

MELMOTH SAGAS

Ferenjinan

MELMOTH SAGAS

I

The Professor was briskly hiking up a remote fell side path, enjoying the freshness of the spring winds, and the charms of the budding heather. She also felt she needed to lose a stone or two put on last Pancake Day. So walking vigorously, breathing somewhat heavily, she crested a minor hill. Major to her, but minor to the major leaguers, she pondered as a gaunt fell runner ran gasping past her and disappeared up into a rat- black mizzling cloud *up there*.

‘Nutters’ she muttered pedantically, recalling the ginger/lemon curd drenched crêpes last mardi gras- a plethora of fattening delectables cooked for her by Rupert Atherton Whitbread, the fourth. Another fell runner loomed to her right, a knackered looking simulacrum that brought her nearly to tears with empathetic fatigue ‘What makes them *do* it?’ she chuntered to herself, neurotically gnawing at her stumpy fingernails. Her empathy hadn’t been enough to understand the highs. She detested pain. Resolutely, she turned the opposite direction and proceeded a few feet.

‘Oh, that is quate charming indeed!’ she exclaimed, glimpsing a small tarn, tucked away on the mountainside like a hidden splinter of a moonstone. Then she frowned disdainfully at the sight of an abandoned bicycle lying beside it, its empty panniers having tumbled forth a fortune in fine and expensive wines. Every bottle was empty (she checked), and one wheel was still spinning lazily, but no one was around. The bike was a new and fancy model, which had clearly cost a bob or two. A gorgeous purple smoking jacket was flung onto the nearby rocks.

‘Hic’ she thought she heard, a soft hic, but she merely curled her lip and commented snottily to the larks ‘*Disgraceful yobbos*’. She turned on her heel and retreated down the hill.

‘Help’ she never heard.

And the fine Professor would never have dreamed of responding to the ghostly ‘bloop’ that drifted away on the wind.

ICELAND

II

On a high cliff stood a fierce group of men, and a bound prisoner. Far below, the sea hurled itself at the steep rocks as if in demented rage. Spume reached halfway up to the puffins in their precarious nesting sites. A wild wind blew, and the shrill cries of the gulls vied with the angry voices of the Norsemen.

‘Han må er en heks. På grunn av han, matte min beste geit dø’ growled Ketil the One Handed.

(kill him)

‘Nei, han er bare en reisende trollmann... han kurerter min ufruktbare kone...uhm...han er virkelig morsom’ wheedled Asmund the Beardless. (nah)

‘Men han sier at han kommer fra Upper Fetlock. Hjem av ondskap!’ denounced Harold the Unshorn. (he’s an evil Englander)

The prisoner thus spoken of stood at the edge of the cliff, arms tied behind him and a bag over his head. Although the piles of rocks his captors had brought with them indeed showed their intentions to carry out his execution, the fellow seemed unconcerned.

‘Bloop.’ Giggled he, under the bag.

‘Tra la la’ hummed he.

Disconcerted, they frowned all the harder, but still sought excuses to delay hurling the first stone.

‘Oi, you there, **Melmoth the Wanderer**, how did you cure Asmund’s wife’s infertility, eh?’

‘I really shouldn’t say!’

‘Did you claim Loki was your brother/’

‘Tra la la.’

‘Can you cure my piles?’

‘Bloop.’

Consternation made the men fidget crossly. This Melmoth person was not taking the proceedings at all seriously. There he was, balanced precariously at the edge of a deadly drop onto sharp rocks into a freezing ocean; the bag over his head prevented him from using his Evil Eye to bewitch them; they were about to stone him to death,

and all he would say was 'bloop.'

With a whining drone of shamanistic chanting, Helgi the Lean appeared. Clearly, with his spells and incantations, he was out to see to the fall of his rival.

With a cat –who-ate-the-cream look on her face, flaxen braids falling loose around her bosoms, and cheeks rosy and flushed, Urðr appeared. Wife of Asmund the Beardless, cured of her infertility by the foreign magician, she too was keen to see what might befall.

With a loud and raucous cccrrawww, a huge raven black as burnt raisins appeared. He flew directly to the shoulder of the bound prisoner and perched there, loudly declaiming.

'Is that you, **Quoth**?' asked the be-bagged Wanderer. As a massive and ominous ocean of dark clouds roiled in, up strode Grettir the Strong, and reached for the biggest stone.

With a suddenness to stop one's breath, raindrops big as plums began to batter the group, and a blood chilling rumble of fire and ashes began to obscure the scene. Snæfellsjökull was erupting!

Puffins flew every which way, their orange cheeks comical in their panic; whales dove to the bottom of the sea and sheep scattered to the far green hills of Norðoyar. The humans turned to flee, and only as they had begun to reach a safe distance did anyone turn back to think of the blinded and bound man standing at the cliff's edge.

Urðr screamed 'he's gone!'

And indeed, Melmoth the Wanderer had disappeared.

24 March 2012

MALI

III

The pirogue was three days out of Mopti and the journey was flowing smoothly as a snake oil salesman's tongue. Yes, there were a number of unusual things going on ever since they had picked the stranger up from the river bank, but they were nice unusual things.

How often do buxom, flirtatious fisherwomen sail over and hand you a large and tasty fish, fresh from the Niger's brown waters?

And last night, as they all lay resting on the high ground watching the stars after the campfire had burned low- when the wanderer began humming softly to himself and then a meteor shower had suddenly swept across the sky like a horde of marauding Tuaregs? Shards of brilliant light had streamed by, creating a bright beautiful river in the sky, and giving Amadou a feeling of excitement and youth.

In the morning, the grizzled old man felt his age again as he stiffly climbed down to his boat and took the tiller. Amadou II, his assistant, bailed and cooked breakfast in the bilges. All the other passengers had disembarked and only the stranger, **Melmoth the Wanderer**, was going all the way to Timbuktu.

Amadou II handed him a cup of 'coffee' (a ghastly mixture of Nescafe powder, sweetened condensed milk, and brown river water), and it was received with a sad little 'bloop'. Melmoth settled himself in the prow of the boat to sip his brew and to dip his bread into a little brown bottle (with a yellow label) of mojo spread, and to watch the world slide by.

The river being so low, they perforce travelled well below the surface of the great Sahara, and so saw only the steep dun coloured banks, monotonously going by forever and forever, with only an occasional glimpse of a drinking cow or goat to break the tedium. Or an occasional tatty collection of huts, and the other small craft on the river.

The stranger sat and watched, from time to time calling out incomprehensible questions. 'What's a five letter word for Polish currency, starting with a zed?

Both Amadous stared blankly and smiled politely, their teeth flashing white against flat black faces. Amadou II bailed endlessly with an old plastic jerry can, and cooked from time to time. Amadou I steered and smoked, and so wrapped in the warm dank air of the river, they slowly made their way towards the landing for Timbuktu. Drowsiness had nearly overcome the boatmen when they heard the sound of polyrhythmic hoof beats, ululations, drums, and a high pitched chittering sound. Crashing the boat into the muddy bank, they gaped, and gawped, and blinked their disbelieving eyes.

A stampede of white camels pranced to a halt before them, snorting and frothing, while Melmoth the Wanderer insouciantly hopped off the pirogue and strolled up to the shimmering crowd of apparitions.

'Djinns!' wailed the Amadous.

"Strewth, it's my pixies!" chortled Mellie, and as he mounted to ride off, he turned and tossed something to his pals. It was his little brown bottle (with the yellow label) of magic mojo.

Marmite read the awestruck Amadous.

'What's an eleven letter word for mutability?' came one last question from out of the cloud of vanishing dust.

28 March 2012 2:43AM

EIRE IV

The gentle drizzle that usually fell on Connemara's rocky shores had turned into a pounding hard rain, the air smelled of kelp, and the hidden enchanted shebeen quickly became jam packed. Bodies (and souls) crowded in every which - where; the benches were all arse to elbow, Padraig's serving bar had three hefty gombeens ensconced on it, the corners oozed more happy drunks, and a few were under the table.

Hard rain fell, and poitín flowed. **Silly the Box** took out his melodeon and started up 'Sweet Biddy Rumples' and a tin whistle player joined in. Feet tapped and intoxication jingled. The door opened and more wet and thirsty travellers squeezed in. Among the damp and woolywhiffy Irishmen, eight women and one Manxman, no attention was paid to the arrival of one more bedraggled (though furrin) stranger.

He fitted himself in next to Silly, downed his tippie in one cavernous-throat go, and took a small ocarina out of his pocket. Silly gave him the stink eye, until realizing that the old fellow was a brilliant player! His small clay sweet potato trilled and tripleted, jigged around, slid his notes like Mattt Malloy on a bender, and brought tears to many an eye with 'An Buachaill Caol Dubh'. After a companionable 4 am run to the karsey, Silly and the stranger fell into chat

‘**Melmoth the Wanderer**, eh? Been on the road a wee while, ‘ave ye?’
‘Nu, it’s been the last score or more of years, ever since the Expulsion.’
‘Uhm...*which* expulsion? Only one comes to *my* mind is the Iberian exodus, but Jaysus wept, that was in 1492...that would be more than a score, my fine friend.’

‘Aye, Feels like it.’

Silly went quiet, being himself a box player who also dabbled in time travel.

‘So, what brings you to Connemara?’

‘Funny, that. I heard a lidell voice, saying- go to King’s Place...trouble is, I’ve no idea where that might be...’ he raised his glass again and the potion squirmed down his gullet like a ferret at a Morris Dance. A pale munted sun finally rose, shaking off drops like a tarn- dripping terrier. The light shone like anemic gold fleece, blackbirds warbled thankfully, fat blackberries hung luscious from their bushes. The sky aspired to Norfolk grandeur, and failed.

The Sidh, (and the drinkers) clutching their aching heads but still attempting one last reel (on tiny tottering legs) grasped the hands of the stranger, and the Faerie Queen herself swung him round and round. She leaned in closer to him, giving him a seductive kiss from her own ruby lips. Her scent, as spicy as a Christmas pomander, intoxicated Mellie anew, and when she slipped a handful of pebbles into his pocket, he nodded sagely.

'Hic' he said.

'These, O mortal spalpeen, will help you on your way. Head up richly north by north east, to Antrim (past the Bushmill's plant but beware!!! *Taste not their product!!*) Toss the magic pebbles before you, and lo, a bridge, a causeway fit for Fin McCool himself will open before you, leading to your destination...

'King's Place?'

'How by all the beards of the Tuatha de Danann should I know?' My task is to dance and bewitch, scatter magic, break hearts, ensorcle time and pass the eons away in a single night in a fairy fort under the raths of Old Ireland. You, Melmoth the Wanderer, your task is to ceaselessly roam, bringing laughter, confusion, jests, high jinks and low humour to befuddled humankind. Off ye go, so.'

And off he strode, muttering 'Oh bum.'

30 March 2012 5:45PM

SINAI V

‘Like a pasty, luv? A hot crispy Swedy- Caerphilly – Filbert filled pasty, and no weevils?’

oggy oggy oggy oi oi oi

A warm pasty and a cool Black Sheep, then Petal?’

‘Oy’ laconically murmured the stranger, blinking. Growing stronger as he came to, he burbled ‘a real oop north Black Sheep? Cor, by Hermes’ winged sandals, that sounds too good to be true.’

It was.

Head whirling with dizziness, he thought he beheld an English rose. Where the hell am I and how did I come to be here...I remember...mountains, a peak... Mt. Bloody Sinai forsooth, and a sunset from the top, looking out over a sculpted ocean of rocks and spurs and faded dreams, an arid garden of purple and amber desert of awesome eternity. Coming down the zigging path by moonlight, following will o the wisp lights and by the half moonlight companioned by those spooky little columns of stones...This heat! It’s not like this in Upper Fetlock, no, Bob’s yer uncle it boils your brains...I must have passed out, and NOW I must be in the middle of a mirage. Fata Morgana is cruelly tempting me, for I see an English rose of a lass with hot pasties, and I’m in the shade and before me lies a glory of a narrow trail at the bottom of a deep deep canyon, walls smooth as a carnelian necklace on the breast of a goddess, the path made of silken sand, powdery as ivory talc...and it’s cool....so cool.

Melmoth the Wanderer wobbled to his feet and looked around. The slot canyon spoke of a millennia of rushing water carving a miracle of beauty deep under the desert’s surface. And such an intense blue sky so far far above that the birds circling up there- perhaps even the Blue Bird of Happiness – were as fleeting as forgotten passions.

The mysterious sound of flute music drew him on, weary feet shuffling through the soft sand, his hands caressing the painted canyon walls; climbing and squeezing up through narrow slits in the rocks, balancing bouncing from boulder to boulder he followed the wistful reedy tones.

The canyon narrowed further and further until at the top the walls came so close together that it seemed he was enclosed inside a snake, a dry snake of shadows purple rose striations in stone, with curves as seductive as a smile and ahead lay a small cave, dark in the shadow of an overhanging ledge. Trickle of water had formed a minute pool, and there sat a Bedu youth blowing across a ney. Chills ran up Mellie’s spine as the tune spoke to him of the travails of his wanderings, the pathos of being forever on the move, and the eternal anxiety of hoping to come home.

Tears came to his eyes.

Blinking and rubbing them, and looking again at the new player, he saw that the boy had vanished. In his place was again the English rose. With a smile as welcoming as homecoming, she offered a fragrant basket of buns.

‘Care for a not cross bun?’ she cooed.

He reached for a bun, feeling like an actor on a surreal stage with no audience no script no meaning and no one but him and the rose and her cat. The animal grinned at him, and as he meandered on down the path he exclaimed ‘Aha, must be the Cheshire Cat!’

‘No, it’ the Toasty Cat’ floated a whispered rejoinder behind him.

4 April, 2012

ALASKA VI

Nestled by a steely sea under jagged mountains, a small village was being buried in snow. A mere nub on the toe of Mt. Ripinsky, it *did* boast a bookstore. The *Babbling Book* was brightly lit but empty, as the snow had reached halfway up its windows, and the path to the front door was nearly impassable now.

The woman behind the counter was serious and hippy looking, a Yoko Ono with wild hair all down her back, wearing rather exotic and quite un-Alaskan clothes and thick specs. She was intently reading a book, and her ancient Husky was snoozing away in the middle of the entryway. Both were nonplussed when the opening door made the bell jingle, and a stranger walked in. He stooped to pet the dog, recognizing that rising to greet him would hurt her old joints.

Smiling at the Buchändlerin he politely inquired if they had a copy of “The Striabismuss Institute’s Studies and Research on the Bloop Effect on Golden Cograts.”

Regretfully, she admitted that they did not.

‘Perchance a copy of ‘The History of Strife and Reconciliation in the Quarrelsome Candlebra Café’ by Desmond ‘Tutu’ Snottergrype.

Again, she demurred, adding ‘You might try Godfrey’s Antiquarian Books on Stonegate, in old Eboracum, you know.’

He nodded sagely. ‘Can you recommend something perhaps by a local author?’

She brightened, offering the mysteries of John Straley. ‘The Woman Who married a Bear’ is quite popular.

Seeing his look of highbrow disdain, she went on ‘there’s the just published ‘Grace Notes: Singing the Winds of Change’, it’s extremely relevant to the world’s current eco- crisis, as well as being full of music magic and esoteric characters...’

He took the book and wandered off to have a browse.

From the back room of the shop came fiddle music, old timey tunes sawed out by the Babbling Book’s owner.

The hippy lady’s toe was tapping, **Melmoth** was reading, the dog was sleeping, and the snow was falling. Walpurgisnacht * was nearing and the four were happy in their quiet isolation.

As the lively tones of the violin turned sadly modal, the snow suddenly ceased and a cold dark sky flashed clearly at them through the window tops. The faint echo of

eerie harmonics crying in deepest space caused Tom to lay down his fiddle and emerge to stand looking entranced out the windows. Northern lights were dancing across the blackness...silver...green...crimson...shimmering over the white peaks, so beautiful that no one could breath for an auroran forever.

As the lights played across the sky, the three humans stood enthralled. Their finger crept towards each other's and they stood there holding hands. Aisling's tail thumped.

" It is so peaceful here.' Said Mellie.

Walpurgis Night

(Walpurgisnacht) is a traditional spring festival on 30 April or 1 May in large parts of Central and Northern Europe. It is often celebrated with dancing and with bonfires. It is exactly six months from All Hallows' Eve.



Photo from Moyan_Brenn via Flicka - he said we can use this if we make a donation to a Third World charity. I will donate to Voice - a charity set up in Australia to aid Cambodian refugees.

SLOOP JOHN B. VII

They stood on the deck of the sloop, arms wrapped around each other and their knees bent to keep balance, as the boat sailed away from the island.

‘Good riddance’ they proclaimed simultaneously, and laughed.

She faced the open sea, the woman, blooming with health and joy, casting an artist’s eye around her, taking in the force of the waves, the fluid wing movements of a tern, the cloud patterns as strong as truth, and the invisible beauty of the wind. He stood, an arm over her shoulder and the fine scent of cedar shavings about him, with an unworldly look of kindness and wit in his eyes. Content radiated out of them as warm as toast and honey.

Together and away at last, and to boot their pockets laden with gold doubloons- the house sold **huzzah!** *lickety-split* dun & dusted like billy-o!- and off on high seas adventures, back home to re-knit family bonds and escape a culture dead with over-consumption.

They exulted.

Humming as the setting sun turned the sea a melancholy purple, as the Sloop John B cut through the waves, they went below.

Time for a mug up.

In the tiny galley were two of the crew. One tall and handsome bloke was shiftily trying to hide something wiggly and squirmy in his trouser pockets as he made their tea (sweetened with mangewurze powder) “No, *couldn’t* be...” thought **La Maestra**.

”Ello ‘ello there mate, wotcha got there in yer pocketses then?

‘Oh nothing much...a touch of Delhi Belly p’rps”

La Maestra laughed uproariously and reached out to gently pat the warm bulge.

Abashed, he pulled out the two kittens and introduced them. ‘This is **Myrtle** and here is **Sage**. I was taking them to new homes, but when it came right down to it, mate’ sniff ,’ I just couldn’t ! So back we go; since I’m now skint, am working my way home to Oz. You won’t dob me in, will you?’

The looks they gave him were answer enough.

‘So all three of you are heading home. Will the missus be crook with the kitties return?’

‘Nah, she’ll be apples, mate! She’s a bonza Sheila, too right.’

The second crew member was looking on a bit sadly. Oz was not his home, and he had heaps of more wandering to do before laying his head in the bosom of his family...hoping to reach Edinburgh in time, but fearing for his fate.

Melmoth climbed back up to the deck to stand his watch, and spent his 4 hours pacing, gazing at the jilted sliver of moon as he trod the watery Songlines, keeping the world in balance.

11 April 2012 7:50AM



Photo Paulette Hayes. Somewhere between Martha's Vineyard and America.

AWASSA VIII

Melmoth the Wanderer was in a bodaciously good mood. Riding pillion behind his very favourite apiarist, the wind in his face...a smiling dog in the motorcycle's sidecar...surrounded by tall and gorgeous people....he was a happy man.

As they drew closer to the lake, the dirt road petered out, and the crowds of people in their gauzy white robes thinned.

They came to the reedy shores, parked the bike, and got out to stroll and enjoy the scenery.

Lake Awassa was one of the Great Rift Valley lakes and was quite renowned for its birdlife, so it was not surprising to spy two avid birders hunkered down, binoculars at the ready, toes nearly drenched with lapping lake waves.

'Look there, right there, it's a Eurasian Wigeon!'

'Mmm, and there! A Hottentot Teal!'

"Yes! Oh yes!! Look up there, an Abyssinian Roller, exquisite.'

Rapt silence.

Mellie and Loins sidled closer, recognizing the two.

'Ah, a Goliath heron...Nubian Woodpecker...African Spoonbill...

'G'day mates. Good bird spotting eh? '

'Fantastico!'

'Well, aye, but we were thinking of going for a drink, we hear tej is pretty good- care to come along?'

'Oh yes, tej! Yes, yes let's go!!'

So **Panurus** and **Mrs. Matisse** hopped on the back of the cherry red Royal Enfield (with Mish in the sidecar) and off they zoomed. Riding parallel to the lake with its teeming birdlife -ducks cleverly camouflaged in the reeds, Goliath Herons standing one-legged in mid distance, and swooping multitudes over the waters as the lake rippled out into a hot Ethiopian distance - the lads were still exclaiming away

'Cor blimey, it's a blinkin' Marabou Stork, look at the size of the thing!' as they

headed down a rutted dusty trail.

‘Whew, great to be away from the Timkat crowds, innit.’ Commented Loins ‘All that religious fervor, all them shouting ‘ferenji’ at us all the time. What does it mean, anyway?’

‘Well’ replied Melmoth ‘it means foreigner. But whether they are reminding us of our status, calling out a warning to their friends, or just commenting, who knows. Ferenjis are us.’

They putted along, the birders raving over the hornbills, and they all were in a quiet mesmerized little daze until the driver came to an abrupt halt. A beautiful girl was walking tiredly along, her broken arm encased in plaster and held up by a tangerine cotton sling. She had a pair of fancy pink high heels slung over one shoulder as she trudged along, bare feet in the dust.

“Care for a lift, luv?”

With alacrity she accepted and hopped aboard.

Tall Amharic figures draped in white also walked along the dusty road, cheekbones sharp as hunger, hair plaited into sculpted styles and elegance in every stride.

The driver halted again.

As artist stood by the shore, paintbrush in hand, and on his easel a painting of Lake Awassa nearing sunset, impressionist in style.

‘**Kooks!**’ shouted the driver. ‘We’re going for a drink, want to come?’

The artist quickly packed up his stuff and climbed on. Being from the sub- continent he was entirely comfortable with an overcrowded motorcycle.

They putted on and stopped at a rickety wooden boozier under some dusty acacia trees.

‘Tej, bring us tej!’ they cried, and happily bellied up to the bar.

Of course there were a few ‘ferenji’ comments from the locals, but they were friendly, and all in all, everyone was just getting on with their drinking and socializing. Tej flowed.

The furriners looked around, looked at each other, and smiled.

‘It ain’t Edinburgh, but gadzooks, it’s OK. No pies and mash, but this injera stuff is pretty tasty.’

Contentedly they ate and drank and companionably listened to music, until Melmoth got up and announced

‘Ciao, chaps and chapesses. Gotta run, I have a date with a lovely lass who has a little boat...she’s taking me out to...uhm...see the ...uhm, hippos.’

‘Mellie! Hippos are dangerous!! Out on that lake in a little boat near those naufragous hippos? Don’t do it...’

‘Oh tiddlywinks. It’s no more dangerous than that Georgie in the snug where you all hang out.’

‘But Mellie...hippos?!’

It was no good. Melmoth strode away, leaving his friends to wonder if they would ever see him again.

Mish began to howl



Lake Awassa, taken in March 2011 by LondonBBG

COCHIN IX

Down the street of broken cobbles, redolent with spicy smells, garbage and tropical flowers, came the shrill discordance of a wedding band. Drums ta-ratted enthusiastically. Clarinets squealed, nasal and off key. And trumpets! Pride of place (and volume) went to the trumpets, the musicians sweating in their red and gold uniforms as they straggled along the street, tooting out the joys of a Keralan wedding.

Melmoth and his lady, having sailed the wine dark sea in a claret red dhow, had arrived in sultry Cochin and were having a wander around. Dark Indian faces and Portuguese cathedrals enticed. Warehouses of cinnamon, cloves and cardamom flung out aromas like heaven's bakery. A salty tang was in the air - seafood, beer and black coffee... Mellie's head was a whirl, but he had a suspicion it was the heat. 'Not like this in Whitby' grizzled he, mopping his brow.

His Falasha maiden was intent on visiting the synagogue, so they were heading to Jewtown. Halting to let the band pass, Melmoth could have sworn that one **Bugler** was both **Silent** and strangely familiar. 'Must be my swimming head' he told himself, and suggested they stop somewhere in the shade for tea.

Finding a dhaba serving North Indian food, breezily by a canal, with odours that would have tempted even a MacDonald's fan, they halted.

'Chai!' they called.' 'Fresh lemon soda!'

Hearing the commotion of a large family group nearby, Mellie looked around. At this point expecting almost anything, he wasn't surprised when **SeaRogue** turned and smiled at him and gave him a wink. Then SR turned back to the señora by his side, and they went back to their planning. 'Please do come to Edinburgh' called out **Spanish Scot**. 'We can guarantee it won't be this hot and humid, and *how* we'd love to see you!' Their eyes twinkled at each other, La Scotia's rich with her deep experience of life's passions, pains and rewards. Melmoth's eyes were sad and full with the knowledge gained in his centuries of wanderings.

The food arrived, a simple meal. Shahi paneer, rich and creamy with added cashew bits and flecks of green capsicum. Dal fry, what could ever surpass? Aloo palak and fresh hot chapattis, all you could eat, followed by masala chai, aromatic as all the spice godowns of old Malabar.

After seeing the synagogue with its Chinese tile work and brass bimah, they found themselves at a Kathakali dance performance. His Falasha darling was ecstatic at the stylized dance moves, wild make-up (red eyes! Green faces!) and extravagant costumes. She turned to him and explained that she would be remaining behind in Cochin to study South Indian dance. Her journey was over.

Melmoth tried to keep calm and focused, but the crowds, the heat and noise had him strummed. Stepping outside for air, he was attacked by kamikaze mosquitoes and random gremlins, and frightened by packs of feral dogs. In a wee panic he fled, past courtyards lit by candles, filled with sari clad beauties creating coloured chalk designs on their stones. Past Fort Cochin's parade grounds with their old cannons and huge Neem trees, past butterfly nets resting from their day's fishing, past chic cafes with their patios full of tropical flowers. Gasping, he came to the seafront.

Wildly, he peered around, hoping to see their dhow. No such luck. In despair, he let out a low groan. 'God be damned' then let out a small shriek as a one-eyed Zanzibari Hindu touched his arm.

"Sahib, may I be of assistance? For some small -small baksheesh, you might care to be availing your good self of *Myrtus Nivellei* - my Magic Carpet.'

Melmoth the Wanderer was off in a flash.

19 April 2012 6:35AM

ARMENIA

X

The **small stone** village lay eerily quiet in the spring sun. Apricot trees were in bloom, but no birds chirped. No sheep baaed. Nothing moved and no one spoke.

Melmoth stood frozen where the time machine had left him, wondering what he'd gotten himself into. Drifting smoke provided the only movement, and the smell sickened him.

He'd been in a bar, enjoying the fleshpots of Old Byzantium...was enjoying the delights of a belly dancer with three nipples, but then met a man who'd made him a dare...and for a lark he'd agreed.

And now an ominous sense of dread, of cataclysm washed over him, and he started to nervously, aimlessly walk around in search of life. He saw none. He moved as an unseen ghost, a mythical figure lost in confusing circles of time; his ghastly prank gone awry had brought him here to where and when no one would choose to be.

Seeing a church dome in the center of the village, he made for it. There was writing in a foreign script, all loopy with curves like honey. Armenian, he realized... **Երեւան** - Bitlis. Remembering his history, he started to absolutely dread what he had landed himself in

There were people and action near the church, a Goyaesque travesty of humanity screaming in a nightmare melee of chaos. The church was on fire, flames and smoke shooting up to the sky. Ragged boards were nailed across the door, and the panicked screams of people trapped inside rose higher than the smoke.

Turkish soldiers strutted around with their bayonets clanking and bloodied.

Dead bodies dotted the square like confetti after a wedding, and the still living were being rounded up into a long chain, and sent a marching out of town.

It was 24 April, 1915, **Երեւան Երեւան** and Melmoth remembered it was the beginning of the genocide of the Armenians. It was Jerdet Bey Pasha's local implementation of Taalat Bey's 'solution' to the problem of the Christians (those clever and talents gits!) whose infidel existence he so wanted shot of. A hirsute wild eyed **monk** stared with disbelief at the scene before him, gibbering impossibility stealing his senses away.

Melmoth the Wanderer stood in the shadows, frozen with indecision and horror. Then finally, fully aware of what he was doing, he stepped out. He remembered the documentary evidence of the death marches, archival photos of the bodies of the thousands of innocent civilians who had been driven out into the desert, to a thousand kinds of Der el Zar- Place of the Dead. Bandits, Kurds, swords, rape, hungercoldthirstexhaustion lay ahead, and few survived. But he stepped out, and

joined in the march

.

'Oh bum' he said, and started walking.

Humming 'Solidarity Forever', he cocked his own personal snook at Schicklgruber, and walked on.

Passing a raped and bayoneted woman, he heard a faint mewling coming from her bloody bundle of rags where she'd hidden her baby girl. The tiny infant was still alive, and Mellie picked her up and buttoned her into his shirt front, crooning 'Hey, petal'...Uncle Mellie's here...I'll call you- uhm, Sasha, and you'll live...and flourish...*kesi shad gusirem*.

He walked on.

Coming across a frail old man who was swaying near collapse, he helped him onto his back, and walked on.

The doomed caravan crawled out into desolation; Syria, an impossible destination, unreachably ahead

home, family and life behind.

swords wielded with hatred and stupidity hounding them...beside them...among them.

He walked on.

24 April, 2012

TIKAL XI

Heart pounding and adrenalin racing through her veins like cold fire, **Sasha** finally reached the top of the pyramid. Not too terrified to appreciate the view, she looked around her.

The jungle stretched green and unbroken for as far as she could see. The fear of heights which had perversely driven her up the -arghh! steep! ooh! 47 meter Temple of the Great Jaguar made her chuckle at herself.

Her dark red hair, the colour of a rosewood cello, blew in the wind. A cacophony of birds resounded as they shook themselves awake in the dawn. As ever, birds have quite a lot to say in the morning. Thinking of the previous day's events, Sasha had to give a smile. It was both rueful, lascivious, and melancholy, but there was no trace of self pity or fear in it.

She and her uncle had arrived at Tikal, deep in the Guatemalan jungle, and she'd promptly caught the eye of a local young fellow. His eyes shone with sincerity, his lips curved with the promise of passion, and his classic Mayan profile was irresistible. He'd offered to guide them around the site. Uncle looked cynical, but the girl was eager...

'Plus ça change, plus ça même chose' he muttered to himself, but went along with things, and the day was good.

They'd spied Quetzal birds and Toucans, listened for the roar of a jaguar, (only hearing imaginary ones, but hey...years later it'll make a good story, innit) seen a quick glimpse of a Teppisquinty (not nearly as sexy as seeing an Ocelot) and picnicked under the shade of entish Kapok and Mahogany trees. She'd not been keen on the giant ants and her uncle was torn between being protective and letting nature teach her its ways. They both sweated profusely in the dank heat. In the Great Plaza the stone stele had bored Sasha but she enjoyed clambering into the various ancient stone temples, imagining savage pagan rites and mysteries. Uncle wanted a Black Sheep.

As afternoon shadows grew they tackled the climb of the main temple. It went straight up in the air and the tiny steps were worn away by the centuries, so it was a dangerous clamber, more like mountaineering than sight seeing.

The serpent carvings and the serpent shrine at the very top sent shivers down her spine- or was it the casual touch of the guide as he 'showed' her into the darkest niches to show her stuff?

Chak tok ich aak.

Descending as dark beckoned like a back street hooker, Uncle looked at the amorous pair and casually mentioned that with Mexico DF being not so far away, and it

hosting the 1970 World Cup with *Pele* playing, and the Time Machine being handy, he might just go and take in the game.

Sasha was both dumbfounded - and pleased. He took off, and left her to the roar of howler monkeys and the attentions of her young man.

They walked into the village just outside the park, and joined in the evening paseo at the plaza.. A small fountain tossed up water, couples circled the square round and round, chatting, flirting, resting in the cool of the evening and Being Traditional. They feasted on hot spicy empanadas and listened to marimba music, and enjoyed their anticipations of the night of love ahead.

It was a short night.

Sasha woke well before dawn as her lover was rolling out of the hammock muttering something about 'mi esposa', and leaving. She lay alone as darkness cruelly gave way to a pink dawn which couldn't hide her trickle of tears. Recalling her uncle's look of skepticism, she felt embarrassed.

Being a tough cookie however, and a survivor, she soon shrugged off ill feelings and decided on a last and solitary climb of the temple. The view was still stupendous, she was still young and beautiful, and also a bit wiser.

'Vagh, I wonder where Uncle will get to in that Time Machine? Me, I may be a blind fool, but hot damn! Kismet is kismet, and **Blindy** is beautiful. I think I'll head to the beaches of the Yucatán. ¿Como no?'

A small ruby hummingbird hovered by her face, whirring and shining in the new day, agreeing.

1 May 2012 6:42AM



Tikal,
Guatemala
a. Photo
Paulette
Hayes

Tikal, Guatemala. Photo Paulette Hayes



BULGARIA

XII

From high up on the dunklegrün-forested sides of the Sredna Gora mountains came the reedy nasal tones of the 9/8 rhythmic thump of a tupan and the jingling of coins, as Thracian women danced in their traditional costumes (embroidered up the yin yang and wooly aprons to boot).

Down in Koprivshtitsa village Sasha, aka 'Hot Lips', was quaffing a pint of plain, gazing out at the revelry as widdly throngs of drinkers dancers musicians and punters got sqiffy pie-eyed but jolly jolly. Standing arms akimbo on the arched stone bridge over the Topolnitsa River, rushing rushing on its self important way to the plains, she stretched, shook her booty and tossed her red hair around.

Melmoth the Wanderer (note: a purely fictional and mythical figure in no way related to the Right Honourable Melmoth 1916 (1492.1066.etc) so revered in the Quibblingly Contumacious Café - I'd certainly not want to offend said **Mellie** by.uhm.presuming.) had strolled into the village with a satisfied smile, and still clutching a tattered vuvuzela.

He took in the sight of his niece canoodling up to the swarthy Rom youth at her side, and accepted his hug with a wink. 'Bulgarian folk music, eh ? Gypsies, Tsigany and the free folk of the open road.Well, whatever lift's your skirt, luvvie. Been having fun then?

She gave a throaty chuckle and a return wink. 'I never *imagined* such dancing before ! Forget boring old 4/4. Here it's 7/8.15/16.fantastic rhythms! But I'm totally knackered and my feet don't ever know if they're in or out or hokey- pokeying all about.! and it's a wonder I didn't fall and break an arm!!

Oh, this is Ibro, he's an *amazing* accordion player, manitas de plata indeedy, you wouldn't believe, and he's invited me to travel with him in his vardo, heading North. There's a wedding gig up in Transylvania, and they say on the purple laden grapevine is that even **MissP** and **Deelfi** might be there!! Only might, mind you, but still, Not to be Missed!'

'Groovy. I've just come from oop there, some wordsmith hugger- muggers were having a big bash - ye know, WalpurgisNightShite..splotyka, profiteroles, **CAKE**jollitycameraderiessssnits and all...'

She took in his hangdog travel worn condition and hugged him again. 'You old Wayfaring Rat, you. And where next, on all your winding ways? Heading over to Edinburgh?'

Melmoth sat down to have a think, and a nosh.After feasting on stuffed grape leaves, banitsa and ripe cherries, washed down with Mastika, and much cogitating,

he announced,

'Maybe.'

The bagpipes swooned and the kavals whistled sweetly, the gadulkas spoke with honeyed tongues and the stars faded against red red moons.

'But it might be a rather circular journey'.

FIN

