porter in a moustache appeared and stood staring at the chaos in the street. It was very difficult to get Roger out of the cab and into the hotel, for he was a heavy dog. Larry jumped off the cab and started dancing with the whip, chasing the dogs away, while Leslie, Margo, Mother, and I carried the struggling Roger. We fell into the hall, and the porter slammed the front door. The hotel manager had a look of worry and curiosity. Mother faced him, her hat on one side of her head and my jar of caterpillars in one hand.

‘Our name’s Durrell,’ she said, smiling sweetly, as though our arrival had been the most normal thing in the world. ‘I believe you’ve got some rooms booked for us.’

‘Yes, madam,’ said the manager. ‘Four rooms on the first floor.’

‘How nice,’ said Mother. ‘I think we’ll go upstairs and have a little rest before lunch.’

And moving like a proud queen, she led her family upstairs.

* * *

The next morning, we started on our house-hunt, **accompanied** by Mr Beeler, the hotel guide. He was a fat little man with small eyes. He was quite enthusiastic when we started, but he did not yet know what was coming for him. If you haven’t been house-hunting with my mother, you can’t possibly imagine it. We drove around the island while Mr Beeler showed us villa after villa, in many different sizes, colours, and locations. We had looked at the tenth villa and Mother had said no once again. Exhausted, Mr Beeler sat on the stairs and wiped his face with a handkerchief.

‘Madame Durrell,’ he said. ‘I have shown you every villa I know, yet you do not want any of them. Madame, what is it that you require?’

Mother looked at him with surprise.

‘Didn’t you notice?’ she asked. ‘None of them had a bathroom.’

‘But Madame,’ Mr Beeler cried, ‘What do you want a bathroom for? Have you not got the sea?’

We returned to the hotel in silence.

The following morning Mother decided to hire a car and go out house-hunting on our own. She believed that somewhere on the island there was a villa with a bathroom. We did not agree with her, and we walked to the main square in an annoyed state. The taxi drivers saw our innocent appearance, got out of their cars, and **surrounded** us. They began shouting at us, and as their voices grew louder and louder they held each other’s arms and moved towards us. We were not used to the Greek character and thought our lives were in danger.

‘Can’t you do something, Larry?’ Mother yelled.

‘Tell them you’ll report them to the police,’ suggested Larry.

‘Don’t be silly, dear,’ said Mother breathlessly. ‘Just explain that we don’t understand.’

Margo stepped in. ‘We English,’ she yelled at the drivers. ‘We no understand Greek.’

At that moment a deep voice was heard, and everyone stopped talking.

‘Hey!’ roared the voice. ‘Why don’ts yous have someone who can talks your own language?’

We turned and saw an old car and a short fat man behind the wheel. He opened the door of the car and got out. He looked at the group of silent cab drivers.

‘Thems been worrying you?’ he asked Mother.

‘No, no,’ said Mother untruthfully. ‘It was just that we had difficulty in understanding them.’

‘Thems idiots...excuse my words. I’ll deal with them.’

He turned to the drivers and shouted at them in Greek. Hurt and angry, they were sent back to their cars by this **extraordinary** man. Then he turned to us again.

‘Wheres yous wants to gos?’ he asked.

‘Can you take us to look for a villa?’ asked Larry.

‘Sure. I’ll takes yous anywheres.’

‘We are looking for a villa with a bathroom,’ said Mother firmly. ‘Do you know of one?’

‘Bathrooms? You wants a bathrooms?’ he said. ‘Oh, I knows a villa with a bathrooms.’

‘Will you take us to look at it, please?’ asked Mother.

‘Sure. I’ll takes yous. Gets into the cars.’

We climbed into the car. The driver started the car, and we shot through the twisted streets on the outskirts of town, swerving in and out among donkeys, carts, groups of peasant women, and dogs. As we drove, our driver spoke to us.

‘Yous English? Thought so ... English peoples always wants

bathrooms ... Spiro's my name. Spiro Hakiapulos ... They all calls me Spiro Americano because I lived in America ... Yes, spent eight years in Chicago ... That's where I learnt my goods English ... Went there to makes money ... After eight years I comes back to Greece ... brings this car ... bests on the islands ... All the English tourists knows me ... I likes the English.'

We drove down a white road covered in a thick layer of dust. The road was lined with pears and scarlet fruit. We passed vineyards³ and olive groves. At last we climbed the top of a hill Spiro suddenly hit the brakes and stopped the car.

'Theres you ares,' he said, pointing with his finger. 'Thats the villa with the bathrooms, likes yous wanted.'

Mother, who had kept her eyes shut during the drive, now opened them cautiously and looked. The sea was shining and there was a small hillside which was covered in olive groves that shone brightly when the breeze touched the leaves. Halfway up the hill, surrounded by a group of tall cypress trees, there was a small strawberry-pink villa.

* * *

The villa was small and square, standing in its tiny garden. Its shutters had been faded by the sun to a light green. The garden was surrounded by fuchsia trees. There were big roses, red and white, and marigolds and pansies. The bougainvillea was hung over the balcony with magenta flowers. As soon as we saw it, we wanted to live there; it was as though the villa had been standing there waiting for us. We felt we had come home.

Spiro now took over complete control of our lives. He explained that

³ vineyard: a piece of land on which grapes are grown

it was better for him to do things because everyone knew him, and he would make sure we were not cheated by anyone.

‘Donts you worrys yourself about anythings, Mrs Durrells,’ he had said. ‘Leaves everythings to me.’

So, he would take us shopping, and after an hour’s bargaining, he would get the price reduced by perhaps two drachmas⁴. This was approximately a penny, but he explained it was not the money that was important but the principle of the thing. When he discovered that our money had not yet arrived from England, he **supported** us. He paid our hotel bill, organized a car to carry our luggage to the villa, drove us there himself and purchased our groceries.

He knew everyone on the island. Wherever his car stopped, people would shout out his name and ask him to sit at the little tables under the trees and drink coffee. Policemen, peasants and priests waved and smiled as he passed; fishermen, grocers, and café owners greeted him like a brother.

Within a week he had changed from a taxi driver to our champion, guide, philosopher, and friend. He became a member of the family, and soon he was involved in anything we did or planned to do. He arranged things, told us how much to pay for things, and kept an eye on us all.

We were all settled in our environment in different ways. Margo went sunbathing in the olive groves. She made friends with some of the handsome young men from the village.

Larry spent a day unpacking his two trunks of books, which were so heavy that they had been carried into the villa by three village boys with great difficulty. His room was so full of books that it was almost

⁴ drachma: the unit of money used in Greece before the euro.

impossible to get in or out. Larry would spend the whole day in there with the typewriter and would only come out for meals.

Leslie had unpacked his revolvers⁵ and frightened us all with a series of explosions. He was firing at an old tin can from his bedroom window. After a noisy morning, Larry came out of his room and protested that he could not focus on his writing. Leslie said that he had to practise. Mother suggested that he practise with an empty revolver. Leslie spent half an hour explaining why this was impossible. Finally, he moved his tin farther away from the house, which helped a little.

Mother was settling down in her own way. The house smelt of herbs, garlic, and onions, and the kitchen was full of bubbling pots. On the table was a pile of cookbooks which Mother checked from time to time. When she was not in the kitchen, she was gardening happily outside.

As for me, I spent most of my time in the garden, where Roger and I learned some interesting things. Roger, for example, found that it was not a good idea to smell wasps, that the village dogs ran barking if he looked at them through the gate, and that the chickens were the wrong birds to go after.

The garden was a magic land, a forest of flowers and creatures I had never seen before. Among the petals of the roses there lived tiny, crablike spiders. Their small bodies were coloured to match the pink, white, red, yellow roses they lived in. On the rose stems, ladybirds moved like newly painted toys; some were pale red with large black spots, some apple red with brown spots, and some orange with grey spots. Carpenter bees zigzagged among the flowers. Among the white cobblestones, large black ants walked around looking for strange things:

⁵ revolver: a small gun that can be fired several times without putting more bullets in it

a dead caterpillar, a rose petal, a dried piece of grass. In the background there was always the sound of cicadas; their endless cries came from the olive groves outside the garden.

At first, I was puzzled by the great amount of life in our garden. I was unable to focus on one creature and was constantly **distracted** by butterflies or insects. I would spend hours squatting on my heels or lying on my stomach watching the private lives of the creatures around me, while Roger sat nearby. In this way I learned a lot of **fascinating** things.

All these discoveries filled me with pleasure, so I had to share them. I would run into the house and tell the family news about my discoveries: for example, the strange black caterpillars on the roses were not caterpillars but the young of ladybirds.

During my adventures in the garden, I came to know the village girls who passed the garden every day. Riding on their donkeys, they chatted and laughed among the olive trees. In the mornings, they would smile and shout out greetings, and in the evenings, they would bring me gifts—grapes, figs, or a watermelon. As the days passed, I **gradually** started to understand them. Slowly I started to use the words, and later to put them into ungrammatical and strange sentences. Our neighbours were very happy that I was trying to learn their language. They would listen to me as I tried to say a greeting or make a simple remark, and when I had successfully concluded, they would nod their heads, smile, and clap their hands. Slowly, I learned their names, who was related to whom, and other details.

We ate breakfast out in the garden, under the small tangerine trees. The sky was fresh and bright, and the flowers were half asleep. Breakfast was a slow and silent meal, for no member of the family was talkative at that early hour. By the end of the meal, thanks to the coffee, toast,

and eggs, we started to revive, telling each other about our plans for the day. I never joined these conversations because I would concentrate on finishing my food as fast as possible.

‘Eat it slowly, dear,’ Mother would say. ‘There’s no hurry.’

No hurry? With Roger waiting for me at the garden gate? No hurry, with the first cicadas waking up? No hurry, with the island waiting to be explored? I did not **expect** the family to understand, so I would slow down until they focused on something else and then start eating quickly again.

When I finally finished, I would leave the table and walk to the gate, where Roger sat waiting for me. Together we would walk into the olive groves beyond the gate.

In those early days of exploration, Roger was my constant companion. We went farther and farther together, discovering quiet, remote olive groves. He was the perfect companion for an adventure; he was loving, brave, intelligent, and full of tolerance for my strange activities. If I slipped and fell when climbing a slippery hillside, Roger appeared suddenly, made a sound that **resembled** laughter, checked if I was alright, shook, sneezed and gave me a grin. If I found something that interested me—an ant’s nest, a caterpillar on a leaf, a spider wrapping up a fly in silk—Roger sat down and waited until I finished studying it. If he got bored, he moved a little nearer, gave a gentle yawn and started to wag his tail. If what I was studying was not very important, we would get up and move on. However, if it was interesting and required more time and attention, I would frown at Roger, and he would realize that it was going to be a long job. His ears would fall, his tail would slow down and stop, and with a hurt look on his face he would go lie down somewhere in the shade.

During these trips, Roger and I made friends with many people in the countryside. There was, for example, the immensely fat and cheerful Agathi, who lived in a very old cottage high up the hill. She always sat outside her house and made thread out of sheep's wool. She was well over seventy, but had shiny black plaited hair. As she sat with her bobbin of wool, she would sing. It was from her that I learned some of the most beautiful peasant songs. Sitting on an old tin, eating grapes or pomegranates from her garden, I would sing with her. Now and then she would stop and correct my pronunciation.

Apart from Agathi, the person I liked best was the old shepherd Yani. He was a tall man with a great hooked nose like an eagle's, and an incredible moustache. I first met him one hot afternoon when Roger and I had spent an hour trying to dig a large lizard out of its hole in a wall. Unsuccessful and **exhausted**, we were lying down under some cypress trees. I heard a gentle sound of goat bells, and before long, the herds of goats appeared, pausing to stare at us with their yellow eyes. The bells and the sound the goats made as they ate the bushes had a calming effect on me, and I was nearly asleep. Then the shepherd appeared. He stopped and looked at me, leaning on his brown olive-wood stick. He had little black eyes.

'Good afternoon,' he said firmly. 'You are the foreigner...the little English lord?'

The peasants in the villages used to think all English people were lords, and by then I was used to this strange idea. I said I was the little English lord.

'I will tell you something, little lord,' he said. 'It is dangerous for you to lie here, beneath these trees.'

I looked up at the cypress trees, but they seemed safe enough to me, so I asked why he thought they were dangerous.

‘Ah, you may sit under them, yes. Their shadow is as cool as well-water, but they tempt you to sleep. And you must never, ever sleep beneath a cypress.’

He paused, stroked his moustache, waited for me to ask why and continued.

‘Why? Why? Because the black cypresses are dangerous. While you sleep, their roots grow into your brains and steal them. When you wake up, you are mad.’

I asked whether other trees could also do this.

‘No, only the cypresses,’ said the old man, looking up angrily at the trees as if he was trying to see if they were listening. ‘Only the cypress is the thief of intelligence. So, be careful, little lord, and don’t sleep here.’

He nodded, gave an angry look at the trees, and went after his goats.

I got to know Yani very well, for I often met him during my explorations. Occasionally, I visited him in his little house, and he would give me fruit and advice to keep me safe on my walks.

Perhaps one of the most interesting and fascinating characters I met during my travels was the Rose-Beetle Man. He looked like a character from a fairy tale, and I used to look forward to my infrequent meetings with him. I first saw him on a lonely road leading to one of the remote mountain villages. I heard someone playing a tune on a shepherd’s pipe. Then he appeared around the corner in front of us.

He had a sharp, fox-like face with large black eyes. He was short

and slim. His dress was fantastic, and on his head was a shapeless hat with a very wide brim. In the band of the hat there were many kinds of bird feathers. His shirt was old, tattered, and grey, and round his neck was a bright blue cravat. His coat was dark and shapeless, with patches here and there. The pockets were full of objects: combs, balloons, olive-wood carvings of snakes, dogs, and horses, cheap mirrors, handkerchiefs, and rolls of bread. His trousers were patched like his coat, and his leather shoes had upturned toes decorated with a large black-and-white pompon. He carried on his back cages full of pigeons and young chickens, several sacks, and a large bunch of fresh leeks. He held a flute to his mouth with one hand, and several cotton strings with the other. Tied to each string was a rose-beetle, glittering golden green in the sun. All of them were flying around his hat, trying to escape.

When he saw us, the Rose-Beetle Man stopped, removed his hat, and gave us a long bow. Roger was so shocked by his appearance that he started barking. The man smiled at us, put his hat back on, raised his hands and waved his fingers at me. I politely greeted him. He gave another bow. I asked him if he had been to a fiesta⁶. He nodded his head and started playing a tune on his flute. He stopped, and with his thumb he pointed at the way he had come. He smiled, touched his pockets, and rubbed his forefinger and thumb together, which was the Greek way of expressing money. Then I realized that he could not speak. So, standing there, we had a conversation and he replied with very clever pantomime. Using lots of gestures, he told me what the rose beetles were for. He was selling them to little boys who enjoyed playing with them.

⁶ fiesta: a public celebration, especially one on a religious holiday, with different types of entertainment and activities



Perhaps one of the most interesting and fascinating characters I met during my travels was the Rose-Beetle Man.

Exhausted by his explanation, he sat down by the road and played a short tune on his flute. Then he put the flute in his pocket, gazed at me thoughtfully for a moment and then took down one of the sacks on his shoulder and opened it. To my surprise, half a dozen tortoises fell into the dusty road. Their shells had been polished with oil. Slowly they stuck out their heads and legs from the shells and started walking. Fascinated, I watched them. I particularly liked a small one with a shell about the size of a teacup. It seemed livelier than the others. Its eyes were bright, and its walk was energetic. I told myself the family would love it and congratulate me. The fact that I had no money to pay the Rose-Beetle Man did not worry me at all. I would tell him to come to the villa the next day. I never thought he would not trust me. The islanders loved and respected English people, so they would trust them. I asked the man the price of the turtle. He held up both hands, fingers spread out to mean ten. I shook my head to say no and held up two fingers. He held up nine fingers; I held up three; he shook his head. After some thought, he held up six fingers. I shook my head and held up five. Roger yawned loudly; he was getting bored by this silent bargaining. The Rose-Beetle Man picked up the tortoise and showed me how smooth its shell was. I kept holding up five fingers. He shrugged, sighed deeply, nodded his head and held up five fingers. He gave me the tortoise.

Then I told him I had no money, and that he would have to come the next day to the villa. He nodded. I said goodbye and thanked him and hurried off along the road. I was very excited about my new pet. It was **undoubtedly** the finest tortoise I had ever seen. I patted his head and put him carefully in my pocket.

I called the tortoise Achilles, and he turned out to be the most intelligent and lovable animal that had a strange sense of humour. At

first, he was tied by a leg in the garden, but after a time we let him go where he wanted. He learned his name in a short time; we would call out once or twice and then wait patiently for a while, and he would appear, walking slowly on the narrow paths, his head and neck stretched out eagerly. He loved being fed and would sit under the sun while we gave him lettuce, dandelions, or grapes. He loved grapes as much as Roger did, so there was always great **rivalry**. Achilles would sit chewing the grapes, the juice running down his chin, and Roger would lie nearby, watching him enviously. Even though Roger always had his fair share of fruit, he seemed to think that it was a waste to give good food to a tortoise. After Achilles finished eating, Roger would go up to him and start licking his face to get the grape juice. Shocked by this, Achilles would bite Roger's nose and retreat into his shell.

But the fruit that Achilles liked best were wild strawberries. He would become uncontrollable when he saw them, walking up and down, trying to see if you would give him any, gazing at you with his tiny eyes. He could eat up the very small strawberries in one go. But if you gave him a big one, he behaved in a very strange way. He would grab the fruit and holding it tightly in his mouth, would walk off at top speed until he reached a safe spot among the flower beds. There he would drop the fruit and then eat it slowly, returning for another one when he had finished.

Achilles also loved being around people. If you came into the garden to sit and sunbathe, to read, or for any other reason, soon you would hear him moving among the plants and see his wrinkled, happy face appear through the flowerbeds. If you were sitting in a chair, he would get as close to your feet as possible, and there he would go to sleep, his head

hanging out of his shell. However, if you were lying on a rug, Achilles thought you were there for his entertainment. He would walk quickly onto the rug, pause, think for a moment and choose a part of your body on which to climb. It was not very relaxing to suddenly have the sharp claws of a tortoise in your leg as he tried to climb up to your stomach. If you sent him away and moved to a different spot in the garden, Achilles would circle the garden until he found you again. This habit became very annoying and after many complaints and threats from the family, I had to lock him up whenever we lay in the garden.

Then one day the garden gate was left open and Achilles was gone. Immediately, we started searching for him. The family, who had spent most of their time making threats against him, now wandered about the olive groves, shouting, ‘Achilles ... strawberries, Achilles ... strawberries ...’ Finally, we found him. He had fallen into a disused well. Sadly, he was dead. Even Leslie’s attempts at mouth-to-mouth, and Margo’s suggestion of putting strawberries in his mouth failed to bring him back. So, we buried him in the garden under a small strawberry plant.

Not long after Achilles died, I got another pet from the Rose-Beetle Man. This time it was a pigeon. He was very young and had to be fed on bread and milk. He was a very ugly bird, with his new feathers pushing through his pink skin. Owing to his unpleasant appearance, Larry suggested calling him Quasimodo, and I agreed.

Because he did not have parents to teach him the facts of life, Quasimodo believed that he was not a bird and refused to fly. Instead, he walked everywhere. If he wanted to get onto a table or a chair, he stood below it, moving his head up and down and making pigeon noises

until someone lifted him up. He was always **eager** to join us in anything we did and would even try to come for walks with us. However, we had to stop this, for either you had to carry him on your shoulder, which was risky, or you had to let him walk behind. If he walked, we had to slow down because if we got too far ahead, he would start making desperate noises and run after us.

Quasimodo insisted on sleeping in the house even though I had built a pigeon loft for him. He preferred to sleep on the end of Margo's bed. But if Margo turned over in bed at night, Quasimodo would wake and go sit on her face, cooing loudly and lovingly. Eventually, he was sent to the sofa in the sitting room.

It was Larry who discovered that Quasimodo was a musical pigeon. He liked music and could recognize the waltz and the military march. If the tune was a waltz, he would dance around the gramophone, cooing softly. If it was a military march, he would get up, inflate his chest and march up and down the room.

One day, we woke up and found that Quasimodo had fooled us all. On the sofa there lay a white egg. After this, he became angry and bad-tempered, and started to peck if you tried to pick him up. Then, he laid another egg, and his nature changed completely. He, or rather she, became wilder and wilder, and treated us like her worst enemies. Not even the gramophone was attractive any more. The last time I saw her she was sitting in an olive tree.



ACTIVITIES

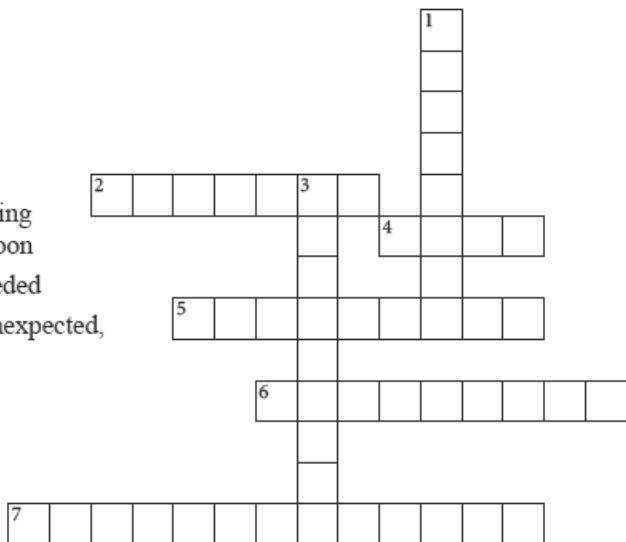
A. Do the puzzle.

ACROSS:

2. angry
4. keen, interested
5. can't wait; wanting
smt to happen soon
6. necessary or needed
7. very unusual, unexpected,
strange

DOWN:

1. correct
3. very tired



B. Underline the alternative that best completes the sentence.

1. Larry liked to introduce new ideas, but never accepted the *consequences* / *suspicious*.
2. Mother wanted Larry to go to Corfu first and *approach* / *arrange* everything before they all went there.
3. Mr Beeler *accompanied* / *struggled* the family in their house-hunt.
4. Spiro helped the family in many ways; he *supported* / *required* them financially, paid the hotel bill, and bought food.
5. There were so many things to explore in the new garden that Gerry was always *annoyed* / *distracted* and unable to focus on one thing.
6. Gerry made friends with the villagers and *gradually* / *impatiently* learned their language.

C. Who is it? Underline the name of the character.

1. It was this person's idea to move to Corfu	Leslie or Larry
2. This person taught Gerry Greek peasant songs.	Agathi or Yani
3. This person warned Gerry about falling asleep under the cypress trees.	Spiro or Yani
4. This person sold Gerry Quasimodo the pigeon.	The Rose-Beetle Man or Mr Beeler

D. True or False?

- _____ 1. Gerry's main purpose in writing the book was to talk about the interesting members of his family.
- _____ 2. Roger did not want to get into the cab because he had never been in such a vehicle before.
- _____ 3. The family were scared when the taxi drivers surrounded them in the main square.
- _____ 4. Quasimodo thought he was a human being.

E. Discuss the following questions.

1. What did Mother do to get used to their new life?
2. What qualities made Roger the perfect friend for Gerry's explorations?
3. Gerry had no money to pay for the tortoise. Was this a problem for the Rose-Beetle Man? Why/Why not?
4. Did Achilles like humans?
5. What did the family realize about Quasimodo?
6. You have read the first chapter. Who is your favourite character so far? Who is your least favourite character? Why?

GLOSSARY

Chapter 1

accompany (v) to travel or go somewhere with somebody

accurate (adj) correct and true in every detail, without any mistakes

annoyed (adj) slightly angry

annoy (v)

approach (v) to come near to somebody/something in distance or time

approach (n)

arrange (v) to plan, prepare for, or organize something

arrangement (n)

consequence (n) a result of an action or situation, often one that is bad

distracted (adj) unable to pay attention to somebody/something because you are worried or thinking about something else

eager (adj) very interested and excited by something that is going to happen or about something that you want to do

essential (adj) completely necessary; extremely important; something that you cannot live without

exhausted (adj) very tired

expect (v) to think or believe that something will happen or that somebody will do something

extraordinary (adj) unexpected, surprising or strange; not normal or ordinary; greater or better than usual

fascinating (adj) extremely interesting

fascinated (adj)

gradually (adv) slowly, over a long period of time

gradual (adj)

impatient (adj) wanting to do something soon; wanting something to happen soon

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gerald Durrell (born 1925, India; died 1995, Jersey) was a British naturalist and conservationist. Durrell's love of animals began when he was a boy living on the Greek island of Corfu. After his family returned to Britain, he became an assistant at the Whipsnade Zoo. He devoted his life to the preservation of wild animal species. In 1958 he created a wildlife preserve (the Jersey Zoological Park) which was dedicated to scientific research and protecting endangered species. He made expeditions to many places in the world. In 1976 he founded the International Training Centre, an educational facility that trained more than 700 scientists and field-workers from 80 countries.

He was encouraged by his brother, novelist Lawrence, to write about his passion for nature. He was a prolific author, producing many amusing and informative books about the animal kingdom. Among his best-selling books are *The Overloaded Ark* (1953), *Three Singles to Adventure* (1954), *My Family and Other Animals* (1956), *A Zoo in My Luggage* (1960), and *Birds, Beasts, and Relatives* (1969). He wrote about his travels to places like Argentina, Paraguay, Mexico, Australia, Mauritius, and Madagascar. Durrell also produced a series of television programs, among them "Two in the Bush" (1962), "The Amateur Naturalist" (1983), and "Ourselves and Other Animals" (1987).

Source

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