



**Ronald  
Mackay**

# **A Scotsman Abroad:** **A Book of Memoirs 1967-1969**

**Spicuri din istoria  
Catedrei de Engleză a  
Universității București.**

Edited by  
C. George Sandulescu  
and  
Lidia Vianu



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The University of Bucharest. 2016

## **Ronald Mackay**

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ISBN 978-606-760-045-2

Edited by C. George Sandulescu and Lidia Vianu.

In the 1950's, an agreement was reached: England was to send teachers to Romania, within the framework of a cultural exchange. They started coming to the University of Bucharest in the early sixties.

The book we are now publishing is a book of memoirs written by Ronald Mackay, a young Scottish graduate who taught phonetics in the English Department at the end of the sixties. The book is captivating and its author is gifted indeed.

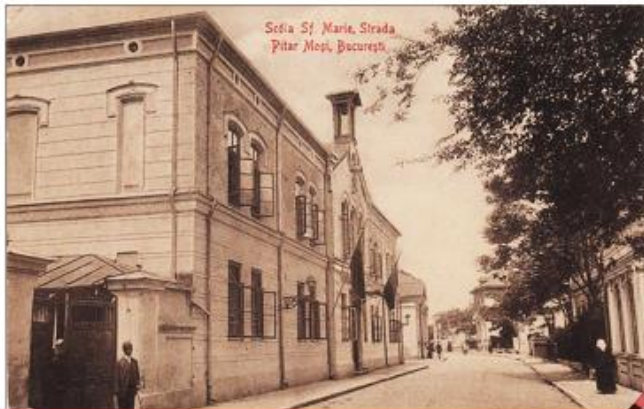
We warmly recommend this book to our readers: it will bring back memories. The incidents related in it took place at a time when the darkest years of communism in Romania were only beginning.

Începând de prin anii '60, Catedra de Engleză a avut două tipuri de profesori: profesori care erau de naționalitate română și profesori care erau trimiși din Anglia, pe baza unui acord cultural de schimb al cadrelor didactice, inițiat la sfârșitul anilor '50.

Vă punem acum la dispoziție una dintre cărțile de amintiri, scrisă de Ronald Mackay, un profesor scoțian care a predat fonetica la Universitatea București spre sfârșitul anilor '60. Descrierile sunt pitorești, iar autorul dă dovadă de mare talent.

Vă recomandăm cu căldură să citiți această carte, care o să vă trezească multe amintiri. Perioda în care s-a aflat el în România a reprezentat începutul celor mai negri ani ai ocupației comuniste.

**C. George Sandulescu and Lidia Vianu**



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Lidia Vianu  
 Director

George Sandulescu  
 Executive Advisor

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Holograph list of the 40 languages used by James Joyce in writing *Finnegans Wake*

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C O N T E M P O R A R Y  
L I T E R A T U R E P R E S S



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For Pearl Mackay, a mother who always encouraged,  
for my wife,  
Viviana Carmen Galleno Zolfi who suggested I write this memoir,  
and for my abiding friend,  
Dr Dino Sandulescu, for enduring.

### **Acknowledgements**

Constructive feedback during the writing process itself is invaluable to any author. Knowing that my readers read and enjoyed the chapters of this memoir as they were written, contributed to the momentum that allowed me to complete it.

My sincere thanks go to my wife, Viviana Galleno; my sister and brother-in-law Vivian and John East of Wilmslow, Cheshire; my brother Euan Lindsay-Smith of Brisbane, Queensland; Dr Palmer Acheson and his wife Lise of Lethbridge, Alberta; and Mae and Pete Cummins of Cheshire.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr Doina Lecca of Montreal, Quebec. As a native Romanian who lived in Bucharest and studied at the Department of English in the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures during those precise times, Doina enthusiastically recognized my account of ethos, characters, and events while not always coinciding with my analyses or the conclusions I draw.

Ronald Mackay, Miraflores, Lima, Peru, March, 2016



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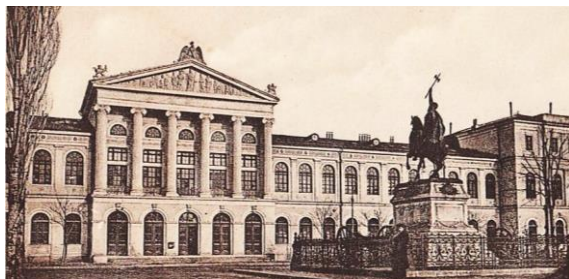
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## Introduction

Groove-billed anis, long-tailed mocking birds and blue-grey tanagers exchange urgent pre-dawn warnings so loud they might be sitting on the open windowsill but they're out there, in the still-scented night jasmine or the thicket of dark bougainvillea or perched in the palm trees in the empty street. Pale mother-of-pearl light seeps through the blinds. Five-fifteen, my best time. Aiming for silence I slip out of bed but the ancient spring mattress complains at the hour. Viviana sleeps on. I plant both feet firmly on the parquet and collect the shorts and tee-shirt laid purposely close last night. I'm grateful for the parquet's unyielding silence and close the bedroom door.

Now I'm in a central sitting room that serves our bedroom and the two empty bedrooms on the second floor. My laptop sits closed on the glass surface of a round rattan table its cable plugged into a power-bar plugged into an adapter plugged into the two-pronged wall socket. This is the house Viviana grew up in and the wiring is sixty years old. Once you plug a cable in, it's best to leave it alone or risk sparks and splutters. I hold my breath and switch the power bar on. No fireworks. The orange light comes on, stays on. Good for at least another day. The screen on my old laptop flickers into life and my eyes rise to the faded white stucco wall. Four children gaze down at me, faintly amused. Two brothers; two sisters; between 6 and 10. Viviana – my wife – and Patricia are non-identical twins. Pepe died at 49, ten years ago. Enzo, the fourth, has lived in Los Angeles for more than 30 years. He and I have met three times. Twice here in Peru and once in California when Viviana and I spent the spring learning how to raise queen bees on the slopes of the rattlesnake-infested canyons behind Temecula so that we could return to Chile and establish a service to pollinate avocado groves.

These four, hand-tinted photographs represent only four of the five Galleno Zolfi children. The photograph of the youngest is missing. Why? Who knows? I ask myself can anybody know *any* of the Galleno Zolfi family? After two decades they still present mysteries.

My wife's maternal great-grandparents had emigrated from Italy to Argentina

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before the First World War, started their family at the Bodega Orfila near San Martin in Mendoza. Her great-grandfather built the most beautiful bank in San Rafael. Then he surveyed the valleys of three rivers in the province in preparation for dams to hold the snow-melt off the Andes, irrigate the desert and grow soft fruit and grapes. In the 30s they pulled up stakes, bought seats on the British-built railway over the high Cordillera to Chile and then a cabin on a steamer from Valparaiso to Callao to build the first Coca-Cola plant in Peru.

Viviana's great-grandparents on her father's side arrived in Peru from Italy two generations earlier. Their children, her grandparents – or at least the men – continued to build on the trading efforts of their parents up and down the coast from Chile to Ecuador. Eventually they settled down in Pisco to harvest their extensive plantations of Pima cotton in the sun-scorched desert inland from Paracas using melt waters from the Cordillera.

Two families linked by the essence of life – water.

I am a Scot, born and brought up in my grandmother's house in Coupar Angus during the Second World War and later educated, along with my elder sister and younger brother, at the Morgan Academy in the industrial city-port of Dundee. To me, my wife Viviana's family history is alluring and mysterious, the family members right down to the present generation, enigmatic. The Zolfis were the more traditional, the more upright – Italy, Argentina, and on to Peru. The lives of the Gallenos, on the other hand, inexplicable and perplexing. Fortunes made as a result of hard work, good husbandry and luck. Then squander and loss as a result of imprudence, profligacy and political edict.

I feel that I should be starting to write about the Gallenos and Zolfis, their origins and their issue, their migrations and meanderings, their ups and downs, sins and virtues, their ancient and their present absurdities.

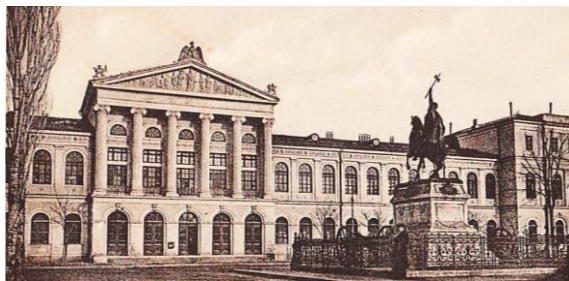
But I'm not. I'm keeping my promise to my wife to use the next several months in Lima to write about – of all things – myself.

Why?

Viviana thinks I should and keeps prodding me. She believes that my 73 years



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have not all been usual or conventional. With a family like hers, I find this ironic. However, despite a niggling feeling that writing about one's self is an act of egotism, I'm keeping my promise.

I sit. I reflect. Do I start at the beginning, with the earliest 1940s memories of my grandmother's stone house in Coupar Angus in a puzzling world of khaki-clad soldiers appearing on leave and then disappearing, some of them forever? School days at the Morgan Academy in a Dundee that smelled on alternate days of marmalade and jute? Teenage jobs on Scottish farms and then in the banana plantations and on the tiny fishing cobbles of Tenerife? The decision to surrender my US green card in 1964, determined not to serve in Vietnam? Or the moonlit night in 1975 when a Mexican rider near Tuxpan, Mexico leaned down, tucked the muzzle of his primed rifle under my chin – I can still feel the cold steel – and demanded to know who I was and where I was going?

Until I took up Viviana's challenge to begin writing about it, I thought my life was a relatively simple, normal one that made sense. Now committed to reflection, to dragging the past from dark recesses, turning it into words, all sorts of doubts arise. Will this be merely a record of events? If so, it can only be inaccurate because memories have been eroded and distorted by the decades. An attempt at understanding, to make sense of seven-plus decades? Should I try to interpret the past as a sequence of options, opportunities, choices, opportunities and coincidences? A sequence of causes and effects that arrive at this 'now'? Answers don't come easily. I fear I have as little ability to appreciate my own life as the lives of the Gallenos and the Zolfis. I fear my life is of much less interest. I squirm. Isn't writing about oneself an act of self indulgence and presumption?

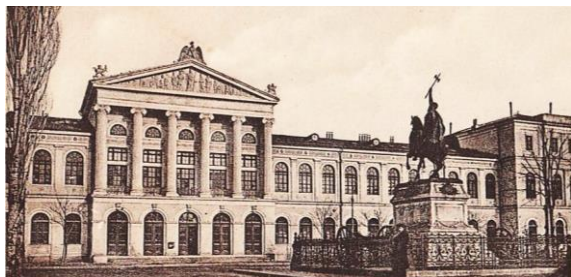
The greatest challenge in all writing projects, I have found from hard experience, is to begin. So I have begun, but with trepidation to be sure. Memoirs have been praised as the *'backstairs to history'* and decried as a *'popular form of fiction'*. Insofar as they deal with the remembered past, they are *our personal history*; insofar as they are reconstructed from capricious memory, they are *our personal fiction*.

No doubt others, especially those who appear and disappear in these pages,

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might contradict events, names, details; but these stories are mine and I will tell them as I remember them. I will dare to write and even to stand by them – until perhaps, in the company of a family member or a friend from these pages and inspired by a glass or two of a good single malt, together we recreate truths different from the ones recounted here.



Aberdeen University: King's College

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## **Begin near the beginning**

“Come over here, Mister Tubby and let me give you your meagre tip.” The accent was unmistakably Indian. The demand came from a dark face leaning out of the lowered corridor window of a carriage belonging to the Orient Express, the very carriage I was trying to get into. The train would be leaving shortly from its Gare de l’Est starting point in Paris *en route* to Istanbul. The speaker’s casual desire to reward his porter contrasted starkly with my need to spend nothing whatsoever. I was determined to manhandle my own paltry luggage and thereby save the tip, however meagre. Money that I simply couldn’t afford.

I recognised the accent as Indian because it was identical to that of the waiters in the only restaurant that I had been able to afford—and then only very, very infrequently—while a student at Aberdeen University up until only a few weeks ago. But Amrit was no waiter, I came to learn during our three days train journey together through France, Germany, Austria, Hungary and on to Bucharest, Romania where we both got off, leaving the Express to continue on to Istanbul.

Amrit was on his way to Bucharest to take up his new post as Second Secretary at the Indian Embassy. I had just been appointed by the British Council as British Exchange Professor in Phonetics at Bucharest University’s Department of Foreign Languages. I was pleased and relieved by my ability to recognise his accent as ‘rhotic’ with its distinct post-vocalic and its retroflex alveolar stops. My phonetic preparation for this post though hurried had been thorough and gave me confidence.

Despite my phonetic preparation, my title “Exchange Professor in Phonetics” was fraudulent. I held no ‘chair’, ‘readership’ or even ‘lectureship’ in any British university to ‘exchange’ with the Romanian whose place I would be taking for a year. Moreover, my phonetics training had been undertaken mostly alone during an intensive, extra-curricular four weeks after I had written my finals leading to an honours degree that gave me a Scottish Master of Arts from King’s College, Aberdeen University.

The cultural agreement between the British and Romanian Governments

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allowed that a Romanian and a British professor of phonetics would exchange places each year for the 3 or 4-years of the bilateral agreement. The exchange was to be between the University of Bucharest and Oxford University. Whereas Romanian professors at Bucharest University could be guaranteed to compete ferociously, even maliciously, for the prize of an all-expenses-paid year in the coveted West, there was in 1967 nobody at Oxford who expressed the slightest desire to spend a year in Bucharest. For a Romanian academic, anywhere in Britain – indeed anywhere in the West – would have been popular but Oxford with its scholarship and its dreaming towers was the pinnacle. The British could not find even a trace of enthusiasm from any Oxford professor or even the lowliest phonetics lecturer from even a red-brick British university to spend a year – 12 months! – 365 days! – in total obscurity and isolation behind the Iron Curtain under an oppressive communist regime in a satellite of the oppressive Soviet Union.

As a result, the British Council, who with the Romanian Ministry of Culture jointly administered the exchange programme for their respective Governments, was forced to seek a match for the successful Romanian professor by advertising the post in the British press to attract a handful of candidates in the hope that one might be suitably qualified for the task, accept the appointment, serve the year, and survive.

In April 1967 only a few short days before my final exams, I had casually picked up the Guardian in the post office-cum-newsagents on the High Street of Old Aberdeen and read the advertisement.

*“Letters of application are invited from suitably qualified British graduates with appropriate experience for a one-year appointment as Exchange Professor in Phonetics at the School of Foreign Languages, Bucharest University, Romania.”*

The address of the London headquarters of the British Council was provided along with a deadline before which applications must be received.

Lacking a spare three or four pence to buy the Guardian, I copied down the address, walked straight back to King’s College Library where, like my friends, I’d been preparing for my finals and searched the stacks for an atlas. When I confirmed exactly where Romania was, boxed in between the Soviet Union in the north, Bulgaria

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in the south, the Black sea on the east and Hungary and Yugoslavia on the west, I decided I wanted to go there and would apply.

In 1960, my last year at the Morgan Academy in Dundee, I'd been fascinated by a map of Europe that hung permanently on the wall of the geography classroom. It showed all the countries from the UK to the Black Sea. Rivers and lakes in blue, plains in green and uplands and mountains in shades ranging from orange through ochre to dark brown for the highest mountains in the ranges. Somewhere close to the middle of that map a black spot represented the city of Cluj and a thin wandering black line encircled a small region identified as the 'Magyar Autonomous Republic'. The name fascinated me—how could a city be called by a name—'cludge' was the only pronunciation I had for it—a word that in schoolboy language we employed to refer in an uncomplimentary way to the school toilets—the 'cludge' or the 'cludgies'!

"When I go to Bucharest,"—in my mind I'd already won the appointment—"I'll go and visit Cluj. I'll see for myself the city with the unimaginable name, walk in the Carpathian Mountains and even explore the marshes of the Danube Delta."

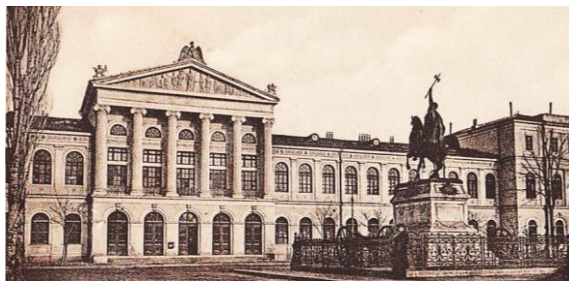
But then doubt and reality intruded on my excitement. I'd never taken any courses in phonetics during my four years at King's College. I had taken courses in English language that covered morphology, syntax and semantics in a general way. Having cycled all over Scotland I'd developed an interest in accents and dialects, but phonetics? I'd have to find out exactly what 'phonetics' was or 'they were'.

My inquiries took me to a professor of linguistics recently arrived at Aberdeen University who had completed a course in phonetics at Leeds University in his native city. Phonetics, he told me, was the scientific study of the sounds used to create human speech. The theoretical and operational frameworks used to describe the different sound systems used by the hundreds of languages throughout the world had been developed by the International Phonetic Association and he gave me a copy of their thin handbook. It contained fine line-drawings of the human speech organs—the tongue, the lips, the teeth and the less easily visible internal parts inside—the mouth, throat, vocal chords, and the nasal passages—and how these act on and sculpt the air being exhaled (or occasionally inhaled) from the lungs to create the meaningful

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sounds that make up the speech of any given language. The aim of the International Phonetic Association was to promote the scientific study of phonetics and the various practical applications of that science as, for example, in the teaching and learning of languages.

The professor from Leeds told me, after I showed him the advertisement, that he assumed that the Visiting Professor to Bucharest University would be expected to teach the sound system of British English and perhaps be able to contrast the sound system (the phonology) of the English language with the phonological system of the Romanian language. He was enthusiastic and encouraging. He lent me a copy of Daniel Jones' *Outline of English Phonetics* and gave me permission to access a taped introductory course in phonetics that he had placed in the University's language laboratory. He was optimistic about my learning sufficient phonetics before any interview if I applied myself intensively to the books and the tapes. With gracious consideration, he gave me permission to state in my letter of application that I was 'completing' an informal course in general phonetics and English phonology under his supervision.

I wrote and posted my application letter off to London and, after writing my finals, spent three weeks of intensive study in the language laboratory and the library.

I was curious about what Romanian sounded like and asked my professor if he knew. He didn't. Aberdeen University had no tapes of the Romanian language but he encouraged me to visit Edinburgh University. There, in the Department of Phonetics, he was certain, I would find samples of languages from all over the world and Romanian would be among them. So I wrote to Edinburgh's Department of Phonetics with my request.

Having waited in vain for a reply, I hitch-hiked the 150 or so miles to Edinburgh, lodged with a friend there, and presented myself at the desk of the receptionist in George Square early the following morning. She was a friendly soul who when she heard that I wanted to spend a year 'behind the Iron Curtain' as an Exchange Professor, helpfully showed me where the listening laboratory was and how to find the tapes I needed. She left me with some motherly advice:

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“Mind that ye’ll be ahint the Ir’n Curtain, son! And son,” she looked at me very seriously, “Son, jist keep yersel’ tae yersel’ an’ dinna trust onybody. Ye woudna be wantin’ trouble wi’ them Commyernists! Gie them half a chance an’ they’ll lock ye up an’ drap the key doon the nearest cundie!”

I thanked her for her help and graphic warning and then spent all morning listening and re-listening to samples of Romanian speech. I found most useful and intriguing the rendering of a standard phonetic passage – the ‘Story of the North Wind and the Sun’ – into clearly enunciated Romanian.

*The North Wind and the Sun were disputing which was the stronger, when a traveller came along wrapped in a warm cloak. They agreed that the one who first succeeded in making the traveller take his cloak off should be considered stronger than the other. Then the North Wind blew as hard as he could, but the more he blew the more closely did the traveller fold his cloak around him; and at last the North Wind gave up the attempt. Then the Sun shined out warmly, and immediately the traveller took off his cloak. And so the North Wind was obliged to confess that the Sun was the stronger of the two.*

Having just learned the International Phonetic Alphabet in Aberdeen and to match sounds to symbols, I was able to listen to the male voice and appreciate how the Romanian sounds were articulated:

“vɨntul ʃi 'soarele se tʃer'taw, fiekarə pretin 'sind kə 'jɛl'je,ra ,tʃɛl'maj'tare, kind ,jej və'zurə un kələ'tər tʃe so 'seə imbrə'kat ku pal'tonul. 'jej se ɨntse'ɫɛserə kə ʔa 'tʃɛlə dɨntre 'jeç kare va izbu'ti sə dez'bratʃe pe kələ'tər te pal'ton, va ,firekunos 'kut ka 'tʃɛl'maj'tare. detʃ 'vɨntul ɨntʃe 'pu sə 'sufɫe din 'toatə pu 'tereə, dar ku 'kiɫ'su'fla maj'tare, ku a 'tʃɪkələ'torul ɨf'strin'dʒeə maj'tare pal'tonul, jar ,pinə la 'urmə 'vɨntul renun'tsə de a ɨl'skoate, a'tuntʃ 'soarele ɨntʃe'pu sə strəlu'tʃeəskə, ʃi ɨn ke'rɨnd kələ'torul ɨnkəl'zit ɨf'skoase 'singur pal'tonul. ʃi 'ʔastfel 'vɨntul a trebu'it sə reku'noaskə kə 'soarele jera 'tʃɛl't maj'tare dɨntre 'jej'doj.”

Within three hours, I could recite the entire passage from memory in Romanian and produce, with relative ease, even those speech sounds that were not used in English phonology.

Exhausted by the concentration and effort, I decided to take a short break from

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earphones and basement lights. It wasn't a lunch-break because, like most students in the 60s I had little or no money. So I walked in thin early summer sunshine among the golden daffodils and the leafing trees in George Square gardens feeling, I must admit, a little superior to the crowds of undergraduates milling into and out of the buildings round the Square. I had written my finals. I had a good chance, or so I thought, at a job. Shortly, I could be off to Romania as Britain's Exchange Professor in Phonetics in Bucharest sponsored by The British Council and backed by a benevolent British Government.

My feeling of satisfaction and dreams of security didn't last. On my way back to the listening laboratory down in the bowels of the Department of Phonetics, I passed a very tall, rugged, unsmiling man. I nodded respectfully. He looked at me, puzzled, and then called on me to stop.

"Do I know you?" Imperious English tones.

"No Sir. My name is Ronald Mackay. I've just written my MA finals at Aberdeen. I came to Edinburgh to listen to how spoken Romanian sounds and try to learn some before —"

My inquisitor interrupted, "Bucharest? Hungary?"

"It's the capital of Romania." Respectful.

He paused and looked at my worn, mostly second-hand, mostly ex-army clothes, "You? Bucharest? What can you possibly do there?" He stressed the 'you' as if, had I been somebody else, perhaps *anybody* else, the question might not have been necessary.

'*Fung Sassenach.*' I thought to myself. But I smiled and modestly told him that I expected to be interviewed by the British Council for the post of British Exchange Lecturer in Phonetics to the 'Facultate de Limbi Straine'. I did my best to make my Romanian sound authentic.

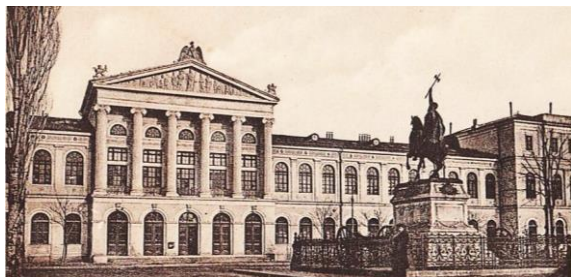
"You? Phonetics?" Horrified. "Aberdeen University doesn't teach phonetics. Nobody there knows anything about phonetics." Categorical.

I mentioned the name of the professor who had been guiding me these past three weeks.

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“Never heard of him!” My friendly professor from Leeds was dismissed.

I kept my mouth firmly shut but wondered at this Sassenach’s arrogance.

“I am Professor Iles!” He drew himself up, towering over me, and the look on his face seemed to expect some sort of recognition. The name meant nothing to me! “I am head of the Department of Phonetics. The listening laboratory, the tapes, are my responsibility.”

Before I had time to compliment him on how useful one tape in his vast collection was proving to be to me, he put his hands on my shoulders and forcibly wheeled me round 180 degrees to face the door I had just come in.

“Out!” I wondered if he acted in amateur theatre. “I cannot have just *anybody*” – he stressed the ‘anybody’ as if I were a drunk who had come to seek respite from the street – “wandering in here as if he had a right to use resources reserved for *my* graduate students.”

A good 8 inches taller and a hundred pounds heavier, he propelled me towards the staircase. “Out!”

I felt too demolished by his undeserved discourtesy to expand on my explanation, make a plea to be allowed to stay or even to let him know that I had made a written request to use the facility without having received a reply. Dejected, diminished, I kept going up the staircase without a backward look at the lofty Head of the Department of Phonetics and keeper of the Departmental collection of speech samples from all over the world, Professor Laurie Iles.

Some years later, I had occasion to meet David Abercrombie, a truly great 20<sup>th</sup> century phonetician who had also held a professorial appointment in phonetics at the Edinburgh University. The occasion was, I think, a cocktail party for the opening of the Princess Grace Irish Library in Monaco. My friend Dr Dino Sandulescu had been invited to found and direct the library in the early ‘80s by Prince Rainier III in memory of his wife, Grace Kelly. Wine was flowing. David Abercrombie, in addition to being a phonetician, was a wine connoisseur. He regaled a group of us with tales of his own vineyard near Nice and of winemakers he had known. The topic of phonetics came up and he told us that he had been the founder of the Department of Phonetics in

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Edinburgh University. I told him of my experience, doing my best to make light of it.

David carefully refilled, first my glass, with a fine purple French wine, and then his own, and pronounced in an adopted but authentic Scottish accent, "A perverted university culture can bring out the worst in small people. Professor Iles, to his own discredit and the University's misfortune, never mastered the most important duty of an academic – that of showing kindness and respect to colleagues and students alike. Please accept my tardy apologies for his uncivil behaviour."

He paused, touched his glass to mine, and we both drank. Professor Laurie Iles was forever and appropriately banished. The wine was, he told me with a wink, almost as delicious as that from his own vineyards.



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## Shortlisted for Bucharest

A brief one-paragraph letter informed me that I'd been short-listed for the position of Exchange Professor of Phonetics at Bucharest University. If I were still interested, it said, I should immediately express, by return of post, my willingness to attend an interview at British Council headquarters in London. I wrote confirming my avid interest. A second letter duly arrived informing me exactly where and when to present myself for interview by the selection board. The envelope contained a rail ticket Aberdeen-London-Aberdeen and a night's reservation in a small hotel.

When I arrived at the British Council offices in London, an elegant brick building just off Oxford Street, a secretary ushered me into an ante-room where three other candidates were already waiting. We shook hands without enthusiasm. All were my age, 25, or slightly older. All were English. Two were teaching as temporary lecturers in British universities. The third had just returned from having taught at a university in East Africa. Enjoying paid employment, all were better-off than me and it showed in their dress. All wore suits; I, worn corduroys and a home-spun Harris-tweed jacket borrowed from a fellow-student, my size, from the Isle of Lewis.

I listened intently while my three fellow-candidates discussed their previous teaching experience—phonetics and phonology, grammar, English as a foreign language. They were opening up dimensions entirely new to me. They asked me about my experience. Prior to studying in Aberdeen, while working in the Canary Islands, an amateur short-wave radio operator had once asked me to teach him some relevant English. So I quickly turned that experience into *'teaching English for the purpose of engaging in short-wave radio transmissions'* and this made sense to them.

Then at 9.30 a.m. precisely, a formally-dressed gentleman came out of the adjacent office, introduced himself as the chair of the selection board, told us what the procedure would be, and invited the first candidate in for interview. The first interview lasted about 40 minutes then the candidate was escorted back into the ante-room and told to take a seat. During the 10 or so minutes that the selection board took to privately discuss before the name of the next candidate was called, the interviewed

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candidate was quizzed about the questions asked by the board members. They all seemed to be about past experience or technical questions about phonetics and phonology.

It was almost one o'clock when the third candidate emerged from the board room. My turn had still to come, but the three interviewed candidates were satisfied that, given the time and my limited experience, I would not be interviewed. In their view, I as the least qualified had been called merely as a stand-in just in case any of the first three failed to turn up.

### **Interviewed**

Then the chairman came out of the board room and the door firmly behind him. He told us to go for lunch and be back for 2.30 p.m. After the final candidate had been interviewed we would all be asked to wait while the board deliberated and then they would announce the candidate chosen for appointment. My fellow interviewees looked disappointed. Over lunch, they now decided that my lack of experience and training compared to theirs excluded me from serious consideration. I would get a cursory 15 minutes for appearances' sake. They then turned to the more serious matter of which of them was the most likely choice. I had nothing to say. I merely listened and absorbed their analysis, their logic and the criteria they used to form their judgements. Just before 2.30 p.m. we were back in the ante-room. At 2.30 precisely, the board chair invited me into the board room.

The board members, four or five men and two or three women, looked at me impassively. The chairman introduced me by name. Each member had been assigned a topic and one by one they grilled me about my studies at Aberdeen, my knowledge of phonetics, my home background, my hobbies and asked about previous experience of any kind. Questions about my mastery of the English sound system were soon exhausted and they focused in on the somewhat unconventional route I had followed in life to that point. Farm and forestry work as a teenager in the school holidays, a hitch-hiking trip from Scotland through England, France and Spain to Morocco and

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back; a spell in a factory on the East coast of Scotland where we canned peas and carrots; work underground in the Cruachan hydro-tunnel as a dumper driver and on high-rise building sites in London as hod-carrier and brickies' labourer. They wanted to know how I had got on with people; the kinds of friends I'd made; what it was like working in a second language; fitting into different cultures; my self-reliance.

They focused on the year I'd spent in Tenerife when I was 18, living as the only outsider in a tiny rural village; acquiring Spanish; working on fishing boats and in banana plantations. How had I occupied my spare time? (Hiking rough mountain paths at weekends; taking a month to walk the entire periphery of the island). How well had I learned the language? (Fluently.) How had I coped with solitude? (Comfortable and at ease in my own company.) What kinds of people had I related to? (I'd lived blamelessly in the small village inn run by a woman and her five daughters; worked for a time as labourer to a stone-mason; fished pre-dawn off-shore from 2-man cobs on the green Atlantic swell; learned from a peasant to cultivate mountain terraces with a plough drawn by an ox.) What were my political views? (My father had voted Labour, my mother Conservative; I had surrendered my Green Card in United States when I was required to sign up for military service.) Was I a pacifist? (I'd been ejected from the Pipe Band of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gordon Highlanders Aberdeen University Officer training Corps for poor grace-note fingering and reassigned to a special warfare patrol where I'd become proficient in the use of every British infantry weapon from rifle, bren-gun and rocket launcher to mortar and hand-grenade as well as bayonet, brass knuckle-duster and the knife for silent work.)

A pleasant hour passed before the chairman drew the interview to an end. I felt validated – not just for the time they had devoted to my case but that they found my experience interesting. The chairman asked me to join the other candidates in the waiting room. The committee would deliberate and inform us of its decision shortly.

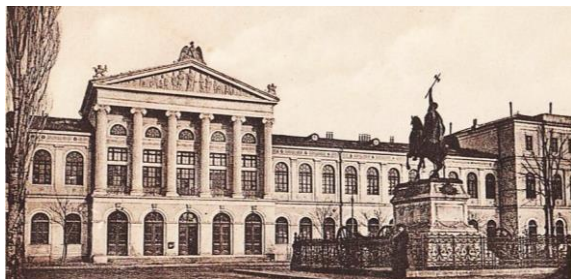
Back in the ante-room, my fellows had discussed, compared and arrived at the conclusion that the position would go to the oldest candidate. He had the longest and most varied experience of university teaching. My chances, all three agreed, were nil.

After 10 minutes, the board-room door opened. "The board has arrived at its

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decision. Three of you can now go. The board has invited Ronald Mackay back in to hear the confirmation of his appointment.”

If looks could kill, I would have died three quick but very painful deaths.

### **Terms of appointment**

The terms of my appointment demanded I undergo a thorough medical examination conducted by a Government-doctor in Aberdeen. When, once back in Aberdeen, I called the doctor to ask for an appointment, he made an issue of the fact that, because the request was from Government, he could see me only outside his normal surgery hours. So long as it was soon, the timing of the appointment itself was irrelevant to me, I accepted the date he insisted on and duly arrived at the appointed time.

His surgery door with his consulting hours engraved on a shiny brass plate stood adjacent to his home. It was firmly locked so I used the shiny brass knocker three times without an answer. With trepidation, I knocked at the front door of his house. A long pause then an elderly gentleman appeared, “What did I want? Couldn’t I see that his surgery hours were over?” He pointed to the brass plate. I explained who I was; that he had given me an appointment; 7 p.m. He was either in a bad temper or desperately needed his evening meal. He looked at his watch.

“You’re five minutes late!”

I explained I’d knocked at his surgery door at exactly 7 o’clock.

“Can ye no read? Surgery’s closed!”

“But-”

“Wait!” He disappeared behind his front door and I heard him lock it. I stood there bewildered. A minute later I hear the key turn in the surgery door. He stood scowling at me. “Well! Dinna jist staun there gowpin’! Dae ye think I can examine ye on the doorstep!”

Once inside, He ordered me to strip to the waist, then probed and listened front and back with ice-cold fingers and arctic stethoscope. He looked at my extended

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tongue, inside my ears, tapped my knees viciously with a rubber hammer shaped like an Indian tomahawk then pointed wordlessly to his scales.

“Ten stone, exactly.” He scratched his numbers into the form with a fountain pen. He ran a wooden level down his rule to the top of my head, “Seven.” More scratching.

“Seven?” I queried.

“Five seven.” He looked up at me from his desk, hostile.

“I’m five seven and a half,” I ventured. At 25, the half inch made all the difference in the world to me.

The old Aberdonian gave me a cold look, “Are ye sayin’ my rule’s no accurate enough for ye?” A rhetorical question; an accusation. This was not going well. I decided on the spot that the half inch was irrelevant after all and kept my mouth firmly shut. He scratched 5’7” on the form and pressed the wet ink with blotting paper recording my deficient height forever and ever.

Finally he placed my arm on his desk, wrapped a heavy cuff around my upper arm, pumped air into the contraption using a rubber bulb and finally, when I thought he was going to cut off my blood circulation, released the pressure. He read the glass dial. I followed his hand with my eyes as he scratched numbers into the form. Hostile, he shielded the entry he’d just made with his left hand, “This information’s for the Government! Confidential!”

I was able to read the final question on the form. *‘In your professional opinion, does the candidate show the mental stability necessary to serve in a responsible British Government post overseas?’* To avoid running any risk of his scratching in a categorical *‘No!’* I obediently averted my eyes and smiled benignly, doing my best to appear *compos mentis*.

He shot me a few curt questions about my parents, siblings and experience at Aberdeen University and scratched something about my mental state into the final box. I kept my eyes averted. Then he silently read the final line on the form, ‘Country of Appointment: Romania’.

His eyes read the line several times, then he looked up at me with respect for

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the first time. "Romania?"

I nodded. "Bucharest."

"Romania! That's a-hent the Ir'n Curtain!" I nodded, expressionless. "And what might ye be goin' to be doin' there?" Impressed and curious.

I met his eyes, held his gaze. When the silence of the moment had reached its peak, I lowered my voice, "Government information, Doctor. Confidential. I'm sorry."

He looked as if he had been caught with his hand in the biscuit tin, "Of course! I wasna thinkin'. I unnerstaun'! Forget the question, will ye? Confidential! Of Course!" He hurriedly scratched his signature at the bottom, folded the form and placed it in the stamped, self-addressed envelope to disguise his embarrassment. He assured me he would post it that very night. He stood up and offered me his hand, "Guid luck! Mind, noo, an' come back safe!" In his eyes I was no longer a mere 5'7"; I was now key player in the intrigues of the Cold War.

I left his office feeling more like the 6'2" Edinburgh coalman Sean Connery.



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## **Aberdeen to Bucharest – by train**

Even short train journeys are exciting. When the trip is over two thousand kilometres, when it takes two nights and three days, even more so. But when your trip will involve passing through 5 countries each with its own police and customs-and-immigration officials dressed and behaving differently and speaking different languages – French, German, Hungarian and Romanian – and when the trip is on the Orient Express, begins in Paris, leaves the familiar West behind shortly after Vienna, slips behind the Iron Curtain and infiltrates deep into Eastern Europe, the excitement is breathtaking.

Border crossings were not scheduled to occur at the most convenient times. There would be a violent hammering on my sleeping compartment door in the middle of the night and when I stumbled to open it, there would be a clutch of quaintly-uniformed, eye-piercing officials demanding passports and visas and opening baggage at random.

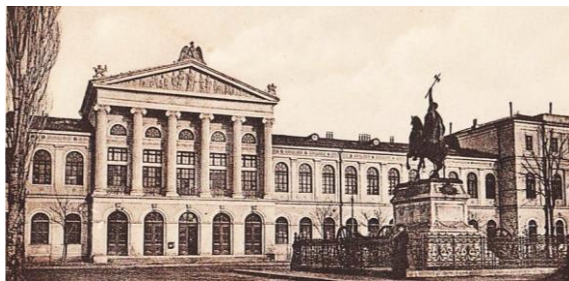
Into Germany and Austria the border checks had gone smoothly. Then, on the second day, our train had sat at the platform in Vienna for over an hour giving me time to get my bearings. I needed to find the least expensive sandwich from one of the restaurants. The British Council hadn't thought to advance my travel expenses and I had been too inexperienced and too embarrassed to ask. After Arjit and I introduced ourselves in the Gare de Nord, he had suggested we book the first sitting in the dining car for dinner. I'd planned to avoid the dining car and brought baguettes, cheese and bottled water in my bags, so, I told Arjit I had no appetite. When he was called to the dining car I ate from my supplies in the privacy of my sleeping compartment. I made excuses at breakfast and at lunch the following day.

We reached the Hungarian border, the journey became less predictable. We were ordered to transfer into smaller, less comfortable vintage carriages that looked as though they came from a bygone age. Without any explanation, passengers were assigned compartments with their wives and or families and the doors locked. Travelling alone, I was isolated. My locked compartment though finished in polished

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wood and the seats covered in dark purple velour, was dingy, the lights so dim that it was impossible to read. I sat alone in this time capsule looking out at a silent shunting yard for so long that I began to wonder if I'd been forgotten. Eventually a uniformed attendant unlocked my compartment door and told me all luggage had been transferred to the carriage and a new engine was ready to take us across the plain of Hungary towards Budapest. I felt I'd been hurtled back to a time when all decisions, even personal supervision of my own suitcase were taken by others.

I must have slept through the loading and unloading at Budapest because much later, when dawn was beginning to break, there was a hammering at the sleeping compartment doors and a voice told us in four languages that we were approaching the Romanian border. I dressed and reached the corridor as the train drew to a halt just in time to see Arjit, passport in hand and protesting loudly, raincoat over his pyjamas, escorted off the train to satisfy some bureaucratic issue with his diplomatic visa. He returned, indignant. Other passengers were less fortunate and didn't reappear after being accompanied off the train. Knowing nothing of their fate and seeing their luggage being off-loaded added to the excitement. The train lurched into motion and we headed towards Bucharest.

I returned to my day-carriage to find that two middle-aged, couples speaking Hungarian had taken possession of the entire space. They solicitously made room for me and Arjit as if we, and not they, were the interlopers. I noticed that their packages appeared to have been mixed up with mine and Arjit's in the overhead racks. The new couples engaged us in eye-contact and offered deprecating smiles but made no attempt to engage us in conversation.

I was intrigued by the valleys the train traced through the Carpathian Mountains, their magnificent hardwood forests and the tiny villages we passed. As we crossed the Wallachian Plain, the Hungarian couples began rearranging their packages, pulling ours to the front and pushing theirs into the further recesses. The train crawled to a stop before Bucharest, uniformed inspection agents boarded and an attendant walked the corridor warning us in several languages to remain in our compartments and have our documents ready for inspection. The woman opposite

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me pushed a wrapped package into her husband's hands and he immediately thrust it into mine.

"Please!"

Earlier journeys I'd made through Franco's Spain and on the ferries to Tangier and the Spanish colonies of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco had taught me to take the utmost care at borders.

I firmly refuse the package. The woman looks as though she might burst into tears. The man cravenly bobs his head to me, undoes the brown paper, and in clear and correct English says, "A wedding present. For our daughter in Cluj. They will confiscate it." He hands the object to me. I examine it very, very carefully. It is an electric carving knife complete with cable and plug. I re-examine it meticulously, then placed it just inside my unzipped my bag. "Cluj!" I see the map on my school-room wall. We exchange smiles and the couple bob their heads.

When the regally-uniformed Romanian agents made their inspection, they searched my bags and found nothing to interest them. Then they opened the Hungarians' bags and confiscated a few objects. The owners made no protest. I believe they'd intentionally included the confiscated objects as minor bait. The 'prize' was safe in my bag. Once they were gone, the Hungarian retrieved the carving knife and he and his wife continued bobbing appreciatively until we all disembarked at the Gara de Nord, Bucharest.

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## Arrival at Gara de Nord

I was met off the Orient Express by the secretary to the Cultural Attaché of the British Embassy – a no-nonsense Scottish woman in her late 30s who knew that all I wanted after 3 days on the train was to be taken to my assigned apartment and left to acclimatise myself. We loaded my pitifully-small amount of baggage into her small British car and she drove us through wide, traffic-free boulevards to an apartment building on an avenue that eventually led, I learned later, to the Bulgarian border. In the car, Norma handed me the keys to my new home, an official University letter demanding I present myself to the Administrative office of the Rector of the University the following day, and a wad of Romanian currency. She also invited me call in at the British Embassy to meet her boss and mine, the British Cultural Attaché, Tony Mann, before the end of the week. She helped me carry my bags up the stairs to the second floor and left. I was grateful to be my own.

I explored my small apartment – a small entrance hall, an adequately-equipped kitchen that overlooked the back of what appeared to be a restaurant on the ground floor, a sitting-cum-dining-room, a small bathroom, and a bedroom. I noticed radiators. Luxury of luxuries, I had central heating! Gone were my student days of over-crowded, grubby basement apartments, damp and cold in summer and freezing in winter. There was, however, a strong, pervasive smell that I did not recognize.

That evening, I went out to explore my surroundings and buy some basics. I stood on the steps of my apartment building. It stood on the corner of Balcescu Boulevard that led north into the centre of town and Marasesti Boulevard that crossed it east-west. Balcescu Boulevard appeared enormously wide and almost entirely car-free. The only traffic I could see consisted of tramcars that hissed and screeched and trolley buses that sparked and spat. All appeared to be crammed full when they drew up at the crowded stop and yet more passengers always squeezed in. The drivers refused to budge until the hydraulic doors hissed to a close. I stood intrigued. There was no queue or turn-taking. Thirty or forty people milled about waiting and then rushed to the air-driven doors when their bus or tram stopped. Then they fought –

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literally fought – with arms and knees and legs and hands as much, it seemed to me, to prevent others from boarding as to get on themselves. There was no deference shown to age or gender – everybody fought everybody else – old and young, men, women, children, peasants in embroidered waistcoats and workers in jackets and ties. The conductor intoned instructions from inside and passengers moved up to accommodate the newcomers or resisted so as to position themselves to get off at the next stop.

I crossed the road and explored what appeared to be a line of shops. The display windows were enormous but empty of goods. I looked back across the road at my building. What I had taken to be a restaurant on the ground floor was named ‘Gospodina’ but had no tables or chairs. Inside, on full display were trays of cooked foods most of which I couldn’t identify. Anyway, I didn’t want to spend my first night in my new apartment in Bucharest in Eastern Europe behind the Iron Curtain eating a take-out alone in my apartment. I wanted to see people, how they dressed, how they looked, how they sounded and how they talked and laughed. I returned to my side of the boulevard and went exploring on foot. Since the streets were laid out on a grid, I was confident I’d be able to find my way back.

After three or four blocks of nothing but apartment buildings, I found a busy restaurant and stood at the door for some minutes taking stock of the interior as clients pushed the swing doors open to enter or exit. I plucked up enough confidence to enter, took one of the few empty tables, sat there and looked carefully to see what the noisy clients were eating and drinking. I was completely ignored. I looked around. Fifty or 60 diners, mostly adults, working class by their dress, with tall bottles of beer and plates of bread, pickles, garlic and cheese in front of them. The waiters seemed to scurry randomly between the kitchen and the tables.

I caught the eye of one and called the words I’d practised, “O sticlă de bere, vă rugăm!” As he rushed past without pausing he uttered something that I heard as “Bere nu mai există!” With my Latin and my Spanish I translated this as, “Beer no longer exists.” I looked at the bottles on the tables around me, mostly empty or half-full and confirmed that they did or had contained beer. Romanian humour, I decided. You go

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into a bar or a restaurant that serves beer and to lighten his gruelling evening's work the waiter denies the existence of beer. I sat there expecting the waiter to bring me a bottle and a glass and lays it on the table with a sly wink. I would smile and confirm the joke, but no, I sat there for another five minutes. Once again as another waiter rushed by, I called "O sticlă de bere, vă rugăm!" and once again I heard, "Bere nu mai există!"

After I made the same request for the third time, the waiter went to the counter picked up a tall bottle, brought it back to my table ostentatiously turning it upside-down to show me that it was empty. "Bere numai existe!" he insisted and added, "Tovarish!" Thinking "tovarish!" must be what was on offer now that the beer no longer existed, I called after him, "Un tovarish!" He turned round, came back to my table and word by word loudly explained to me, with surrounding tables looking on amused, that there was "No beer!". I could have țuică; I could have a plate of oversized dill pickles and cheese with bread; I could NOT have beer since it NO LONGER EXISTED!

That was my introduction to the persistent, inexplicable shortages that occurred in Romania. The most common, the most necessary, the most basic produce grown within the country like milk or potatoes suddenly '*ran out*' and therefore '*no longer existed*'. Such was life. I became used to it.

However, that evening, my very first in Bucharest, I enjoyed the plate of bread, pickles and cheese. I enjoyed one glass of the raw țuică – local plum brandy 40% proof or more – even though it made finding my way back to my new home a little more difficult than expected. I slept soundly that first night and every night thereafter for my two fascinating years in that beautiful country.

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## **First day in Bucharest**

The following day, my first full day in Bucharest, I walked to the Facultatea de Limbi și Literaturi Străine on Strada Pitar Moș, just off Magheru Boulevard in the city centre, to see where I would be teaching. Autumn was on its way and the trees lining the boulevard were beginning to change colour. The walk was about a mile and a half in a straight line and I noticed that the closer I got to the centre, the bigger the trees were suggesting that the area where I lived had been fairly recently built.

I kept passing tram and trolley-bus stops and watched, fascinated, as passengers alighting literally pushed and shoved to get off and those boarding fought their way on—often at the same time! I decided to do my best to walk as much as possible. The way people dressed reminded me of Scotland in the 1940s. What I took to be city people wore dark-coloured clothes; the men in shirt, trousers and sometimes a jacket and tie; the women—many very attractive—in feminine dresses or skirts and sweaters. The country people looked and dressed like peasants. The women tended to be dumpy with heavy skirts and waistcoats—sometimes sheepskin sometimes wool—over dark shirts. Both sexes were weather-beaten and most of the men wore a beautiful high black karakul cap shaped like a tea-cosy.

I'd earned money during all my university vacations, summer, Christmas and Easter. Easter was spent at Beaver House, the City of London headquarters of The Hudson's Bay Company. I'd been hired on as a porter finding the skins that buyers wanted on racks in the enormous warehouse. A supervisor had spotted my interest—I soon knew where the wolf, arctic and woodland fox, beaver and wild and farmed mink were. He promoted me and for the rest of that period and the following I worked with the Afghanistan and SWAA lam-skin grader. Enormous bales of skins were trucked from the port of London to Beaver House. The grader taught me to open the bales and divide the skins into 7 separate categories according to their colour and pile characteristics. The colours and the patterns could be breathtaking. So, as I walked, I stared in awe at the beauty of these peasants' hats, called '*căciulă*' in Romanian.

My route took me to the bridge that crossed the Dâmbovița River. Rivers in

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cities always attract me. I looked at the water moving very slowly within its canalised banks. It reminded me of the London canals only wider. Totally different, however, from London or anywhere else I had ever lived were the striking Romanian Orthodox Churches. Most appeared closed and though intact, poorly maintained. One, in a small park on a low hill at some distance on the other side of the road was magnificent—yellow walls, spires and shining silver domes topped with intricate Byzantine crosses.

As I passed one of the less picturesque churches an older, plainly-dressed woman covertly crossed herself using a single finger on her face. Had I not been looking directly at her, she might have been scratching. She was upset that I had caught the gesture and so allay her fears, I crossed myself openly. She hurried on, head down.

I was approaching the centre. Now the buildings were massive and elegant, all the more impressive due to the lack of traffic. The beauty of the city centre jarred with the expectations I had that cities would be grey and uniform. Bucharest was anything but. And I was struck by the lack of private cars. I was to learn that only recently had private citizens been allowed to own cars. The few cars I did see tended to be black, enormous, driven by chauffeurs wearing cloth caps, the white-curtained back seats invariably drawn. They travelled very fast. Also a very few huge black Mercedes similarly curtained to protect the identity of the privileged passengers. The immaculately-uniformed traffic policemen would raise their white-gloved hands and hold up all other road users to let the limousines speed past. I stared at first, curious, but noticed because nobody else did, I was attracting attention to myself and stopped. I wanted to 'fit in'.

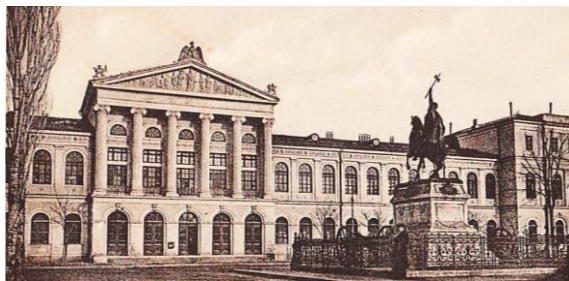
In the centre, on Magheru Boulevard, there were more pedestrians. They would stare at me curiously but looked away if I caught them. I decided it was my unfamiliar clothes. I walked past the Hotel Lido and through the enormous open casement windows saw clients inside seated at tables with white linen table-cloths and attending waiters dressed in threadbare dinner jackets—faded elegance.

I easily found the street called Pitar Moș with a brass plate on the massive stone

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wall announcing 'Facultate de Limbi Straine, Universitatea din București'. Although the door was locked and I couldn't enter, the thought of teaching there excited me. Finding that I was close to the British Embassy I took back streets to get there. Entirely by coincidence I passed the American Embassy with a Reading Room apparently open to the public. Two very smart armed and uniformed Marines in addition to two Romanian soldiers guarded the entrance. I walked on and discovered that the British Embassy was guarded, apparently, only by Romanian soldiers who narrowed their eyes as I passed. Although the elegant wrought-iron gates stood open, I made no attempt to enter. Today, all I wanted to do was to become familiar with key locations.

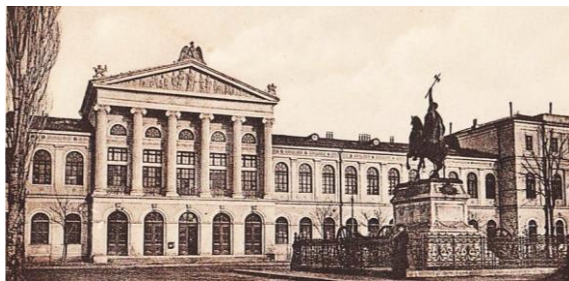
I walked back on the main boulevard, crossed at a pedestrian crossing and began retracing my steps home but on the opposite side of the road. It was lunch timer and I found a restaurant on a corner. It announced itself as 'Restaurant' followed by a number in gold lettering on a red background – apparently the signage of choice or of law here. I went in and sat down. The dining room had been elegant. It was well after lunch-time and despite a dearth of diners I had difficulty getting the waiter's attention. Eventually he brought me a menu and I ordered 'musaka' even though I'd never heard of it before. After a long wait he put a plate in front of me. It smelled delicious and I ate it with relish without the slightest idea what it was. I'd never before eaten aubergines. Often after that, I had lunch there because it was on my way home and because the food was excellent. During that year I worked my way through the entire menu relishing everything.

The following day, at the appointed time, I presented myself at the wrought-iron gates of the British Embassy but a Romanian guard barred my way holding his rifle across his chest and shaking his head. Just as I was trying out my new title on him, 'Profesor invitat la Universitatea din București' a very relaxed but self-assured, well-built man in his early 50s wearing British clothes approached the gate from inside the compound. He said something to the guard. Immediately, I recognised this man's function if not his identity. He had the same confident bearing, stature and the all-seeing, faintly amused eyes of the Black Watch sergeant who had trained us as infantrymen with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Gordon Highlanders in Aberdeen.

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“Welcome to Bucharest, Mr Mackay! The Cultural Attaché is expecting you.” He was the in-charge kind of man I immediately felt safe and at home with, the kind of competent man you saw in the mess reserved for Warrant Officers.

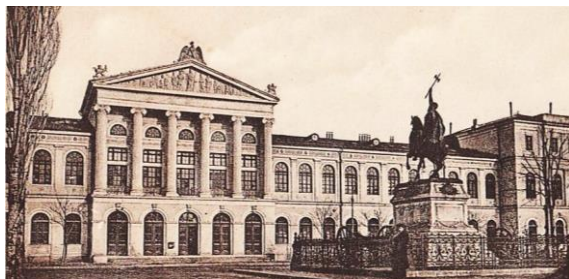
The Cultural Attaché, Tony Mann, was from Oxfordshire, ten years older than me, plump, pleasant and welcoming. Very casually, for the next hour or so he explained the things I needed to know. He was my personal contact person in the Embassy. He was an officer of the British Council but the British Council was no longer permitted to operate in Romania and so, for this appointment he was the Cultural Attaché to the British Legation. It would be better if I did not refer at all to the British Council.

Tony ran through a series of suggestions, warnings and offers of cooperation. I could take anything, *anything at all* to him and he would find a resolution. I was welcome to call him at his office or at home at any time however, as a non-diplomat working at the University, it would serve me better not to become too closely identified with the Embassy. I was one of two British citizens appointed to year-long posts as part of the bilateral cultural agreement. The other, Peter Bird an engineer, also at Bucharest University, was about to leave but I would meet him if I accepted Tony and his wife’s invitation to dinner that evening. As soon as Peter left the country, Bob Reese, a Deacon of the Anglican Church would arrive to become familiar with the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Communist Party of Romania had passed a law that forbade Romanians from associating with Westerners. The Romanian security service, the *Securitate*, ran a vast network of informers of all ages and appearances. Hence anybody who showed any willingness to associate with was probably working for the ‘*Securitate*’. If I initiated association with a Romanian man or woman I could, unwittingly and unintentionally, be putting them in political danger. My apartment and telephone were bugged and I should assume that I was under surveillance constantly. He had been obliged to make an appointment for me with the Rector’s office the following day and I would be told there, what restrictions the University placed on my travelling outside of Bucharest. No diplomat, he told me, could travel more than a few kilometres from the city centre without first applying in advance for

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and receiving a formal, one-time pass. Such passes were seldom refused but tended to arrive too late to allow the planned trip unless it was to the Embassy Villa at the head of the Prahova Valley. He would see to it that I received an invitation to the villa.

I listened intently. I'd been given an essentially similar but shorter briefing by an urbane gentleman in the Foreign Office in London before departing.

"The Romanian security service," he told me, "will assume that you work for a branch of the British Security Service. Your apartment will be bugged, telephone calls monitored and you will be under constant surveillance. It is likely the Securitate will try to compromise you in order to suborn you. They can accommodate any sexual preference be it busty blondes or young men. When you succumb, they will threaten to divulge your sins unless you cooperate with them. You may not publish anything about your stay in Romania for a period of 5 years. After that, you can write anything you want. Olivia Manning, the wife of one of your predecessors Reggie Smith, did so to her advantage. Perhaps you know her *Balkan Trilogy*?"

I'd found myself back out on the London street still trying to process the information I'd been given. The information Tony now offered me was less trite, more detailed and I found it reassuring to know that I had such an agreeable contact person in the British Embassy. I walked back to my apartment reassured.

At the end of the working day, the charming Tony Mann picked me up in his car and drove me to his elegant, high-ceilinged pre-War apartment for dinner. His wife Susan was equally warm and charming. As promised, the engineer Peter Bird was there. Like me, he was a keen hill-walker. He offered to take me by train that weekend and introduce me to the Carpathian Mountains. Delighted, I accepted.

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## **Admonitions from the Rectoria**

The following day, carrying my letter of appointment and my passport, I presented myself at the University Rector's office. The Rectoria is the administrative centre of the institution. The officer responsible for my conditions while I was in Bucharest, a woman in her early 40s, met me unsmiling and led me to a huge wood-panelled room with a central highly polished table surrounded by chairs straight out of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Previous gowned Rectors regarded us soberly from the walls. Still unsmiling, she seated herself on an intricately-carved wooden throne and gestured me to a straight-backed, uncomfortable chair. She regarded me sternly across a wide expanse of polished wood.

"I am appointed by the Rector as the official responsible for all non-academic matters for the period of your appointment." Very good English. She slid me a blue cardboard University ID card. One of the many photographs I'd submitted to the British Council weeks previously had been attached and embossed with the University emblem. It attested that I was the Profesor Invitat la Universitatea din București' and bore my Passport Number, and Date of Birth. Now I officially existed in Romania. The sight of it seemed to give me a foretaste of the adventures to come.

The apartment I had been assigned, she told me, belonged to the university and must be vacated at the end of my contract in the same condition as I found it. My teaching schedule would be assigned by the Head of the English Department, my immediate academic superior, Madame 'M' Cartianu. My salary was paid in Romanian Lei and could not be exchanged or taken out of the country. I must collect my salary on the last day of every month at the Communist Party Base in the building where I taught. She paused and looked at me.

'So far so good,' I thought.

Then came the blow!

*"Within Bucharest, you are free to travel anywhere. However, if you wish to leave the city, you must ask this office for permission, in writing, at least two weeks in advance. In your request you must state the destination, purpose, route and duration of your trip. If permission*

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*is granted,*” – she stressed the conditional – “it will be in the form of a permit for that specific trip and that trip only.”

She went on to say that I must carry that document with me at all times, show it to any official who asked for it and surrender it to her on my return; that under no circumstances could I visit or pass through the oilfields in the Plain of Wallachia. She showed me on a classroom-style map where these were. The official ‘welcome’ from the Rectoria was over and I was out in a street orange with autumn sunshine.

*‘I’ve just been issued a verbal arrest order that limits my freedom of movement!’* I thought to myself. The planned trip to the Prahova Valley and the Carpathians with Peter this weekend was out. Spontaneous trips were prohibited – perhaps all trips might be prohibited if, according to Tony, written permission was purposely delayed! *‘This amounts to arbitrary but permanent quarantine,’* I said to myself.

The injustice of it riled me!

I sat in a cafe to weigh things up. I hadn’t come to Romania to be stuck in the city. Then a light came on in my mind and I saw the solution.

The unsmiling woman in the Rector’s Office was telling me that these were the regulations and it was my duty to self-enforce them. ‘Why’, I reasoned, ‘should I cravenly agree to sanction myself? What if I turn her warning on its head? What if I take the view that responsibility for enforcement falls on the Romanian State not on me?’

She was, effectively, demanding I police myself in order to save them the trouble and expense of doing so. I would be doing their job for them, as an unpaid volunteer! There and then I decided that if the Rectoria or the State wanted to restrict my movements they would have to enforce the restriction without my help. I would simply ignore what I’d been told. *‘After all, what can they do to me?’* I asked myself. The truth was, I had no idea!

And so as planned, that Saturday I met Peter at the Gara de Nord where I’d arrived only a few days earlier. He explained the simple process involved in buying return tickets to the village of Bușteni in the Prahova Valley. We bought return tickets for the same day. Preparations for his imminent return to the UK prevented him from

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spending the entire weekend in the mountains as we'd planned.

Once we were on the train he asked me if the Rectoria had placed any restrictions on my travel.

"Yes," I told him, "but I've decided it's their responsibility not mine, to enforce their rules!" I told him I'd thought seriously about the matter, had rejected the idea of policing myself and would ignore the sanction and take my chances. "I refuse to do their work for them!"

Delighted, he laughed. "I made the same decision when I arrived! Any time I'm outside Bucharest and asked for identification, I simply show my University ID and I've never suffered any negative consequences!"

We were two of a kind. I was sorry that he was about to return to the UK.



Casa Universitarilor

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## **The Prahova Valley**

### **First visit**

Along with a cluster of Romanian hikers, men and women ranging in age from early 20s to their 60s, Peter and I descended from the train to the bracing mountain air of the Carpathians. The Prahova, a shallow, fast-flowing mountain stream, separated the Bucegi Mountains that rose above the west bank from the Baiu range on the east bank. I admired white wooden houses with white picket fences and larger and beautiful villas built from natural wood. Peter told me that these villas had been taken over by the State in 1949 and now served Romanian tourists from Bucharest all year round – hiking in summer and skiing in winter. Some were reserved for members of the Communist Party, others popular with the proletariat and others with the intelligentsia. He recommended one as we passed and I made a mental note of it for the future. The villagers wore brighter colours than the peasants in Bucharest and the backs of their waistcoats were often embroidered with flowers. It was easier to breathe in the countryside.

Peter stopped and pointed out a prominent cross atop a peak above us. “The Heroes’ Cross – ‘*Crucea Eroilor*’ – on the summit of Caraiman. Twenty-three hundred metres. Erected to honour those who died in the First World War.” That’s where we were heading. From there we would be able to see the Cabana Caraiman and the Cabana Babele – two of the many hostels where, on future trips I could spend the night if I chose to.

In single file, hikers in front of and behind us, we began to plod up a steep path through the woods. After more than a couple of hours of hard slogging we emerged onto the high plateau close to the Cross. We took some photographs. So did some of the other Romanian hikers while others headed for one or other of the many hostels on the plateau.

We ate our sandwiches and continued to enjoy the magnificent views of mountains and valleys, forests and rock faces that the summit of Caraiman offered us.

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It was evening by the time we descended in to the valley and boarded the train at Bușteni and it was dark when we reached Bucharest. Peter had been a good companion, he'd given me an introduction to hill-walking in Romania and I'd learned a great deal from him in that one day.

### **First solo trip to the Bucegi**

I spent the following week exploring the city. Tony had let me know that Madame Cartianu would call me to a meeting at the Facultatea de Limbi și Literaturi Străine for my orientation and my teaching schedule – classes were due to begin in less than two weeks – but when no summons had come by the end of the week I decided to go off to the Carpathians again, this time on my own and stay overnight in one of the hostels up on the plateau. This time I would take the train only to Sinaia and follow a different, much longer route into the mountains and stay at either Babele or Caraiman.

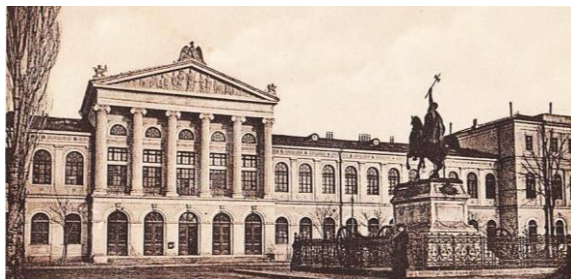
In the vast Gara de Nord, I bought my tickets without difficulty, boarded the train and alighted in Sinaia, a picturesque little resort town. There had been other passengers on the early morning train but I had boarded as one of the very first and selected an empty carriage. As new passengers boarded they would look into my carriage from the corridor, examine me and then move on. So I'd had the carriage all to myself.

When the train stopped at Sinaia, all I had to do was follow others dressed as hikers from the station, through a couple of village streets, crossing first the bridge over the river, then the road that linked Bucharest with Transylvania, enter the forest and begin the steep trudge upwards on the trail. There were a score of others in silent pairs or small groups – men and women ranging from their early 20s to their 60s. All were dressed better and more appropriately for the mountains than I was – stout hiking boots, pant-legs stuffed into woollen socks. Some even wore woollen plus-fours of the kind my grandfather had worn in Scotland. Their canvas jackets showed wear and strapped to well-worn, leather-trimmed canvas rucksacks were warm

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woollen sweaters. The older couples carried much-used walking poles that appeared to have been cut by themselves years earlier when they'd begun hiking.

With the very briefest of "Buna Ziua" to each other and to me, each couple or small group set out quietly and at their own pace. They had no intention of forming broader alliances. That suited me since at this early point I understood very little Romanian and could speak less. So I conserved my breath and energy for the steep trail through woods of magnificent beech and chestnut and the occasional sweet-smelling pine. It was not unlike climbing the path to the summit of Ben Nevis but with the added interest and beauty of trees that began to thin out and eventually disappeared as we gained altitude.

The pairs and small groups soon outstripped me – on purpose, it seemed – and so I settled in comfortably some 500 yards behind them. I was 25, very fit from manual labour, and used to mountain walking in Scotland but had no proper equipment and no walking stick to help on the steep rocky ground. I wore no boots, having been able to afford, before I left, only a pair of stout leather shoes with liberally-sparabled soles from the ex-army store in Aberdeen. Most of my clothes for the four years I'd studied at Aberdeen had come from the ex-army store. Although the shoes were new, they were comfortable and I climbed with relative ease. My khaki, second-hand, army back-pack was the problem. The shoulder straps were too narrow and slid through the buckles so I had to continually adjust them.

The path became more abrupt as we left the woods behind and approached the edge of the plateau. Tumbling streams had created steeply indented valleys and the path wound to avoid great beds of scree far too dangerous to get close to.

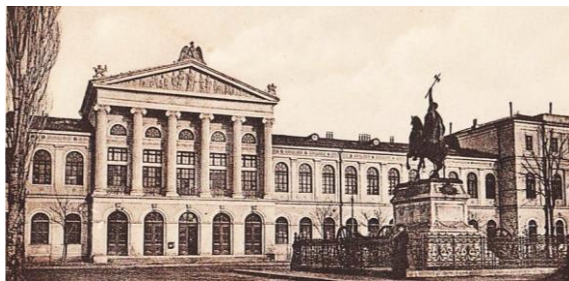
When I arrived on the plateau, the various groups were standing closer together, drinking from water flasks and enjoying the view. They appeared to be slightly more relaxed and without asking me any personal questions at all, pointed out and named distant peaks to the east in the Baiu range of the Carpathians and the tiny neat villages in the green valley far below.

Now, closer but still separately, we trundled across the rounded plateau past Omul at 2,500 metres the highest mountain in the range. All the hikers appeared to be

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very experienced and intimately familiar with this walk and talked quietly within their respective groups.

Now both hostels, Babele and Caraiman, could be seen separated by several kilometres on the plateau. The band of hikers began to split up, each little group heading towards its preferred cabin. I paused to give them all a good head start and then followed the smaller of the two groups at a distance of about a kilometre. They were heading for Caraiman. I reckoned that I stood more chance of finding a bed in the hostel with fewer people.

The hostel was an old cabin built of dark weathered wood – a far cry from the tiny stone cottage and converted outbuilding Youth Hostels I knew in the more isolated parts of Scotland. When I finally arrived, those who'd preceded me had apparently informed the warden of my arrival. He was a young man dressed for the mountains and looked like an intelligent country doctor on holiday. Discreetly barring my way, he asked me who I was, where I came from and what I was doing up here in the Carpathians. I tried to understand and explain as best I could, drawing helpfully on both my Spanish and even more effectively on my Latin.

He patiently explained that besides being unable to admit me without a reservation, hostels were for the use of Romanians. Some of the other hikers were scattered around busying themselves and pretending not to listen.

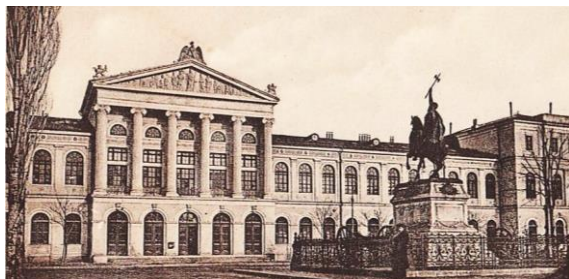
I was determined that I would not be turned away and would spend the night there and so drew on all my linguistic and some even more creative resources. I let him know that Caraiman was the specific hostel to which the 'Rector of Bucharest University had recommended to me for the weekend's walking' – a pure fabrication. I drew my university ID card out of my wallet and pointed to my name, photograph, the university seal and the official signature of the Rector.

As I'd fully intended I'd successfully posed a problem for this young man. Now he was in a quandary. The others were around but kept their distance and as if to share his burden, he invited them to inspect my ID. They all examined it with enormous curiosity but said little. It was clear that they were quite unfamiliar with foreigners and highly impressed by one who had an ID attesting he was a visiting professor at

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the University. To the warden's relief, an older distinguished-looking gentleman accompanied by his wife, supported my case. He insisted that the warden allow me to stay.

Didn't I have a bona fide Bucharest University ID? Wasn't it signed by the Rector himself? Hadn't I explained that I'd been directed to this specific hostel? The distinguished gentleman's arguments persuaded the warden and he grudgingly agreed I could stay. With help, I'd won my first battle. There would be many more to fight in the following two years.

The warden had me sign the register, gave me a number and pointed to a dormitory. When I found my bed number, I sat down exhausted from both the climb and the contest and closed my eyes. When I opened them, I saw one of the women hikers strip off her clothes and make for the showers wrapped in a towel. Alarmed that I'd entered the women's dormitory by mistake, I rushed to find the warden to admit and correct my error. He looked at me puzzled, then amused. Didn't I know that hostel dormitories were mixed? Did I have a problem with that? I was taken aback – all dormitories in Scotland were strictly segregated – but I assured him I had nothing against sharing quarters with members of the opposite sex. And from that day on, I enjoyed mixed dormitories and the delights that they afforded.

The hostel fee included a very satisfying dinner made, apparently, by the warden. The other hikers avoided me but the older man and his wife joined me at my table after I'd eaten. Both spoke very good English. In a low matter-of-fact voice, he summarised my situation in Romania as a visitor from the West. This is what he told me.

All Romanian adults are assigned a 'base' by the Communist Party and their personal records are scrupulously maintained in that base. A Romanian law forbids any association with Westerners. If for whatever reason a Romanian citizen has contact with a Westerner he or she must report the circumstances and the conversation in detail to the Communist Party official at their 'base' where it will be recorded in their personal dossier. Every Romanian knows that the less contact they have with the 'base' means fewer records. The less contact a Romanian has with foreigners,

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especially from the West, the simpler their lives will be. Logically, a thick file will generate more attention from the authorities than a thin one and a file that shows no contact with Westerners is safest. My university colleagues, my neighbours, chance encounters with people like my fellow hikers would, for their own security, do their best to ignore me and avoid engaging me in conversation. Romanians, he explained, do their level best to avoid a visit to the Party base where a suspicious record can be used at some future date to deny a post or a promotion or anything that happens to require a security check.

If I planned to continue walking in the Carpathians and making excursions outside of the capital, he continued, I would do well to dress in Romanian-made clothes and use Romanian hiking equipment. If I spoke little, or better still, not at all, I would not draw attention to myself. If I learned to speak Romanian – he assured me that this would not be difficult for someone who had studied Latin – I might be assumed to be one of Romania's many minorities – a Hungarian, a Saxon, a Schwaab, a Bulgar, a Lipovan, a Tartar, a Russian or a member of one of the other Slav groups from Serbia or the Ukraine.

When he had finished his speech, he and his wife politely informed me that there was nothing more to say, that they were sure I would forgive them for not speaking to me again, that they hoped I would enjoy my year as a guest in their country, and that details of our conversation would be reported to their 'base' back in Bucharest first thing on Monday morning. They rose together and shook my hand. Other couples in the dining room watched with undisguised curiosity. I had the impression that they would love to have dared to talk to me but were wisely choosing the simpler path for themselves.

I followed the advice the gentleman had given me, bought new and second hand hiking clothes and equipment, learned Romanian well enough, and made many, many fascinating walking trips into the Carpathians and trips by car to most of the rest of that varied and picturesque country.

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## The English Department

### Madame Ana Cartianu

By the middle of my second week in Bucharest and only days before the teaching semester was due to begin, the Head of Department, Madame Cartianu had still not been in touch with me. I'd purposely arrived in Bucharest three weeks early to give her time to assign me my courses and allow me time for preparation.

I went along to the Facultate on Pitar Moș to find the door locked. When I knocked and then hammered to attract attention, a beadle told me through a window that the building was closed and slammed the window. I called at the Embassy and asked for advice from Tony Mann, the Cultural Attaché. He gave me Madame Cartianu's home address, an apartment close to the centre of the city, and suggested I visit her.

So, the following day I pressed and donned my only suit, took the trolley-bus to the Piața Romana, entered a florist's and asked for a dozen roses.

"Un cadou pentru o domnisoara." Inquired the middle-aged sales-woman with a flirtatious smile. "A present for a young lady?"

"Da." "Yes."

"În acest caz, doriți unsprezece, nu doisprezece!" She instructed me. "In Romania a gentleman presents 11 roses to a lady. Then the gentleman tells the lady that she is the most beautiful bloom that completes the dozen."

Her look suggested I could be in for the surprise of my life if I bought *her* 11 roses. I thanked her for her advice, paid for the roses and she carefully wrapped them.

"Before presenting them to the lady you must tear the wrapping paper thus!" She showed me where and how much I should tear. "The blooms must be exposed!"

I was delighted by her worldly charm and have followed her advice since that day, most often successfully.

I found the street I was seeking and then the old, elegant-but-fading 1920s apartment building with an ornate wrought-iron front door. Madame Cartianu's

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apartment was on the first floor. After entering the dim foyer, I walked up a wide, ill-lit, marble staircase. Once on the landing, I paused to straighten my hair and my tie and to check that my jacket was buttoned. Then I knocked damaging my knuckles on the vast solid door. No response! Once my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I saw a huge iron knocker and used it to resounding effect. Still no response; then muffled sounds. The door was unlocked and cracked open just a couple of inches. In the gloom I can make out the white of what appears to be a woman's eye and half of her cheek.

"Ce vrei?" The eye appraised me. What did I want?

"Numele meu este Ronald Mackay," I recited my prepared lines. "Am venit să omagiile mele Madame Cartianu." I recited my name, that I was the British Exchange Professor come to pay my respects to Madame Ana Cartianu.. The eye was silent. I was afraid the door was going to close on me.

"Cu trandafiri!" With roses! I tore the wrapping paper as I'd been shown and extended my arm to display the blooms. The door opened just wide enough for the roses to be taken from my hand. "Vă rugăm să așteptați, domnule." Wait, sir. The door was closed but not locked. I took that as a good sign and stood in the dark hall for several minutes. The door opened again, wider this time, to show a woman who looked old, frail, worn and drained. I was slightly taken aback by her appearance—she might have been in mourning or recuperating from a serious illness. I felt I'd intruded on some private grief.

"I am Madame Cartianu." Perfect English. A bare attempt at a smile. She gestured me inside. The apartment appeared to be very large and grand but closed doors and heavy-curtains made it as dim as the entry hall outside. She led me into the middle of a formal sitting room lined with bookshelves.

"I am unable spend much time with you." She neither apologised, invited me to sit nor sat down herself.

I covered my bewilderment by begging her pardon for arriving unannounced and assured her that I wanted only to pay my respects to her and to learn what my teaching duties would be so that I would be prepared. In silence, she looked me up

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and down. What she saw brought no light to her day. I was conscious that my suit was old (it was actually second-hand) and my shoes down-at-heel but I'd pressed the suit and polished the shoes. I could have done no more. I looked at the 11 unthanked roses she held in her hand and wished I'd brought the full dozen.

"Where are you from?" Her question puzzled me.

"The U.K."

"The UK?"

"Coupar Angus, a village in Scotland. School in Dundee MA from Aberdeen University."

"You are English?" *What kind of an Englishman comes from Scotland?* I thought to myself.

"I'm Scottish." Madame Cartianu was not impressed.

"I will arrange for you to be briefed on your teaching duties by the Dean. Thank you for the roses." Too late! I hoped the roses would wither in her hand. She led me back to the front door, opening it wide inviting me to leave. She closed the door behind me and turned the key firmly in the lock.

I thought seriously about returning to the florist with the charming smile and asking her where her advice had gone wrong. But instead I walked home feeling deflated and disappointed for the first time since arriving.

## **Ion Preda**

The following morning the telephone rang in my apartment.

"Mr Mackay, my name is Professor Ion Preda. I am Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Will you do me the honour of having lunch with me tomorrow?" I warmed to the quality of his voice and his impeccable upper-class English accent immediately. I assured him I'd be delighted.

The following day at the appointed time I turned up at the dining room of the Lido Hotel. I already knew the building from my explorations. It stood inconspicuous but with a faded elegance on the main Magheru Boulevard.

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Ion Preda turned out to be a most delightful host. He had the same, reserved, courteous air as the gentleman who had intervened on my behalf at the cabin on Caraiman. He gave the impression of education and breeding, was good-looking and probably in his early 50s. He was formally-dressed in good but well-worn flannels, sports-jacket and tie, colours matching. Smiling, he led me into a long, elegant dining room with white table cloths, linen napkins and white china set between the setting of polished silverware. We were among the first diners to be seated and the respectful, dark-suited *maitre d'hôtel* showed us to a table in a panelled alcove. Ion Preda had banished the disappointment of the previous day. I'd been in Bucharest for three weeks and this was my first official contact with the University where I would teach.

Ion—he asked me immediately to call him by his Christian name—conveyed Madame Cartianu's compliments and, without any explanation, her sincere regrets for not briefing me herself. He hoped that I wouldn't mind if he acted in her place. I did not.

The waiter brought the menus. They were in Romanian of course and I was still unfamiliar with the food and eating habits. I told Ion that I would have exactly what he was having.

The waiter brought each of us a steaming dish of *ciorbă*—a Romanian soup as delicious as any I grew up with in Scotland. On the expanse of white tablecloth between us he placed a small plate containing five or six long thin green pods each with about an inch of stalk attached to the thicker end. We began our meal and as he was talking about the University, Ion picked up one the green pods by the stalk, bit and chewed. I confidently did the same but inadvertently took a far bigger bite. For a moment I could taste no flavour at all and then, all of a sudden, my mouth and nasal passages were under attack. I stopped chewing, my eyes teared up, a wave of heat hit me and my cheeks, temples and scalp poured with sweat. I lost track of what Ion was saying and focussed on not swallowing and drawing tiny, shallow breaths. Ion looked at me and suddenly his smiling face showed concern.

"My dear man! I am so sorry! I should have warned you! You have probably never before eaten *ardei iute*—hot green chilli peppers!"

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All I could do was shake my erupting head. I had never even *heard* of hot peppers before let alone seen or eaten one. Ion summoned the waiter and I was escorted to the Men's Cloakroom. I rinsed my mouth and face in cold water. It reduced my extreme suffering only fractionally.

Eventually I went back to the table and assured Ion that I was just fine but I found it difficult to breathe and so let him speak for the rest of the meal.

"How would you feel about teaching semantics?"

Semantics? I thought, semantics—the study of how words and phrases carry intended meaning and so allow speakers and listeners as well as writers and readers to understand one another? I had no objection but I was puzzled. I reminded him that I held the post of Exchange Professor in Phonetics.

"Of course, of course," he agreed. "Nevertheless Madame Cartianu has decided that before she retires she would like to teach the phonetics course herself. She is sure that you will have no objections to her pulling rank on you!" Still half asphyxiated, I could only confirm I had no objections. And so my teaching duties were in the field of semantics.

Only later did I discover that Madame Cartianu had been horrified when she had heard my Scottish accent and had decided right there and then that she could not compromise the standards of her department by allowing me to prejudice her students' spoken English. Her extreme reaction may seem peculiar even incomprehensible to most native speakers of English but it was a decision based on well-founded historical and sociological principles.

Virtually any British man or woman is able to identify what region of the British Isles a speaker comes from by their accent—how they pronounce their consonants and vowels—and by their intonation. Accents vary in the British Isles, as they do in most countries, from region to region. The English, the Scots, the Irish and the Welsh sound different. A skilled listener may identify even the city from which a speaker comes based on accent alone.

When the phonetician Daniel Jones decided to describe in precise detail the way that English is pronounced, he first had to decide what *accent* he was going to

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select for his study. An obvious choice would be the *'best'* accent. In most countries the *'best'* or most prestigious accent is that spoken in the capital city – the French spoken in Paris not in Marseilles, the Spanish spoken in Madrid not in Seville. However the accent of London does not carry the greatest prestige in Britain. The prestige accent of Britain is, oddly enough, the one and only accent that does *not* signal the speaker's region of origin but how they were schooled.

Those who attend private schools (confusingly called *public schools*) in Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales learn to speak with the same, non-regional accent called Received Pronunciation. 'BBC English', the 'Queen's English' and 'Oxford English' are more popular but less technical terms for people who *'talk with a plum in their mouth'*. And so Daniel Jones chose Received Pronunciation, the prestige, non-regional British English accent to devote his attention to, and as a result this accent has become the target accent for foreigners learning English.

At the time, I was unaware of the reasons why I was being switched from phonetics to semantics. As far as I was concerned, neither my professional identity nor my purpose for having accepted the post was bound up with any specific course and so to me, Madame Cartianu's decision was of no great consequence. I simply began to plan a different course for the students I hadn't yet met and I doubted if they cared.

## Colleagues

Ion Preda invited me to come to the English Department to meet my new colleagues and learn the layout of the building where I would teach.

Ion greeted me at the now open front door. He opened the last door at the end of a dark hall and ushered me into a high-ceilinged room well-lit by casement windows and lined with empty glass book cases. A dozen or so men and women, were sitting at tables or standing talking in pairs. As we walked in, conversation ceased, all rose, and Ion introduced me to each in turn.

The first was a dark, wily-looking man in his early 40s with sharp predatory eyes, "Chițoran!" He gave me his surname name, his hand, and a penetrating stare,

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nothing else. Later I was to learn that in addition to his being a teacher and a senior administrator, he managed the Communist Party 'base' that served the Faculty.

Then two kindly senior professors, Professor Levițchi and Professor Duțescu, both Shakespeare scholars. I would rarely see one except in the company of the other. The fourth, in his early 60s, widened his fixed smile, inclined his head, "Professor Ștefanescu-Draganești."

'What a beautiful name,' I thought, *Ștefanescu-Draganești!*

'We are neighbours!' He offered to introduce me to travel on the public transport system.

I smiled to all, "In the three weeks since I arrived, I've used the trolley-buses and trams as well as 'shanks-pony' to explore much of your beautiful city."

The idiom drew laughter from the group and broke the formality a little. I was to find that there wasn't an idiom in the English language that my colleagues weren't familiar with. The fact that the implication in my first phrase – "*In the three weeks since I arrived,*" – registered not at all with even a single of them made me realise that initiating contact with me was beyond the privileges that they were permitted, or dared, to enjoy. I immediately felt ashamed I'd made the insinuation.

A younger, slighter man shook my hand and greeted me as if I were a long-lost friend, "I am so awfully pleased to make your acquaintance, old boy!"

I wondered if he were trying to maintain the lightened tone of the event by offering a perfect parody of Bertie Wooster, P.G. Wodehouse's fictional but archetypical English gentleman. However, I discovered that was Adrian Nicolescu's normal accent and upper-class, public-school natural manner. Whenever we met, he would greet me with a cheery smile, an extended hand and, "So pleased to see you again my dear boy. It's been absolutely ages!" All he lacked was the monocle! Much later I was to learn that he came from a well-to-do family and that, as a young man before the Second World War, had been educated by an English governess, herself a member of the minor British aristocracy.

Next to introduce himself was, "Andrei Bantaș, lexicographer!" He appeared shy but added, "I've compiled and published a Romanian-English and an English-

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Romanian dictionary, Professor Mackay. I will see that you receive copies." I thanked him.

Finally, a number of retiring, women professors, just a little older than I, introduced themselves. I saw few of them again perhaps because of our different teaching schedules.

My colleagues appeared alert, intelligent and seemed to project an air of heightened vigilance. Their English was perfect – indeed so perfect that I wondered if English weren't the mother tongue of most. I was to find out that only one or two of them had ever been outside Romania! They showed great respect, even warmth for Professor Preda while with Professor Chițoran they appeared deferential but uneasy.

None tried to engage me in small talk. None asked me any questions about my life, studies or my trip from Scotland to Romania. None asked me when I'd arrived or what I thought of Bucharest. None – other than Professor Ștefanescu-Draganești offered me any personal assistance to settle in. I realised that I was witnessing the reality behind the warnings given to me by the Foreign Office and later by the Cultural Attaché beginning to take shape.

In the days, months and years to come, I was to find that whenever I entered the common room, all conversation stopped. Those present would greet me and I would return their greetings but further conversation was not encouraged and as if to forestall even that possibility on my part, my colleagues would slip away with muttered apologies. Within a few weeks I would come to appreciate that my presence so inhibited my colleagues that would use the common-room as infrequently as possible.

In passing, on our way to the teaching classrooms on the floors above, Ion pointed out the Communist Party 'base'. I would have no reason to visit the 'base', he told me. When I mentioned that the Rector's office had told me I would collect my salary there, he said he would arrange things so I could collect my salary at the faculty common room.

Some of the classrooms were larger than others. The one I would teach in was on the first floor and almost identical to those in Aberdeen University – its furniture

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was limited to a long table flanked by a score of wooden chairs, the professor's at the head. At the far end opposite the door, were tall bright windows looking on to the street below. A chalk blackboard extended the length of one wall. Ion told me that classes would begin the following Tuesday. He shook my hand. I was free to go.

My duties, I thought, were extremely light – only 8 hours of teaching a week, four sessions each lasting two hours, Monday to Thursday. That gave me a nice long three-day weekend. I couldn't have asked for more! Then again, I reflected, the British Council could hardly ask for much for the meagre £30 they were depositing each month into my British bank account. I felt greater appreciation to the Romanian authorities who provided my rent-free apartment and my monthly salary in local currency, the Romanian Lei. But there again, Lei could be neither taken out of the country nor converted into hard currency and so all of my salary would return to the Romanian Government one way or another.



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## Students

### Classes begin

My students, all in the first year of their studies to gain a degree in English language and literature, turned out to be an absolute delight. They were extremely bright, enthusiastic, highly-motivated, courteous, hard-working and attentive to everything I had to offer from my modest repertoire of skills and knowledge. Their curiosity, industriousness and attention to detail exceeded that of the average British student I'd known during my 4 years at King's College Aberdeen. I appreciated them greatly for all their qualities and they seemed to like me even if my principal strength was my novelty as the first person most of them had ever met from the West.

A bell announced the 15-minute break within each two-hour class. All other classes took their break at the same time and so the corridors and staircase were always crowded with animated students. They would look at me with curiosity but none, not even those in my own class would approach me. If I went down to the common-room my presence embarrassed my colleagues so the best solution was to remain in my classroom since my students had no inhibitions about talking to me there.

My students – all around the age of 18 or 19, were mainly young women but included a few men. During the break they shed their serious competitiveness and single-minded focus on the subject, showed curiosity about student life in the UK and to my initial embarrassment, gossiped about the other professors and especially delighted in telling the most explicit off-colour jokes. They appeared far more worldly than the average young person I was familiar with in Scotland. Nothing, absolutely nothing at all, seemed to embarrass them and they took a particular delight if they succeeded in embarrassing me. That was not hard to do given the relatively innocent social customs of the youth I'd experienced growing up in Scotland in the 40s, 50s. Having been a student for the previous few years immersed in studies during term-time and physical work during the vacations to pay for my studies, I'd had neither the

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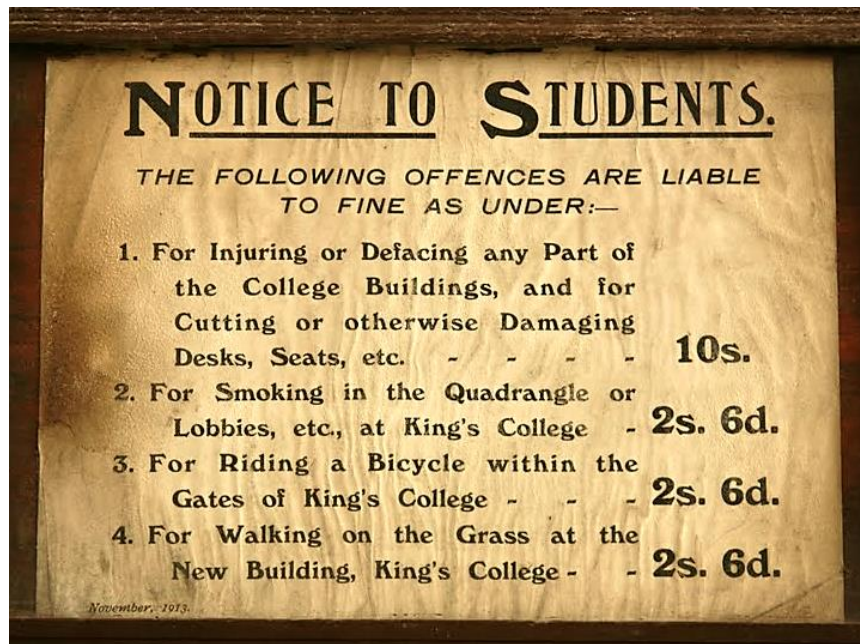
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time nor the money for much of a social life and none for frivolity. The joyous, no-holds-barred titillating conversations and animated joke-telling often made me feel that I was the one who had lived behind some sort of protective curtain and not them. They never talked about politics, East or West and neither did I.

These two-hour classes with my stimulating, entertaining and thoroughly admirable students, almost the only regular contact I had with Romanians during my early months, were the highlight of my week.

I say 'almost' because there was Karen. Karen was not a student. Karen had sought me out in the busy corridor during the very first week of teaching shortly before I decided it was better to spend the 15-minute break between classes in the company of my own students rather than in enforced segregation.



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**Ronald Mackay**

**A Scotsman Abroad:**



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## Who's Who?

### Karen

"Ronald George Mackay?" The confident grey eyes were looking directly into mine. They belonged to a very attractive, very business-like young woman. The way she was dressed and her take-control manner told me she was neither professor nor student. Her natural charms were enhanced by a well-fitting, tailored skirt and matching jacket over a blouse.

Despite having only a few week's experience in the country, I'd become used to the inexplicable feeling that in the initial microsecond of a first meeting, the Romanian had somehow already taken charge, analyzed and classified me, was able to unerringly predict my every reaction and that he or she would remain in control until they decided to end the conversation at *their* choosing and to *their* advantage. I had puzzled over this—it was either a skill they grew up with or a developmental deficiency of my own and one way or another I was determined to learn how to cope with it. Karen, bold and grey-eyed, projected this self-assurance.

"Professor Mackay, I am Karen," she gave me her full name. "I am a graduate of Bucharest University. I have here a dictionary that belongs to Professor Martin Murrell. Would you be so kind as to return it to him when you go back to England?" It was clear that she expected my full cooperation.

Students watching, my own included, were barely able to disguise their curiosity in this elegantly-dressed bold woman who was monopolising the Visiting British Professor during the break. The bell rang and glancing back they slowly made their way to their classrooms. My own students claimed the right to be unashamedly curious and watched us openly from the doorway.

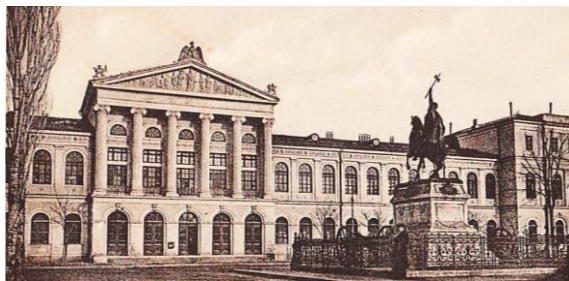
Perhaps, I thought, this was a perfect opportunity for me to react unpredictably, wrench control of the situation from Karen's hands, and see what might happen.

"I'm sorry Miss, right now I'm teaching a class. Please meet me at the gate of

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the *Casa Universitarilor* – the faculty dining room in an hour's time."

A slight movement in her eyes indicated that my answer had taken her by surprise. She'd expected me to devote my immediate attention to her. I walked to my seminar room feeling rather pleased. My students couldn't contain themselves "Who is that?" "Is she your girl-friend?" "Does she love you?" "How long have you known her?" "Do you love her?" "Did you know her before you came here?" "Is she the reason you came to teach at Bucharest University?" "Are you lovers?"

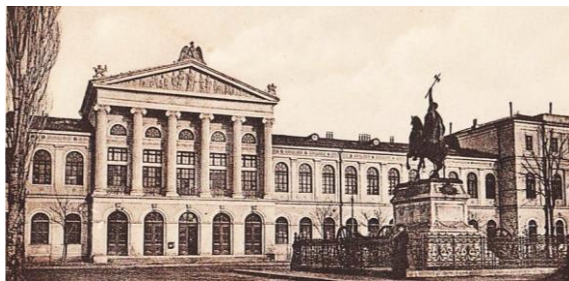
I was embarrassed by their questions but flattered that my students could actually imagine that I was capable of attracting such a woman let alone won her as a lover. My name had never figured among the few on whom Cupid smiled. At University in Aberdeen, I'd had neither the time nor the money to socialize and women rarely if ever made the first move to get to know me. On the rare occasions I summoned up the courage, I was rebuffed – gently or otherwise. I'd become used to it and it didn't particularly bother me. The Scotland I'd grown up in was straight-laced and strict. Boy-friend/girl-friend relationships were chaste at least until an engagement was contracted and more often than not even after. "Lovers" lived in Hollywood.

I couldn't get through the second half of my class fast enough to go and meet Karen. It wasn't just that she was attractive or the first woman to approach me directly in Bucharest – indeed anywhere. I had two other reasons. I couldn't imagine two people less likely to have shared a common interest in English dictionaries than Martin Murrell and Karen. I had met Martin with his wife briefly in London and he struck me as a man who seldom left his desk – although he must have for he had two children – and he'd certainly not risk losing a dictionary or anything else. The more important reason was that Karen had addressed me by a name that was not mine. Although born 'Ronald George', I'd abandoned the 'George' years before in favour of my adopted name 'Mackay'. I'd made the change legally by deed-poll. At no time had I ever used 'Ronald George Mackay'. My passport and British Council records were in the name of Ronald Mackay as was my Romanian Visa. It took painstaking research and then a serious blunder to concoct 'Ronald George Mackay'.

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I am not normally a fast thinker. I react and then, invariably hours later, think of what I *might or should* have said or done. Unaccountably, however, faced with Karen, my thinking processes had gone into over-drive. I'd shown no surprise at her error and I'd made sure that we would meet again. I felt that Romania was encouraging me to grow.

Karen was waiting at the wrought iron gate to the Faculty Dining Room only slightly irked. She was adamant about not entering the *Casa Universitarilor* and suggested a nearby park. She carried nothing but a purse. Once we reached the park she gave me the park's history and the event it commemorated. She spoke fluently and easily. She told me that she had graduated two years earlier from the University's Department of Russian Studies; she knew Romanian, German, Russian and English. She loved Russian history. She knew Bucharest intimately.

"If you are willing, I can help you become familiar with the city." My heart leapt. No Romanian I had met to date had been so forthcoming.

I reminded her that she'd mentioned something about a dictionary. "Oh yes, the dictionary!" She had, unfortunately, forgotten to bring it but if I cared to meet the following week, she would bring it. She smiled, "Would I agree?"

I agreed for lots of reasons none of which were very clear to me. Satisfied, Karen walked off with the gait and all the other attributes of a top model fully conscious that I was watching.

The following week we duly met in Cișmigiu Gardens. My original assessment of Karen's charms was confirmed. She was fractionally shorter than my 5'7", slim and well-groomed with a fine figure, an intelligent face and a pleasant voice and maintained her business-like manner. However, once more, she had forgotten the dictionary.

We began to meet every week and the matter of the dictionary never arose again; nor did I ever ask her about the error with my name. We both seemed to be getting something out of our excursions and it seemed sensible not to provoke.

Karen was a delightful companion. She spoke minimally about herself. She had graduated in the top 5 of her class with a degree in Russian history and now held a

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government post in 'cultural affairs'. She was a very urban person and liked the city's historical monuments, art gallery and small, tidy parks. She scorned the Museul Satului—a village in a rural setting made up of cottages and artefacts from different regions of the country that I loved. She was, she explained, a member of the intelligentsia and above unsophisticated things she considered to be of interest only to the proletariat. I was learning that there were definite class differences in Communist Romania.

I considered that for me, this was an ideal arrangement. She had approached me. She was comfortable with the arrangement. Our association clearly was not one that she felt in any way compromised by. I had a lovely and intelligent companion. Our meetings were an oasis in my otherwise fairly solitary life. What did I care if she reported our conversations to her 'base'? They were innocuous and besides, I had nothing to hide.

So we continued to meet week after week and spend Wednesday afternoons exploring Bucharest. Although I told her about my hikes into the Bucegi, I was happy that she never suggested accompanying me. While it would have been pleasant to have a female companion—most walkers seemed to travel in the mountains as couples and shared beds in the hostels—Karen was definitely an urban woman and did not strike me as the kind who enjoyed roughing it. I'd become used to planning my own timetable and itinerary and dividing my life in Bucharest into water-tight compartments. Becoming further involved with Karen would only complicate a life that I felt I was managing just about well-enough to keep my head above water.

The hardwoods in Bucharest's boulevards and parks were now shedding their leaves and sun was pale. She never mentioned her personal situation nor introduced me to a single friend. Occasionally she would pass a known face on the street. They would exchange "Buna ziua" but neither would stop. We were together and alone on our site-seeing excursions. She talked about history, the buildings and the pictures in the galleries that we visited, never about herself.

We took to having dinner together in a place of her choosing. I was not keen on eating in restaurants by myself and so it was a pleasure to spend the evening over a

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meal with a pretty, enigmatic woman in pleasant surroundings in a secretive and sometimes mysterious city, tucked two days journey behind the Iron Curtain.

Her preferred restaurant was Capșa's and I loved it too. It was more grand, more elegant and more beautiful than any other restaurant I had ever visited in my life and appeared to me to represent the peak of sophistication. From the moment I first entered Capșa's, my imagination transported me back to the glorious days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A liveried footman met guests at the entrance and delivered them to the door of the dining room where the *maître d'hôtel*, in well-worn evening dress, menus in hand, inclined a respectful welcome. The dining room was grand, the ceilings gilded, the tall windows curtained in dark red velvet and the lights created intimate spaces on the silver cutlery set on smooth, white table cloths. The fact that everything was threadbare and slightly fatigued added to the thrill I felt.

Capșa's was usually very busy. Most of the diners were much older than Karen and I—at least the men were—and they would stare shamelessly at Karen and then, I thought, somewhat contemptuously at me. Karen's perfect grooming matched the elegant but simple standards of the few women present. My flannels and jacket, or on occasion my suit, failed to meet the tailored standards of the men. But I was unconcerned. Capșa's was, Karen told me, the restaurant of choice of senior functionaries in the Romanian Communist Party, visiting delegations from other Warsaw Pact countries—and 'East German spies'. For some reason Romanians liked to believe that their country was the target of East German intelligence. For all I knew, it was.

On the whole, I found Romanian women unlike any I had previously met. They could be very flirtatious. Students in other classes, even occasionally students in my own class would glance at me in the most provocative manner, look away and then glance back to see what impression they had left. I was pleased and flattered but never responded, partly out of inexperience and lack of expertise and partly because I felt it inappropriate to flirt with my students.

At first, Karen was very formal and business-like but as the weeks passed she began to flirt a little. She would take my hand in the park and raise her face for a

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simple kiss. Given the circumstances and taking all things into consideration, I found this uncomplicated state of affairs quite satisfactory.

By mid-December 1967 I was feeling quite content with my life in Bucharest. I lived it in a series of separate compartments that never over-lapped. In the city from Monday to Thursday I met my students in my seminar room and we enjoyed each other's company and furthered their already advanced knowledge of the English language. I ate most of my meals in my apartment and walked to and from the university enjoying the bustle and my shopping from the peasant stalls in the Piața Unirii. Occasionally I would make side-trips into back streets and Orthodox churches—places Karen avoided. There were occasional dinner invitations from Embassy acquaintances; my Wednesday afternoons with Karen. Weekends I took the train to the Prahova Valley and loved the forest and the mountains. I was quite content. I was pleased with the way things had evolved and were going.

Content I may have been but Karen increasingly less so. Initially, she had shown no interest in my apartment; now she wanted to 'see' it. I successfully ignored her hints. One afternoon we were caught in a shower of rain. We got wet. She suggested we go to my place to dry off.

It became obvious that this afternoon she intended to put the seal on our relationship. I hesitated, unwilling to complicate my life in ways my imagination could only exaggerate. Once again I made a split-second decision and forestalled Karen before the point of no return.

"Karen?"

"Yes!"

"I think we should stop seeing each other."

She burst into tears.

I was taken aback by her weeping and must admit I felt slightly flattered. In previous years I may have shed a tear or two over a pretty girl but I'd ever been the cause of a single heartache. Now, apparently, I was breaking a beautiful girl's heart. I did my very best to console her. I put my arms around her in as comradely a way as I could.

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“Karen, you are a beautiful, well-educated woman. Lots of young men who would give anything to have you as their girl-friend.”

She pushed me away, stopped crying and looked at me with incredulity.

“You think it’s you? It’s not you!” She said.

I failed to understand. She saw my puzzlement, drew a deep breath and explained to this dolt of a Scotsman, “I’m not crying about you!”

I had heard correctly but my mind was back in low gear.

“Listen! – I’m member of the ‘intelligentsia’. I’ve always been a good student. When I was 16 I was invited to become a member of the Young Communists. That step gave me benefits like holidays and a guaranteed place in the University. I enjoy living well and mean to do better. My next goal is to be invited to join the Communist Party. As a member I will get better accommodation, a better job, a better salary – perhaps the opportunity to travel abroad.”

I listened in fascinated silence to her explanation. She continued.

“I’ve reported on short term visitors and foreign students for the Securitate for several years. This year Securitate entrusted me to report on you for the entire year. If you break off with me, I cannot perform my duty. Failure will count against me. For this reason I am crying.” More tears.

“So the dictionary was just an excuse?”

“It worked, didn’t it?” She blinked.

I nodded. She went on.

“I decided that since you’ve been here for four months and have failed to find yourself a real girl-friend I would be doing you a favour.”

My world crumbled. I’d flattered myself. She saw me as a loser. Here I was, a Westerner in liberal Romania, surrounded by beautiful, flirtatious girls but due to some inexplicable deficiency in my character I’d never managed to get together with a single one of them! Karen’s sympathy for this flawed Scotsman was so great that she thought she’d do him the favour of becoming his lover, as well as his informer, for the rest of the year and accomplish her assignment with the Securitate with flying colours.

I was too astonished and felt my shortcomings too acutely to laugh at the irony

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of the situation: A Scotsman too up-tight and inhibited to embrace what Romania had to offer him; a beautiful secret agent offended by my reluctance to accept her gift and angry that I might stall her career plans!

Perhaps I sat there on the couch staring at the exasperated Karen with my mouth open. Expecting nothing from me, she recaptured the initiative, stopped crying, dried her eyes and became business-like once more.

“I have a proposal that will suit us both.” No romance now in her voice.

“Proposal?” My mind raced. Like the good Romanian she was, her mind was five steps ahead.

“If you stop seeing me now, I will be disgraced. For you too it will be bad. Securitate will assign another informant—or more than one—to report on you. And this time, you’ll never discover who. But, if you continue to see me once every two weeks or so until the end of your contract, I promise you two things.”

“Two things?” I was still struggling to catch up.

“I promise you that I will never to report anything that might compromise you or any of your friends. And when my assignment on you is over, I will never inconvenience you again. We both win!”

Her proposal made sense for both of us. I would have an interesting and lovely companion once every couple of weeks with whom to visit museums, dine with or even appear in public with at concerts or the theatre—no strings attached. Karen would be a step closer to the coveted invitation to join the Communist Party. And so I agreed.

I kept my side of the bargain and continued to meet Karen every couple of weeks until my first-year contract expired. I was able to appear with her in public without compromising her. The first time we went to the Symphony together we bumped into people either she or I knew—including the First Secretary at the British Embassy. The following day he called me. He wanted to meet me urgently.

In the safe room, he began to lecture me. “By appearing with a Romanian woman in public you are putting her at considerable political risk!” I listened to him scold me in polished public school tones as if I were an errant schoolboy in a lower

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form.

When he'd finished, I was silent for a minute or so. Then I told him that Karen was the informant assigned to me by Securitate and that we had 'an understanding' although I didn't go into embarrassing detail about the circumstances that brought the deal about.

The First Secretary was, I believe, slightly put out that a mere contract appointee straight from undergraduate studies in the obscure northern reaches of foggy Scotland was experiencing first-hand the day-to-day lives of native Romanians and able, alone, to function effectively and autonomously in a strictly controlled communist society. He and his colleagues, on the other hand, had all sorts of 'privileged information' supplied by the Foreign Office and the British Security agencies but were not permitted to socialize with Romanians or even leave the city without the written permission of the Romanian Government. Although he was invariably amiable and polite, my freedom relative to his and the casual nonchalance with which I appeared to enjoy my life in the country, did not endear me to him.

As promised, I kept my part of the bargain with Karen. Every couple of weeks we went on an excursion or attended a concert or dined together at my invitation. She kept her word never to enter my life again. During the beginning of my second year in Bucharest, I was walking in the sunshine before classes began, looking at the pretty smiling faces of the girls and women on the Magheru Boulevard. Suddenly my eyes were captured by a familiar face and fine figure. Involuntarily I stopped and smiled, "Karen!" Karen walked straight past me without as much as a hesitation in her stride. She was a real professional and I hoped that she had been invited to join the Party and now had her own apartment. But I'm convinced that that she didn't honour her second promise.

The promise she broke, I believe, was not to make any negative report on me. I believe that Karen took revenge on me for the humiliation she felt at my rejection of what she had offered and I had rejected. In my second year in Bucharest, the Securitate engaged a homosexual man to shadow me, but this fact and how I discovered it I'll keep for later.

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## Book presentation

As part of the bilateral British-Romanian cultural exchange, the British Council sent a package of English language reference books to the English Department at Bucharest University. Tony Mann, the Cultural Attaché, asked me to arrange for their formal presentation to the faculty library.

As undergraduates the magnificent 15<sup>th</sup> century King's College library in Aberdeen had offered us both a warm place to study and a source of essential reference books from its open stacks. Shortly after my arrival in Bucharest, I'd inquired where the departmental library was, my colleagues said simply, "It's in the basement". None offered to accompany me, so I descended the stairs into the ill-lit depths by myself. In the darkness, I could make out a tiny square of light at the far end of the corridor. It came from the upper half of the only open door. On the other side of the open hatch I could see the unlit stacks. I approached the light and tried to get through the lower half of the door. It was locked.

"Buna ziua!" I called.

The head and shoulders of a dragon-faced lady appeared. "What do you want?" A strange question under the circumstances!

"Cărți," I said, "Books on semantics." Since Madame Cartianu had unexpectedly switched the course I was to teach, I badly needed some reference books.

"What's the title?" The Dragon Lady regarded me suspiciously.

"I don't know exactly what I want."

"I can't give you book unless you first give tell me the title!" To the Dragon-Lady, perfect logic.

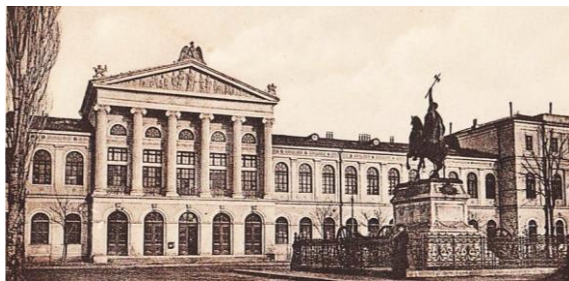
"What do you have that deals with semantics?" My question, to me, was eminently reasonable.

She scowled, disappeared briefly, returned with a drawer full of hand-written filing cards and slammed it down on the tiny counter that divided the upper half from the lower half of the door. A 60-watt bulb cast a feeble glow. The Dragon-Lady positioned herself so that the box of cards was in her shadow.

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“Can I search the stacks?” Dragon-Lady appalled. Hostile silence. I was getting nowhere fast. I’d have to cut to the chase. “Can I speak to the librarian please?”

The Dragon Lady glared at me. “I am the librarian! I protect the books from faculty and students.”

There have been a few memorable occasions on which I’ve suddenly become uncomfortably aware that my world view is in irreconcilably in conflict with that favoured by another. This was one of these occasions. That I could assume absolutely nothing from my previous experience struck me with immense force. At that moment I understood why the British Council selection board had shown so much interest in my previous experience of other cultures and had selected me for this post and not the best academically-qualified candidate. This position demanded some extraordinary survival skills. I was confident that I possessed these and enjoyed using them.

Very politely I thanked the Dragon-Lady for the valuable lesson in how her library functioned and ascended once more into the grateful daylight. When I re-entered the Faculty Room, I felt I was being scrutinised for my reaction to what they must have known I’d just been subjected to, but I purposely adopted an enigmatic expression. I learned very early in Romania never to allow anybody to read my thoughts or emotions. The lesson stood me in good stead.

The upshot was that I suggested to Tony Mann that we present the books not to the library but to the Department of English and house them in the huge, empty, glass-fronted bookcases that lined the walls. Tony agreed and I arranged it. I expected him to make the formal presentation but “No,” he told me, “Your doing the honours will consolidate your position in the Department and add to the regard your colleagues have for you.”

I told him that 95% of my colleagues would greet me with no more than a “Buna ziua!” when I entered and then find an excuse to leave the room. I could also sit at a table in the Faculty Dining Room and not a single colleague would join me. This was, I believed, a function of the pervasive system of fear by which the country was controlled and my donating books would do nothing to change it.

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Nevertheless, I duly arranged with Tony and then Ion to make the presentation. Madame Cartianu regretted she was unable to attend and delegated Professor Chițoran as her representative. From my first meeting with him, I judged Chițoran to be a shrewd individual who appeared to be shunned by faculty as much as I was but didn't care. He was, I learned, the Communist Party representative in the English Department of perhaps for the entire Facultate.

I'd gathered this by listening carefully and reading between the lines. Romanians never chattered idly. They asked few but very piercing questions and seldom made observations on my answers. When they spoke, they appeared to have thought out in advance precisely what they wanted to say. Then they said that, and no more. I had to capture the intended information immediately because it would not be repeated – there was no redundancy. I either got it or I did not. When I got it, their respect for me would grow in tiny increments.

The day of the presentation arrived. When I entered the faculty room everybody except Professor Chițoran was already present creating an air of anticipation. Most greeted me from a safe distance. The 'regulars' exchanged some words.

Professor Chițoran made his entrance, dark, quietly confident, self-contained. In a short speech thanked me and the British Council and left. Then the moment all were waiting for – the opening of the boxes. One by one the books were unpacked, handed round and inspected as if they were frankincense and myrrh. After the inspection of each, two younger women faculty members placed them in the largest cabinet. After the last box had been opened and the last book circulated, the cabinet door was closed with a satisfying click, everybody smiled, the event was over and I left among the first to avoid embarrassing my colleagues further with my presence.

The following morning I had a class at 0800. I arrived my 15 minutes early after my 40-minute walk from home. My routine was to leave my coat in the faculty room and then be in my tutorial room 10 minutes before starting my class. My students had no reservations about speaking to me in that room and I looked forward to their company every teaching day. I enjoyed these informal minutes and was learning a lot

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about the way young Romanians lived their lives from their relatively uninhibited comments.

So I opened the common-room door, hung my coat and scarf on the hallstand and turned to admire the new book collection. To my utter astonishment the bookcase was as empty as the day I'd arrived.

Only much later, I discovered that after I'd left the previous day, the books were shared out among the faculty members. They would lend to and borrow from one another as needed. Leaving scarce and valuable books in an open cupboard was regarded as an act of negligence. Just as I had used my own initiative to subvert the Dragon-Lady's book-control practice, my colleagues had exchanged mine for a practice of their own devising that they knew would work far more effectively.



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## **Fresh milk**

Regretfully, I had come to the conclusion that *lapte* – ‘milk’ in Romania meant ‘sour milk’. As a child in Scotland the milk would occasionally go sour and we learned to enjoy it – here was never any question of discarding food of any kind. Sour milk would curdle in tea but made a refreshing drink and it was ideal for making pancakes. I’d been living comfortably in Bucharest for some time when a colleague, the kindly Professor Ștefanesu Draganesti, asked me what I missed most. I had to think very hard because in most ways in my daily life, I was better off in Romania than I had been in Scotland.

“What I really miss is fresh milk.”

He looked surprised. “You can buy it every day!”

It was my turn to show surprise. “I’ve tried. The milk I buy is invariably sour.”

“Where do you get it?” he asked. I told him – near the Piața Unirii when I walked back from the University to my apartment around midday.

“Buy it at the door of your apartment building. It’s delivered early every morning!” He suggested. “Fresh yogurt as well. That’s where I get mine.”

Milk trucks, he explained, arrived at certain points in every neighbourhood early each morning. At my building, the truck arrived at 0530. And so the next day I got up at 0515 and was outside the front door of my apartment building by 0530 in the snow. I could hardly believe my eyes – a large truck was drawn up on the sidewalk and a mass of men and women crowded behind it in a very loose ‘queue’. I’d learned that Romanians didn’t really line up or ‘queue’ – they preferred a shoving match to be the next to be served. I’d seen this at the trolley-bus and the tram-car stops. People of all ages milled about till the vehicle they wanted arrived and when the gates hissed open they literally fought with each other to board. I had been given hefty blows by young and old of both genders when assuming that it was my ‘turn’ to board but others disagreed. Fortunately, the milk vendor – a woman who might have been a champion wrestler in another life – demanded and successfully imposed a little more discipline on the people behind her truck.

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“Take the exact change with you,” Professor Ștefanesu Draganesti warned. Apparently The Wrestler had no patience for making change. I took up a place in the crowd and let the bodies sweep me forward to where the huge bottles of milk and smaller jars of pure white yogurt were being handed out. Meanwhile I was mentally rehearsing my order so that I could quickly call it out: “*Vreau o sticla de lapte si un borcan de iaurt, vă rugăm.*” – “One milk and one yogurt please!” I didn’t want to give The Wrestler any excuse to overlook me or an opportunist to cut in ahead of me.

I was close to the truck when an old woman kicked my shin and almost forced me out of line. An older gentleman who’d been watching my relative passivity grabbed my coat, pulled me back into line and shoved me in front of him. I called up to The Wrestler, “*O sticla de lapte si un borcan de iaurt, vă rugăm!*”

The Wrestler said something very rapidly—something that sounded like “*goalie*”. I wondered if rather than a wrestler she were a football referee and was calling the score! The important thing was that I failed to understand, made the fatal mistake of pausing, and was immediately shoved out of the line.

Puzzled, and annoyed that I stood empty-handed, I rubbed my shin—I was thankful she hadn’t gone for my groin—and watched. The gentleman who had given me his place in line had been served and was gone so I couldn’t ask him. “Am I being refused milk because I’m a Westerner?” I wondered. That was highly unlikely—I’d been subjected to many a curious stare, people had hurriedly walked away from me, but I had never been refused to be served. I watched to see if the successful purchasers perhaps had a coupon as well as their money. But no, they simply yelled their order as I had done, handed over their money and the Wrestler gave them what they asked for. Annoyed by my failure, I watched in greater detail. Each client, I discovered, engaged in two transactions. As they called out their order, they handed matching empty bottles to the Wrestler’s assistant standing on the left side of the truck. He then put the empties into a metal crate.

I was missing the empty bottles! That’s what the Wrestler had shouted at me—“*Sticlele goale!*” “Empties!”

It’s odd that in solving one problem in an unfamiliar culture, you can be

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presented immediately with another. – Now I asked myself, “How can I get empty bottles to exchange for full ones?” I’d given up buying sour milk at Piața Unirii and had got rid of the empties. So I waited in the snow until the entire early-morning crowd had been served and The Wrestler and her assistant were packing up.

“Vă rog, doamna! Pot cumpăra o sticla de lapte goala și un borcan gol de iaurt?” “Madam!” – I thought it best to treat The Wrestler with great politeness – “Can you let me have one empty milk bottle and one empty yogurt jar?”

She made a truly Herculean effort to rearrange her face into a smile. “Un leu si douazeci!” – ‘One lei and 20 cents!’ in exchange for which her assistant handed me the empty bottles. Then I repeated my original order – “One milk and one yogurt please”, handed the empty bottles back to her assistant, the correct money to her, and received full ones in exchange. I was very pleased with myself. Back in my apartment I enjoyed fresh milk for the first time in weeks and the best natural yogurt I have ever tasted.

That morning I told my students about my experience and they thought it was hilarious. I loved them for their interest in the trivia of my daily life. And they loved to hear about the simple errors I was constantly making and never failed to be amused by my tales.

That experience of trial and error, observation and detection, was typical of hundreds of encounters and exchanges I made during my first year in Romania. Assumptions based on my direct experience in Scotland or in any of the other countries I’d lived in until then – France, Spain, Morocco, the Canary Islands, Portugal, the USA – were of little or no use. What I had to do was watch very carefully, pay close attention to the looks and gestures that were exchanged, the words used and the tone in which they were said. Patience and careful observation always paid off.

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## Getting to know you better

Very soon after my arrival I discovered that the few Westerners I met— Embassy staff, the Exchange Professor from the United States — were frustrated by or complained about virtually every aspect of life in Romania. Their complaints were founded on their disappointment that their expectations were rarely fulfilled. This made me all the more determined to question my presuppositions, understand the daily challenges Romanians had to cope with, and master what it took to live an enjoyable life in Romania on their terms. To do otherwise would be to doom myself to perpetual frustration.

Many of the observations I made by watching Romanians very, very closely and listening to them very, very carefully allowed me to draw robust hypotheses about how best to conduct myself without offending anyone, without drawing undue attention to the fact I was a Westerner or causing myself or others any distress.

For example, I quickly observed that in casual encounters, Romanians seldom introduced themselves to me with their full names and never provided any details about their lives— where they worked, where they lived, whether they had family or not, or even how they planned to spend their vacation.

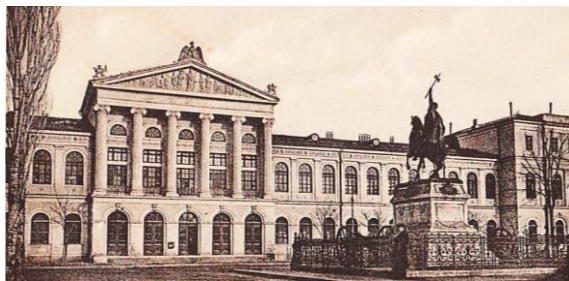
If I bumped into a colleague in the street that colleague's first reaction was to nod and continue without stopping. If my smile and greeting, "*Buna ziua!*" risked their appearing uncivil, they would take just enough time to shake my hand before excusing themselves and hastily going about their business. If that colleague were accompanied by a third party I didn't know, the stranger might act in one of several ways. The most common was simply to disappear. Or they might shake my hand in total silence. Or they might shake my hand and offer their first name only. First names were relatively safe in that I could not identify them to a third party— "*Yesterday I met Ion with Tibi,*" was devoid of useful information.

If they offered their first name it was invariably with curiosity in their eyes. Their brain would be working with lightning speed. As they sized me up they seemed to me to be asking themselves, '*How might this Westerner be of use to me without*

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*putting me at risk?* Then they might ask me a series of questions – Where did I come from? How long had I been in Romania? How long did I plan to stay? Why was I in Bucharest? Where did I work? I would answer these questions without demanding any information at all from them. In my experience, the quickest way to bring an encounter to an end was to ask a Romanian a personal question.

The two questions that they invariably ended up with were, “How much are you paid?” and “How many rooms do you live in?” Answers to these questions might, I figured, allow them to calculate how ‘important’ I was.

Once I had satisfied their curiosity about me and shown my respect for their anonymity, they might very, very occasionally express an interest in getting to know me better. It was usually to make a request of some sort, but not always.

Initially, I found the question “How many rooms do you live in?” puzzling. However I came to learn that accommodation, or the dearth of it, was on almost everybody’s mind in Bucharest. When the Communist Party took over in 1949, there had been war damage and an influx of people from the countryside into the capital. Private property was restricted or eliminated and housing was assigned on the basis of so many square metres per person. A middle-aged married couple who had reared children in a comfortable family home of, say, 150 square metres but who now lived alone, would be assigned a single room and access to a kitchen and bathroom shared by those families who were allocated the other rooms in ‘their’ house.

In my first year in Romania I was in one such house as a guest of the former ‘owners’. They had been forced to move into a single bedroom-cum-study, the other three rooms were occupied by three other couples and all four families shared the kitchen and bathroom. I gathered that this kind of situation was not uncommon. The construction of enormous residential buildings around the periphery of the City was one way the Government was trying to resolve the housing problem.

I often had time on my hands during the week and I developed the habit of getting on a trolley-bus or one of the concertina-buses outside my apartment building and riding it all the way to the terminus. Then I would get off, explore a little and get the next bus all the way back to the city centre. At the end of every bus line I would

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see enormous blocks of apartments newly finished or still in construction. Families would be moved in even before the debris and disturbed soil from the building site had been cleared away and I would see men, women and children picking their way through the muddy snow from their anonymous block to the bus stop, their galoshes filthy.

I undertook these trips for two reasons. One was that it was one way of seeing more of life in Bucharest than merely walking between my apartment and the Facultate. The other reason was more bizarre and doubtless ridiculous.

Not only the Embassy personnel I had contact with believed that their, and my, every movement was monitored, Romanians themselves also believed this. Personally, I was sceptical. It seemed to me that the task of keeping permanent tabs even on a single individual like me was probably beyond not only the resources of the *Securitate* but their agents' capabilities. Nevertheless, just in case the Romanians and the Embassy were right and I was wrong, I set myself a personal mission to guarantee whoever the *Securitate* assigned to my case would be as fully, as uselessly and as frustratingly occupied as possible. I would ensure that they would be burning both ends of the candle to keep up with their reports on me.

One way was to make very long trips on the city's public transport at precisely the time I thought an agent might be winding down his day and wanting to head home to his wife and family. I gleefully looked to see which passenger looked unhappiest or kept glancing despairingly at their watch as I rode a trolley bus from one end of the city to the other.

Another had to do with my apartment, which, I was assured by both Embassy staff and Romanians alike, was bugged. I'd quietly open my front door, go outside and ring the bell. Then I'd welcome one or more imaginary visitors into my sitting room. Once the imagined guests were seated, I'd engage myself in ridiculously long conversations changing my voice to give the impression there were two or more people present. I'd speak in English, Scots, French and Spanish. It amused me to think of all the *Securitate* staff these conversations must have kept busy. I'd no doubt that they had agents who spoke English, French and Spanish but smiled at their confusion

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## Basic shopping

The last of my basic needs were met when I learned how to buy fresh milk. Everything else I needed, except tea, I had discovered ways of securing despite the occasional difficulty. The traditional way followed by most Romanians to buy the necessities of life was to join a milling queue that suggested (a) that the shop was open and (b) that there might be something – anything – worth buying. I had learned, like every good Romanian, to keep a couple of string shopping bags in my pocket in order to take advantage of such serendipitous opportunities. Some background is needed here.

### Shortages

I've been in Bucharest now for two or three months and have learned that shortages are common, without warning anything can run out – bread, shampoo, shoes – for Romanians, these items 'no longer exist'! And then they suddenly make an equally unpredictable return. Most shop windows are entirely devoid of goods. I must admit I find this only a minor inconvenience.

Daily life in Scotland in the 40s and 50s was punctuated by similar shortages and when items were available they were rationed and you needed coupons as well as money to buy only the small quantity that the Government allowed. I usually did the shopping for my mother – it was called "*going for the messages*" in Scotland – and would often walk miles from one butcher's shop to another to find anything at all – 1/4lb of ground meat, bones for soup, tripe, a kidney. I never asked, I took what was on offer, handed my money and ration book to the butcher and was praised for whatever I managed to bring home.

I remember the day the last food item was no longer 'rationed'. It was, I think, 1954; I was 12 or 13, "*going for the messages*" as usual for my mother. I had our family ration book in my hand. When I handed it to Mrs Mitchell she shook her head, beamed at me and handed it back. "Go home, Ronald, and tell your mother rationing's over!" I did. She was overjoyed; having lived with rationing for 15 years.

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But back to Bucharest in 1967.

To find out what, if anything, is on sale in any shop I first make sure the shop is open, then I enter. Inside I join a long queue just to view the few items that the surly shop assistants have on display. I note exactly what I want to buy – a piece of meat, some vegetables, a loaf of bread, whatever, and place my order. In return for placing my order I have a scribbled order form thrust at me. With the scribbled order form I join a second queue and hand it and my money to an equally surly cashier. The cashier stamps my order to show it has been paid and then, with my receipt, I go back to the first surly assistant and wave the receipt in the hope of attracting her attention. Unsmiling she takes my receipt and scrutinizes it from all angles as if she had never, ever, seen such a strange thing before in all her life. She finally deigns to recognize the receipt, wraps the item and thrusts it in the general direction of a third surly assistant who is making a half-hearted effort to distribute the appropriate wrapped order to the corresponding owner in the jostling, reaching crowd.

From start to unpredictable finish, the entire business is unpleasant and time consuming. The other shoppers are inevitably far more experienced and ruthless with their use of elbows and shoulders than me and so inevitably I find myself outside, exhausted, bruised and battered.

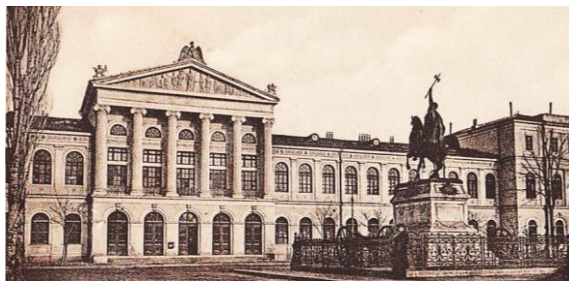
I have even arrived home to open a package that was supposed to contain a half-kilo of stewing meat to discover that I'd been given a couple shin-bones from a cow. Fortunately, they made excellent soup.

Occasionally it was unnecessary to enter the shop. I have seen a truck arrive at a store laden with shoe boxes. Before the driver and his assistant were able to unload, such a large crowd flocked around that the shop assistants had to come outside and sell the shoes directly off the truck. Showing an unaccustomed initiative, they simplified the system. You simply handed your money to one assistant and another handed you a box – any box – with two matching shoes in it. Then, victorious, like those served before you, you withdrew to a safe distance and opened your box. Few received the size of shoe they needed and so you held up your pair of shoes and called out the size you'd been given and the size you wanted. When you found a match you

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made a direct swap. Most people seemed to end up satisfied. It was simpler and more exciting than fighting in three separate queues only to end up with something you didn't want anyway.

On another occasion, I saw a truck surrounded by a crowd of a hundred struggling shoppers. The shop assistants were selling toilet rolls directly off the tail-gate. Toilet rolls had not *'existed'* for weeks! I'd learned the strategic use of shoulders and elbows by then and successfully made a purchase. I put my packet of two toilet rolls into my string bag and was stopped at least a dozen times on my way home.

"Ce ai acolo, tovarishe? Rulouri de toaletă? Ce magazin?" / "Comrade! What've you got there? Toilet rolls? Where did you buy that treasure?" And the delighted comrade, man or woman, would sprint off in the direction I pointed, anticipating the joy of not employing the local newspaper next morning.

I gave up the traditional kind of shopping as soon as I discovered the peasant market held twice a week in Piața Unirii. For 5 days a week the Piața Unirii was a normal city square with flower gardens, devoid of people. On two days of the week it became a picturesque farmers' market with all the attendant aromas and smells and consequent debris. Sturdy peasants in traditional dress set up stalls brimming with fresh vegetables, brown hens' eggs, blue ducks eggs, gaping fish, skinned rabbits, hares, chickens, ducks and turkeys. There were barrels of pickled cucumbers and fermenting cabbage, rolls of sausage and dry salami, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, turnips.

The peasants all seemed to be cut from the same mould. Women were squat, comfortably built, wore colourful headscarves and layers of dark clothes to keep out the cold. The men were slightly taller, slimmer and wore their karakul căciulă on their heads like tall, rounded tea-cosies. Although most city men also wore the Karakul căciulă, had the crown pushed down so that it sat lower and had a dent in the middle.

The căciulă is a beautiful lambskin hat that may vary in colour from glossy black through elegant salt-and-pepper to a light grey streaked with white. The hair on the lambskin was often whorled, curled and corkscrewed in the most opulent way that reminded you of thick smoke curling from a Havana cigar in lazy elegance.

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My needs were very simple and I was able to buy virtually all of the food items I needed from the stalls in the peasant market in Piața Unirii.



Grădina Icoanei

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## **The Commissary**

From time to time, members of the British Embassy invited me to make up the corner of a dinner table. Their way of life was constrained by their diplomatic status. Their status limited their movements and with whom they could come into contact. As a result they were always very interested in my daily life. What for me was perfectly normal—my walks from home to the University, my trips on public transport, my shopping experiences, my diet, the weekends I spent walking in the Carpathians—fascinated them. They lived in grand apartments, officially-sanctioned and rented through the Government channels. They had live-in or daily maids and cooks who were understood to be informants for the Securitate.

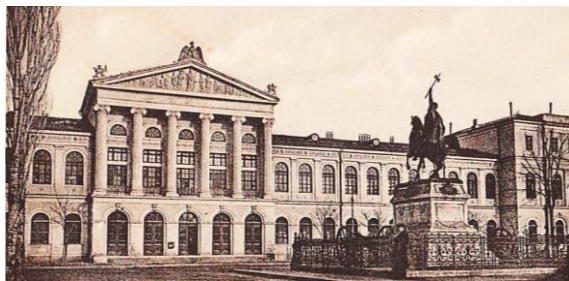
The meals I enjoyed at these dinners in the homes of British diplomats were very different from my very nutritious but basic soups and stews and salads. I learned that the Western Embassies were supplied with food and other items by a regular delivery by small truck from Vienna run by a company called Osterman and Peterson. The British Embassy ran a 'commissary'—a store in the basement of the British Embassy selling the goods delivered by Osterman and Peterson. The commissary was available only to British employees of the British Embassy. I was excluded. Since I was able to satisfy all my needs for food locally and was neither a smoker nor a drinker I had no need of the commissary and thought nothing about it.

However, on one of my visits to the Cultural Attaché in the Embassy, I was told that the Chair of the commissary committee wanted to speak to me. The commissary was run by the wives of the British diplomats and I had met the chair at more than one dinner or party. With great dignity she informed me that the committee had decided to allow me to use the commissary and that as from this Saturday morning I would be admitted. This came as a complete surprise to me. In truth I neither needed nor wanted access to the store. However, I appreciated from the formal way in which the invitation was made, that I was being extended an honour and should express appropriate gratitude. That I would be walking in the Carpathians could not be an excuse for not turning up to accept the distinction that the committee was about to

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bestow upon me.

So, that Saturday morning I duly turned up at the Embassy compound and the British guard directed me to the back door and down the steps into the basement. Several of the wives who were on duty that weekend greeted me as if to Cinderella's ball. Before being allowed into the commissary I was formally warned that I could buy only for my own use; reselling was forbidden. The bad news was that I had to pay in Sterling – a currency I was in desperate shortage of.

The commissary was similar to a convenience store in Scotland. Shelves around the walls were stacked with dry goods. There were large packs of cigarettes and bottles of wine and spirits including whisky.

While the wives on duty chatted and some others arrived to make their weekly purchases, I browsed the shelves. After about 20 minutes, I approached the exit where two wives were stationed as 'cashiers'. I had a packet of teabags in my hand.

"You don't have a basket?" They offered me one. "It's easier than bringing what you want item by item."

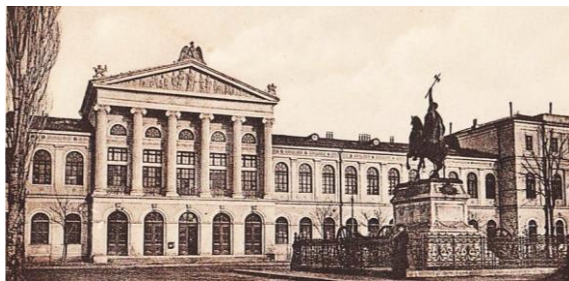
"There's nothing more I need..." I started brightly but was stopped short by the expressions on their faces – horror, astonishment, total disbelief. There was also the hint of another emotion that, to my great fortune, I read correctly. They were deeply hurt that I was rejecting what they obviously considered to be the greatest gift they could bestow. I immediately felt guilty that I was rejecting, in the most callous way, one of the perks that gave satisfaction to their constrained lives, a reminder of 'home', a compensation for the sacrifices they were making in an alien capital behind the Iron Curtain for the well-being of Britain's foreign relations.

In that moment I saw far more clearly than I wanted to, the truth of their lives. They were kind and intelligent women, faithfully following and supporting their husbands, leaving their homes, their families and their friends far behind to live in social isolation for at least two years in an alien country where they were not welcome, whose language they didn't speak, whose people they had no access to and whose countryside they were not permitted to explore. I felt truly sorry not only for my own insensitivity but also sadness for the limitations placed on their lives in Eastern

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Europe; limitations so extreme that weekly access to items found in any corner shop in any small British town took on critical proportions.

I gave them my most charming smile. "Just joking, ladies!" And to their profound relief I went back and purchased another packet of tea, some odds and ends, a bottle of whisky and 200 cigarettes. To their delight, I told them that I would love to have bought much more but, at my salary... They smiled, clucked understood and said they looked forward to seeing me on a regular basis. Relieved that I had not offended, I climbed the stairs to the back garden of the Embassy. As I left, I got a good-natured wink from the British guard and a scowl from the Romanian militiaman. The tea I used for myself. The whisky and cigarettes, I traded. Trading, I persuaded myself, was not reselling.

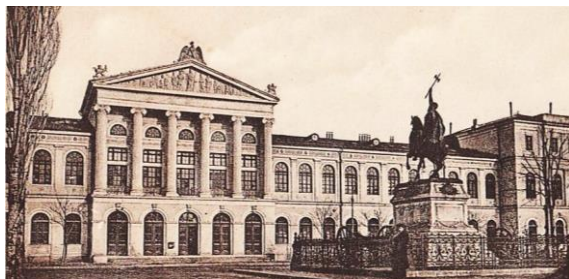
Occasionally at a British diplomat's dinner table I would hear of food items that were, apparently, unavailable locally and as a consequence had to be ordered from and imported by the Osterman and Peterson truck. These included fresh eggs. Initially, when I heard snippets of information like this, I would offer suggestions where the 'unavailable' items could be bought with relative ease. Invariably the diplomats at the table, or their wives, would contradict me. Their maids, they assured me, had looked everywhere but these items were just not to be found locally. I stopped making suggestions guessing that their maids simply found it simpler to have their employers order from Vienna rather than frustrate and exhaust themselves jostling in interminable queues or tramping in the slush and mud of the peasants market in search of eggs.

However, these conversations and observations strengthened my belief in the importance of never taking second-hand assertions at face value. Assertions are a very convenient way of shaping and guiding the beliefs of people who are unwilling or unable to undertake the primary research for themselves. I found that a healthy skepticism was my best survival tool. I came to treat every assertion I heard in Romania – whether it came from Westerners or Romanians – as a mere opinion until additional facts, information or my own experience proved its truth and reliability.

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## **Paving the way for Pearl's visit**

### **Taking stock in preparation**

By the spring of 1968 I felt that the May Day holiday would be good time for my mother, Pearl, to fly out from London where she lived and worked, for a three-week visit. The Consul was going on home leave and offered me the use of her car. I had two weeks without teaching duties and most important of all, I felt comfortably in control of all aspects of my life in Romania.

My courses were going well judging by feedback from the Dean, Ion Preda and the generous reactions of my students. I found my students a great source of pleasure. They were young, enthusiastic and highly competitive. They told me that when they completed their 5 years of undergraduate studies they would be assigned jobs on the basis of their grades. The top positions were in Bucharest with radio and television and one or other of the Ministries. Then came teaching jobs in Bucharest first and then in provincial cities. At the very bottom of the list were school-teaching jobs in the smaller, more distant villages. Virtually all of my students were from Bucharest and wanted to remain in Bucharest. They had no inhibitions about telling me of their ambitions in my tutorial room in small groups – they were seldom, if ever, alone with me. Possibly because they were young and their courage bolstered by the group, they would tell what I considered to be risqué stories about one another's love lives and then laugh uproariously. I trained myself to overcome my embarrassment at the more bawdy tales because if I showed any discomfort they simply laughed all the harder. Their love-lives – at least from the tales they told – exceeded those of any university student I had ever met in Scotland. I wondered if I might just have lived a particularly sheltered life as an undergraduate in Aberdeen – perhaps I'd been blind to what was going on around me – but somehow I didn't think so. Scotland and Romania seemed to be poles apart in matters of passion and affairs of the heart. At 19 and 20 years of age, they talked without embarrassment of their own and one another's '*aventuras*' – '*casual encounters*' – but always in exquisite terms suggesting romantic intrigue. They

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were neither indelicate nor crude. If I ever saw one or two of my students in the street, they would launch me delightfully charming smiles but never stop.

My teaching colleagues had reached a level of comfort with my presence. Professor Ștefanescu-Draganești was the one who spoke most to me. He lived with his wife in a street not far from my apartment and we occasionally found ourselves walking to the university together – or rather he would walk a quarter of the way and then catch the bus and I'd continue alone. If we did board the trolley-bus together, he would ask me not to speak to him at all on the journey. To speak in any language other than Romanian attracted unwanted attention. I had heard Romanians scold speakers of minority languages – Hungarian or Saxon German – for speaking their mother tongue in public. My Romanian simply wasn't good enough not to have drawn curious eyes to me and to whoever I was speaking to and Romanians preferred to attract no attention on public transport.

Another reason he and I had contact was that he had taken to asking me to correct the proofs of a school text book he was translating into English. He would occasionally knock on the door of my apartment with a manuscript in his hand. He would apologize, step into my apartment and tell me that the manuscript had to be corrected and returned to the State publishing house the following day – Could I please help him?

I sometimes wondered if he was checking to see who I might have in my apartment but as he was a very kindly old gentleman whose life had not gone easily after the revolution in 1949, I felt sorry for him and always helped him out. Besides, I learned how the foreign language courses for school children in Romania were developed. The content was written first in Romanian to the specifications dictated by the Communist Party and then translated into all of the other foreign languages with slight modifications, permitted to accommodate cultural differences. For example the English version that I read presented readings from some of Charles Dickens novels presenting an England beset by the inequities of the Industrial Revolution as if they were current. The chapters referring to life in Romania projected happy school children going off to visit their happy grandparents on idyllic communal farms or

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making class visits to monuments of the revolution. When I first saw this blatantly propagandistic material I queried its fitness but Professor Ștefanescu-Draganești became agitated and so I accepted it for what it was – blatant political ideology. *'Isn't most history?'* I pondered.

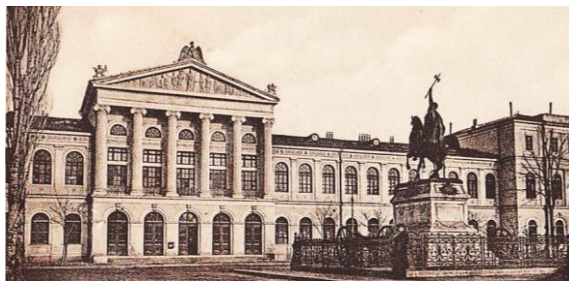
To my surprise, I was frequently invited to make up the corner of a dinner party held by a member of the British Embassy and occasionally by the Cultural Attaché at the American Embassy. I almost never refused invitations from Tony Mann our own Cultural Attaché or XX the British Consul but I often found excuses not to accept many of the others. One reason for my excuses was to maintain a distance from the tightly closed diplomatic community to which, by reason of my appointment, I did not 'belong'. Tony had reminded me during my initial briefing that I had no diplomatic status and had encouraged me to integrate myself to the extent possible into the Romanian community. Another was that I found Romania far too interesting to limit my experience to the restricted orbits around the Western Embassies. Invitations were commonly issued for weekends and I was generally off hiking or travelling and so I was able to send my regrets without causing offence.

When I did accept a dinner invitation I was usually quizzed so enviously about the places I'd been to visit that I felt genuine sadness at my hosts' constrained lives. They had standing and status, beautiful apartments some with cooks and maids, excellent salaries and perquisites, generous home leave, and access to all the food items they were used to back home. What they were denied was exactly what I enjoyed – freedom! Granted, I was the author of my own freedom in that I, on principle had chosen to ignore the travel restrictions imposed upon me by the Rector's Office of the University. But diplomats had to answer to their Ambassador and to 'protocol' – the Protocol Department of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – for their behaviour, I did not. Their time in Romania was a kind of confinement that denied them insight into the country. They had little or no real, direct, first-hand understanding of that beautiful country with its fascinating people from a wide range of rich and varied ethnic backgrounds. It made me sad to see that what many of these diplomatic families really wanted was be back home or perhaps in a part of the world

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which didn't constrain their every movement so brutally.

I enjoyed my regular outings and conversations with Karen. Sometimes I, sometimes Karen—whose resources were considerable, would get tickets for a function—the ballet, the symphony or a very occasional film. We would enjoy an evening out together among very sophisticated and well-educated audiences. Every single official function I ever attended whether in Bucharest or in a provincial city was filled to capacity. Educated Romanians—Karen called them the 'intelligentsia' or the 'intellectual class'—appeared to love to dress as well as their wardrobes permitted and enjoy cultural events of all kinds. Some women wore ancient evening dresses, some men threadbare evening suits. Never did Karen introduce me to anybody she knew at any of these events nor exchange anything more than a "*Buna seara!*" a "*Good evening!*" with anybody who greeted her. They seemed to sense from her bearing, her tone and her curt greeting that any words beyond the formality would be inappropriate. So they would offer a courtly smile, eye me with curiosity, and move on.

I use the word 'courtly' on purpose. The social behaviour of educated Romanians was impeccable. They carried themselves regally, behaved discreetly and conversed intelligently in low, modulated tones. It was not uncommon to see a man greet a woman by raising her hand to his lips and the woman to respond with graceful and pleasurable acceptance of the favour. Although it must have existed in Scotland, in my albeit limited and relatively short life, I had never experienced the effortless dignity of bearing, elegance of dress and cultured, informed conversation that I experienced in Romania. Romanians were almost totally devoid of the crass, philistine, uncouth features of Western culture and I admired them enormously.

I'd come to know the Prahova Valley and the Bucegi Plateau well, from my walking trips. These trips were usually made on my own but occasionally, when his permit came through, the Vice-Consul would join me and together we would cover much more ground than I did alone and explore new routes and wooded valleys. I'd been befriended by an English engineer, Ron Walker, who visited Romania for a couple of weeks every few months. His job was to inspect the excavators and earth-

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movers his company, Hymac, sold to the Romanian Government. He loved the Black Sea coast and we'd drive down there in his car along with his Romanian girl-friend (I was to learn that Ron had friends in cities all across Europe, East and West) to spend long weekends in a tiny Lipovan community called 2 Mai. The Lipovans emigrated from Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and many of them were fishermen. Ron was able to rent us tiny rooms in a compound that appeared to house a large extended family who welcomed him with open arms. Arms opened to welcome Ron Walker all over Europe.

And so I began to plan a schedule as interesting and varied as I could, for Pearl's visit.



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## Land Rover

One bright, sunny, cold day early in 1968, as I was leaving the British Embassy after a meeting with Tony Mann, Bob, one of the British guards beckoned me into his office.

"I've heard you're staying in Romania for another year?" I told Bob I was but that I would spend the greater part of the summer working in the UK to earn and generate some savings.

"Are you thinking about buying a car? Maybe driving back from the UK to Romania?" I told him that I wouldn't have the money to do that. I wondered if he was hinting to me that I was stretching the Embassy's patience by so often borrowing the Consul's car and sometimes that of one of the First Secretaries when they returned to the UK on leave.

"How would you like to buy a good, used Land Rover right here in Bucharest?"

"That sounds great, Bob, but there's no way I could afford it," I told him.

"Not so fast," he cautioned, "A British contractor has finished a job here and doesn't want to take the Land Rover with him. I can get it for you cheap."

"How cheap?" I was sceptical. I'd never owned a car and didn't really need one.

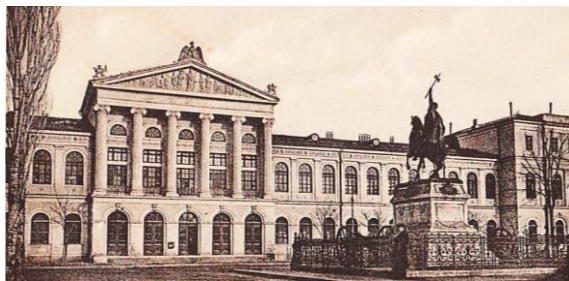
"£150." The price surprised me. "And it's in good running order."

At that price, I was tempted but I had only a little more than that in my UK bank account. The British Government reserved its largesse for career officers in the Foreign Office and their minor-league siblings in the British Council. Even overseas students whose studies in Britain were funded by one or other agencies of the British Government enjoyed generous conditions, but contract employees like me were treated shabbily. My contract within the bilateral cultural exchange agreement between the UK and Romania required I resign my UK resident status and thereby most social rights and benefits, in return for a monthly payment, free from tax, of a miserly £30 into my British bank account. I had a generous salary from the University of Bucharest but that was paid in local currency, the Romanian Lei which could

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neither be converted into hard currency nor taken out of the country.

I waved off Bob's offer but he wasn't to be deterred.

"What if I get it for you for –"

I formed the word 'No!' with my lips but he interrupted my objections.

"Wait! Hold on! What if I get it for you for £100 and find you someone willing to rent it from you from time to time for Pounds Sterling?"

"Paid into my bank account in the UK?"

"Paid however and wherever you want it,"

I paused. Now Bob had got my attention. In fact he'd hooked me so firmly that I failed to ask Bob who might be renting the Land Rover from me and for what purpose.

I duly made arrangements to have the £100 transferred from my bank in Scotland to the UK corporate owner of the Land Rover in the UK. Bob called me when the deal had gone through and I went to the Embassy compound to pick the vehicle up.

I'd got to know and like Bob well; he reminded me of our training sergeant in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gordons – confident and capable, he could make things happen. Immediately outside the permanently-open, wrought iron gate to the British Embassy were posted two khaki-uniformed, armed Romanian Milițieni. Their principal task appeared to be that of discouraging Romanian citizens from entering the compound and reporting on those who did. Bob and one colleague, both Londoners judging from their accents, guarded everything behind the gates and the wrought-iron fence – the compound within which the Embassy stood – once a private house – and an outbuilding – in earlier days the mews, with double-doored carriage-houses below and accommodation above.

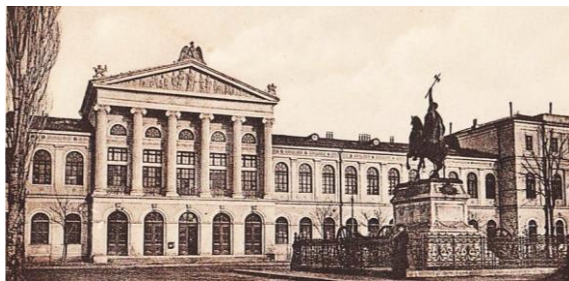
My experience in the Gordons convinced me that both had been, or still were, members of Her Majesty's Armed Forces. Their bearing communicated the self-assured, unhurried confidence of the NCO's from whom my platoon of infantrymen had received weapons training. They missed nothing; they exuded competence.

The Land Rover, parked by the mews, was painted a flat, dull, rust-colour and

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gave the impression of a low-profile agricultural vehicle, entirely unremarkable in every way. Bob handed me the registration papers. They were in my name.

“That’s not my address!” I pointed out. It was ‘*Something Farm*’ in Cornwall, England.

Casually Bob explained to me, “You don’t have a UK address, remember? So as not to deprive you of the sale, they decided to leave the existing address. It’s inconsequential.” He fitted the papers into a thin metal plate and slid the metal plate into flanges under the dashboard so that the plate disappeared. The utilitarian interior of the vehicle was all ‘no frills’ metal and exactly the same non-colour as the exterior. “Leave these there at all times. If you’re stopped, you know the drill, show only your University ID.”

Then he handed me the keys. “I have a spare set here,” he pointed to a row of hooks on his office wall, each with a set of car keys. “Embassy policy!” He winked.

The engine burst into life on the first turn; the vehicle shuddered and rattled and then settled down into a gentle vibration. I’d occasionally been a passenger in Land Rovers on the hill farms and moorland estates where I’d worked during the school holidays and later university vacations. I never failed to grasp with both hands every opportunity to earn some money even if it were just a week’s beating grouse for the ‘*Glorious Twelfth*’; in those needy student days, every penny was ‘*grist tae the mill*’. I knew Land Rovers to be good, solid, reliable vehicles on-road or off-road. Bob gave me a wink and I drove my Land Rover home and parked it close to my apartment building. Private vehicles were few and far between, so mine sat there alone.

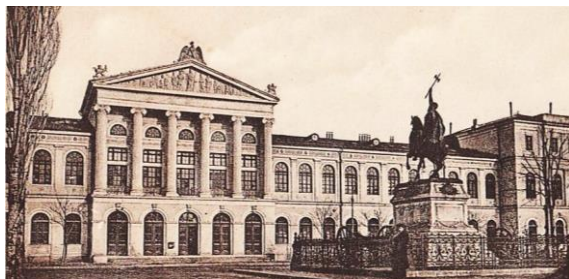
For some reason, my Land Rover refused to start for me again. I had neither tools nor mechanical expertise. It sat in a forlorn spot where I could just get a glimpse of it from my apartment window.

From time to time Bob would call me to say that ‘*certain parties*’ wanted to rent it. Despite my protestations that it wasn’t working, it disappeared for up to 5 and 6 days at a time. After each ‘*hire*’, a small but very welcome sum was paid into my account with the Bank of Scotland. I never met those who rented it. They seemed satisfied because Bob made no mention of its refusing to start. I was mystified.

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The vehicle would reappear in its accustomed place; I would start it, it would run for a few minutes; then stop and refuse to fire again. I had no manual, no tools and little expertise. And so my Land Rover sat not far from my apartment building unless rented by '*certain parties*'.

I took to recording the odometer readings each time it was used and returned. It sometimes covered hundreds of kilometres in just a couple of days as if it had been driven non-stop day and night. In an attempt to find out where it might have been driven, I would take the mileage covered on a given trip, divide by two and draw a circle in pencil on my map of Romania. The arc over the Black Sea I ignored. I poured over the overland portion of the arc which was large and touched on the USSR, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and even the north-west corner of Turkey – assuming, that is, that it had been driven to its destination and back again by much the same route. There was no way to know exactly where it had been, so I gave up speculating and took satisfaction from watching my bank balance grow in small increments instead.

### **Land Rover repaired**

However the fact that invisible renters were apparently able to get such good service out of my Land Rover but for me it refused to run, became unbearable. When he returned to Bucharest in May, I discovered that Ron Walker had brought me a ragged Land Rover manual he'd picked up. So early next morning, I dressed in my oldest clothes and tried to start the vehicle with no success. I spent the entire morning tracing first the ignition system and then the fuel system with the help of the manual. My model was different from that shown in the manual but the similarities were sufficiently close to help me undertake the task.

The ignition system didn't tell me much. The engine turned over but wouldn't fire. The fuel line proved more productive. I discovered that built into the fuel line on my vehicle was a small reservoir with a valve on the line that led from the fuel tank. The valve could be turned on or off. If the valve were turned to the *off* position the fuel in the reservoir would allow the engine to run for a few minutes but then the engine

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would exhaust the fuel supply and inevitably stop. This seemed to be some kind of home-made anti-theft system.

My hands-on experience with diesel engines was limited to a bulldozer I'd briefly driven one summer at Auch, a sheep farm near the Bridge of Orchy where my cousin Derek worked as a shepherd. The owner, a Mr Aiken, was an apathetic farmer with few skills and little interest in sheep. He told me that his parents had bought all 78,000 acres of Auch for him to avoid his having to serve in WWII. He had lived off government subsidies ever since.

Using the bulldozer, he wanted a small side-stream of the Kinglass deepened to reduce pasture-flooding so that he could graze some Keil cattle he'd bought. 'Diversification' he called it! And he hired me cheap to do the job. I'd run out of diesel once and one of the shepherds who had shown me how to run the bulldozer and knew a little about diesel engines, showed me how to bleed the air out of the fuel lines so that diesel could flow again uninterrupted to the injectors.

This idiosyncrasy of diesel engines taught me enough to know that if there was a valve on the fuel line there must also be a manual pump that could be used to clear air out of the line and induce the flow of diesel fuel. I hunted for the pump and found it. The reservoir and the *on/off* valve didn't feature in the manual Ron had brought me so I assumed that these had been added by the contractor to reduce the danger of theft on his work site. The device certainly worked because it successfully prevented me from using the vehicle. I wondered if Bob knew about it. Bob was the kind of soldier who knew everything but didn't always share what he knew.

I turned the valve to open, pumped fuel through the line until it ran continuously and then hooked the line back into the injector and tightened the nut. Once I turned the key in the ignition, the engine bust into life. The entire vehicle vibrated wildly for a few moments and then settled down to a comfortable purr!

I was delighted! Pleased with the Land Rover and most of all, pleased with myself; I'd identified a problem, diagnosed its source and successfully resolved the issue. It gave me a great deal of satisfaction.

Desperate now to take advantage of my success, I closed the hood, jumped into

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the driver's seat and set off up the wide Magheru Boulevard, through the centre of the city and headed towards Herăstrău Park. When I reached the enormous winged statue at Piața Aviatorilor I looked for a fuel station, found one and topped up the tank with diesel. The phantom 'renters' always returned it with plenty of fuel but I'd learned the importance of reducing the danger from moisture condensing into a half-empty tank where it would cause difficulty firing. After topping up, the Land Rover started again without a complaint and I took advantage of the Piața to turn 360° and head back home.

### **A revolution?**

Driving back down Aviatorilor Boulevard I became aware that it was unusually quiet even for Bucharest; neither trolley-buses nor trams were running. As I passed Piața Victoriei and turned back on to Magheru again, I began to see people thronging the pavements on either side of the boulevard. Portable barriers had been set up to hold them in check.

Puzzled, I slowed down to try to figure out what was going on. For me, managing to get my Land Rover up and running was a momentous occasion but these crowds weren't out just to cheer my success and British technology. I peered at the masses, puzzled. Suddenly a group of Milițieni on motorcycles, very smart in navy-blue and white with lots of braid and shiny black leather, appeared on both my left and my right – I was getting an escort! The crowd cheered!

The Milițieni riders drew in front of the Land Rover, slowed down, and forced me to stop. Masses of people of all ages were cheering and waving flags but I had to reserve my attention for the Milițieni.

The officer in charge dismounted and approached me. He and his men were obviously perplexed – about what, I had no idea.

"*Cine sunteți? Ce faceți?*" The officer in charge fired staccato questions at me. "Who are you and what do you think you're doing?" In answer, I cooperated by showing him my Bucharest University I'D' I began to explain, proudly, that I was

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testing out my recalcitrant vehicle after having successfully repaired it all by myself. I gave him and his troop of helmeted riders the modest smile of a mechanical genius.

The officer's face turned purple inside his helmet and he angrily waved me off the Boulevard. His troop had to remove a barrier and hold back crowds people to allow me off onto a side-street.

"Park here! Get out of the vehicle! Get into line!" The officer's commands were reinforced by his troopers willing arms. They all but dragged me out of my vehicle. A small tricolour flag on a stick was thrust into my hands.

"Val steagul!" – "Wave it!" The officer ordered.

I waved it for all I was worth. As its colours fused in front of my eyes, I noticed that it wasn't the Romanian tricolour I was used to – blue, yellow and red – but one I didn't immediately recognize, blue white and red.

*'There's been a revolution!' I thought, 'Ceaușescu's been overthrown. The entire city's celebrating!' I became very excited at the idea and waved the flag with increased enthusiasm just as those now hundreds – thousands – of rejoicing Romanians around me were doing.*

In my mind I was struggling to decide whether I should shout "*Trăiască revoluția!*" – Long live the revolution! Or perhaps "*Trăiască contra-revoluția!*" – Long live the *counter*-revolution! In Marxist rhetoric, revolutions brought about Communism; toppling a Communist regime would demand a *counter*-revolution. I didn't want to get my rhetoric mixed up at such an important moment in Romanian history!

I waved my little flag for all I was worth and followed everybody's eyes – they were looking expectantly up the boulevard in the direction of both Băneasa and Otopeni Airports.

'Of course!' I thought, 'The new president has just flown in and is staging his triumphal procession to the Palatul Parlamentului to assume control of the government!'

And sure enough, a vast fleet of immaculate navy-blue and white motorcycle Milițieni came into view, ceremoniously leading a huge, glossy, black Russian

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limousine complete with triumphal figure in khaki uniform. 'It has to be the new president!' I thought, 'there's been a military coup!' The sea of flags waved with enormous vigour. Voices cheered. The triumphal figure – a very tall, very large man with a huge head calmly, modestly recognised the adulation of the crowd.

I stared more closely at the uniformed figure. There was something familiar about him, his cap – an overly tall round drum with a short horizontal peak. All that prevented the khaki drum from slipping over the face were a pair of enormous ears and a huge nose.

And then it dawned on me; *Charles de Gaulle!* His, the first visit of a Western European leader to Romania was scheduled for this day! It's why my classes at the *Facultate* had been cancelled – so this venerable old man could be welcomed!

I abruptly stopped waving my French tricolour and thrust it at a boy sitting on his father's shoulders.

"*Nu uitați ce aproape sa întâmplat azi!*" – "Don't forget what almost happened today!" I said with a smile. The boy and his father eagerly accepted my little flag; of course the ambiguity of what I said was lost on both. General Charles de Gaulle's daring state visit to Bucharest was almost, *almost*, sabotaged by an *Anglo-Saxon* to boot! Had I succeeded, it might have been the making of me!

The Milițieni had refused to allow me to recover my Land Rover until the following day; there were simply too many people on the streets. As I walked home on back-streets to avoid the crowds, I felt sorry that I had not, after all, witnessed the overthrow of Ceaușescu and his uncompromising domination of the Romanian people!

The following day, I returned to discover my Land Rover guarded by two smart Milițieni. I saluted them, opened the door, climbed in and turned the key. The engine burst into life and I drove to the British Embassy to tell Bob how by dint of persistence and logic I'd overcome the vehicle's ignition problems.

To my disappointment, Bob didn't seem much impressed with my initiative. He was more concerned about the reports he'd had to record into his ledgers when *Securitate* had lodged a complaint about a British vehicle's unauthorised use of the

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route from the airports to the city centre on such an important day.

"I managed to keep the complaint on my desk," Bob told me. "It needn't go any further. 'Sir' would not be happy!" Bob admonished me. 'Sir' was how he and Tom referred to the British Ambassador, Sir John Chadwick.

Bob pushed a copy of the daily newspaper towards me. It had photographs of de Gaulle's triumphal procession down thronged boulevards. It also included a line from de Gaulle's address, "*Chez vous, un tel régime est utile; il fait marcher les gens et fait avancer les choses.*" It would seem that much could be overlooked in the pursuit of commercial relations between the West and the East.

Two weeks later my Land Rover was rented again. This time, it didn't return.

"*Ran into a bit of bother,*" was all Bob would say.

"*My rental fee?*" That concerned me most.

"*You'll be paid. You'll be reimbursed in full.*"

And sure enough, I was. Weeks later, two sums were deposited into my bank account in the UK, the first for the rental, the second of £100 to reimburse me. I was overjoyed when I told Bob I'd received the money.

"*Forget you ever owned a Land Rover in Bucharest, Ron.*" He winked at me.

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## **Pearl arrives**

### **Bucharest**

Pearl flew from London's Heathrow to Bucharest's Otopeni Airport and we spent the first week exploring Romania's elegant capital city, Bucharest. Since my role was guide, I chose the most impressive sites – palaces, churches, parks and government buildings.

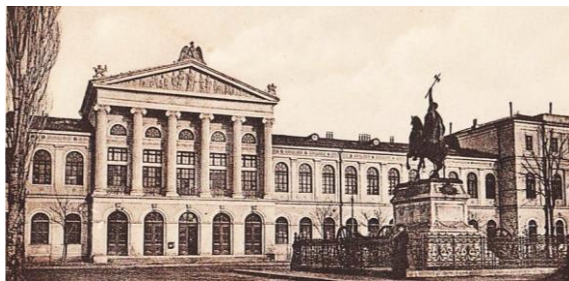
St. Nicholas, one of my favourites, was originally built as a Russian Orthodox Church at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but after a chequered career during two World Wars it passed to the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate under the authority and control of the Romanian Government. Despite the Communist Party having forcefully and systematically purged opposition by the church after the communists took control of the country in 1947, the strongly nationalistic Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate adopted a policy that placed itself at the service of the secular government. This compromise characterised the pragmatic Romanian spirit of survival captured in the phrase that I constantly heard repeated, "*A bowed head is not cut off by the sword!*" as if it were an aphorism. It is not; the line comes from a poem by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanian poet, diplomat and politician Dimitrie Bolintineanu that continues, "*A bowed head is not cut off by the sword, but is overwhelmed by humiliation*". From my own observations I was able to see that Romanians lived daily with 'realpolitik' – their way of living by necessity sought to survive by means of prudence, agility and opportunism, a winning combination that could help them deflect the humiliating blow and secure a tiny victory.

I counted myself lucky to be able to admire St. Nicholas Church every day as I walked first Bălcescu and the Magheru Boulevards to my classes and often again on my way home. I sometimes sat there as the only worshiper. Approaching the church on a low rise above the main boulevard, Pearl was able to admire the characteristic, multiple, gold 'onion' domes and once inside, the beauty of the murals and the iconostasis. So completely different from the plain interiors of the Scottish churches

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we were used to!

The official newspaper of the Romanian Communist Party was called *Scînteia* – the *Spark* and it was printed at its impressive headquarters called ‘*Casa Scînteii*’ along with virtually all other publications authorised by the Party on paper or on vinyl. *Casa Scînteii* – ‘*The House of the Spark*’ was an enormous, intentionally-impressive building in the style of Soviet Socialist realism and it copied the architecture of Moscow State University. It had to be huge in order to accommodate all of Romania’s centralised printing presses, the newsrooms and all the attendant staff of the state propaganda machine. Pearl found the overall effect of its symmetry, grandiose proportions and geometric white stone profile against the blue sky, stark and menacing. She said that the giant statue of Vladimir Lenin that dominated the entrance made her imagine she might be in Russia. Although neither she, nor I, had ever been to Russia, buildings of such brobdingnagian proportions evoked for us Westerners, rightly or wrongly, the all-encompassing stifling bear-hug of the Marxist-Leninist-controlled Soviet Union.

The exotic Mogoșoaia Palace delighted Pearl. Now in formally laid-out gardens, the ornate palace was built in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century by Constantin Brâncoveanu, Prince of Wallachia, in an unusual, highly decorative Romanian renaissance style called simply and proudly by Romanians ‘*Brâncovenesc*’.

The largest and perhaps oldest park in the city is the Gradina Cișmiugu – a series of paths through beautifully landscaped gardens extending to some 50 acres round a still, kidney-shaped pond lined by weeping willows and boasting black swans. We went there purposely on a Sunday morning when the gardens were at their busiest so that Pearl could appreciate the uses made of the park. Serious stamp-collectors would be swapping the most beautifully colourful Romanian postage stamps; sober games of chess between silent, thoughtful men watched by silent onlookers; family picnics – and the range of people and dresses that make up this varied nation.

Pearl was intrigued to learn that the ethnicities reflect the history of a country that emerged slowly taking shape over many centuries from the former province of the Roman Empire called *Dacia*. It has been home to waves of conquerors and settlers

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from the Ottoman Empire in the east to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the west and, after the Second World War suffered the domination of its neighbour to the north, the powerful Soviet Union.

I accurately predicted that Pearl's favourite place would be the *Muzeul Satului*. The 'Village Museum' is an open-air ethnographic museum built in the extensive and beautiful Herăstrău Park. To create the Museum, exquisite examples of authentic old buildings were identified in every region of Romania, disassembled, transported to Bucharest and reassembled in the park. Peasants' houses; churches; water-driven saw-mills, grist-mills and carding-mills; farm houses; inns; even milking parlours, village cheese factories, wineries and plum-brandy stills. All of these were built by village craftsmen out of natural wood and other basic materials and showcase traditional provincial village life in all its rich variety. The large collection of fascinating buildings and the information provided on each – its original location, its traditional use, age etc. is a source of never-ending satisfaction to anybody interested in the self-sufficiency of rural living of the not-so-distant past. I visited the Village Museum frequently myself and Pearl and I together returned two or three times during her visit.

To add to visitors' pleasure, there was a spacious restaurant and terrace overlooking the central lake where they served dark rye bread, beer, enormous dill pickles and delicious cheese – but only when these '*existed*' of course! When supplies were short and these items '*no longer existed*' you could sit in the cold with a cup of sweet Turkish coffee. The supply of coffee seemed to be inexhaustible.

For the first week, Pearl and I would leave my apartment after breakfast and head off on our explorations of Bucharest either on foot or using the excellent public transport system. We would invariably eat a light lunch at a restaurant and then have to rush back in the late afternoon to shower and dress for one of the many evening celebrations that we'd been invited to as a way of celebrating her visit.

Pearl was in her mid-fifties, in excellent shape and capable of tackling absolutely anything. She was a happy, curious and intelligent Scot who was well-read and delighted in new experiences that involved interesting people and exotic places.

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She had always had the knack of being able to relate easily to anybody, from the meanest farm-labourer to the highest Peer of the Realm. She had been brought up between the city of Dundee and the village of Coupar Angus in Scotland, raised and educated her children in Dundee, and had lived in London since leaving my father in 1962 after all three children had completed school. In London she worked as a bookkeeper for several organizations including the East India Company. She had lived for a year in Boston, Massachusetts with her sister and brother-in-law where she worked as payroll bookkeeper for the company Fanny Farmer. Pearl was fearless, great company, and open to new experiences. Before going out to one of our invitations in the evening, she would look in the mirror with despair at her unkempt hair and then put on a wig that suited her perfectly and made her look like a 40-year-old. Everybody was taken with her conversation, her humour, and her enthusiasm. That made me proud.

The British Consul invited us to dinner shortly after Pearl arrived. We had a lovely quiet evening in her apartment with her and two of the Queen's Messengers. The Queen's Messengers told us that they were two of only dozen who deliver, on an as-needed basis, sealed cases containing secret documents from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Whitehall to British Embassies all over the world. They told us that their office as Queen's Messengers guaranteed them and their baggage safe passage by virtue of the Vienna Convention. They made Pearl laugh when they told her that the sealed cases they carry are identified independently each with its own passport! They told us the diplomatic pouches and bags are exempt from all airport checks and cannot be opened, x-rayed, weighed, or investigated in any way by anyone at all until delivered to the Ambassador in person.

When the Messengers mentioned that they both came from London, the conversation turned naturally to that city of cities. Pearl told them that shortly after arriving in London in the spring of 1962 and getting settled into an apartment in St John's Wood, she had begun attending *Get to Know London* classes every weekend with a professional guide. As a result of the walking tours—because that's what these classes consisted of—her excellent memory and her keen interest, she impressed the

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Queen's Messengers with how intimately a provincial Scot had conquered London in barely 8 years.

When the conversation touched on the theatre, it turned out that we had seen almost every production on the West End since 1963, surprising both the Consul – a keen theatre-goer – and the two Messengers. I explained that in order to pay my housing, subsistence, clothing and books while at Aberdeen University – my fees were paid for by the municipal government – I had worked on building sites in and around London as a hod-carrier and brickies' labourer. I'd made enough money not only to save what I needed but also to take Pearl to the theatre at weekends. It was rare that two weeks passed and we didn't attend a West-End production.

One weekend we even went to South End Pier to be entertained by Stanley Holloway reciting some of his most famous monologues including 'Albert and the Lion' and 'Sam, Sam, Pick oop thy Musket'. One of the Queen's Messengers immediately delighted us all by reciting 'Sam's Sturgeon' the monologue in which Sam catches a sturgeon while fishing in the canal and knowing that the sturgeon is a 'Royal Fish' takes it all the way to Buckingham Palace to offer to the King. The Royal Guard won't let Sam enter the Palace but the King, returning from his nightly stroll, immediately recognises the illustrious Sam at the gate and invites him up to the Royal Suites for a cup of tea. There the King confides to Sam,

*"It's champion seeing thee again,  
But Sam twixt me and thee  
I can't stand Sturgeons  
– But I love a kipper to me tea."*

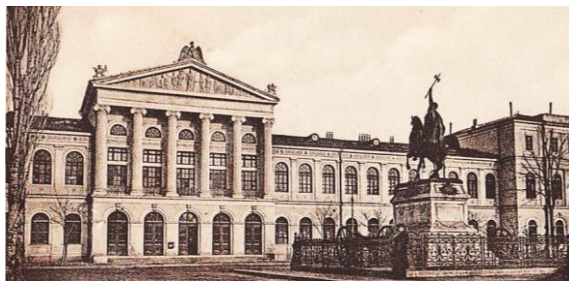
The evening ended in laughter.

As we thanked the Consul and bade her farewell, she reminded me that her car keys were with the Embassy guards and we exchanged our respective good wishes for safe and successful journeys – hers back home to the UK and ours up north to the mountains and forests of Bucovina on the southern border of the Soviet Union (the Ukraine, today) in the region of Romania called Moldavia, (not the former Soviet

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republic now the Eastern European country of Moldova adjacent to Romania in the north-east) to visit the world-famous painted monasteries built in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries – Voroneț, Sucevița, Humor, Arbore, Moldovița, Dragomirna and Putna.

One iconic example of these painted monasteries – that at Voroneț – was built in the village of the same name by Stephen III, ruler of the Principality of Moldavia in 1488. He was known as *Ștefan cel Mare*, ‘Stephen the Great’ for his success in maintaining Moldavia’s independence in the face of the expansionist ambitions of the Ottoman Empire. He built Voroneț to commemorate his victory over the Ottoman governor of Rumelia, Hadım Suleiman Pasha, at the Battle of Vaslui. As a result of Stephen’s victory, the Pope at the time, Pope Sixtus IV recognized Stephen as a *Champion of the Christian Faith*.

Because of the symmetry and beauty of its architecture and illustrative paintings inside and out, Voroneț is referred to as the ‘*Sistine Chapel of the East*’. The intense shade of blue in the frescoes is unique and known throughout Romania as ‘Voroneț blue’ – a truly eye-catching shade. The monastery’s first abbot, Daniil the Hermit, a saint in the Romanian Orthodox Church, is buried in a tomb inside the church.

Voroneț and the other painted churches of Bucovina are now listed by UNESCO as World Heritage sites.

Pearl and I were heading off into a very remote and exciting part of the world that few in the West had heard of at the time, an inaccessible and isolated area fought over for centuries by Russians, Hungarians, Poles and Ottoman Turks. We had a car and a couple of weeks, no definite plan and an unreliable road map produced by the Romanian Tourist Board which I was told, at the time, was all that was available.

That summer of 1968, while back in London, I discovered and purchased large scale, detailed maps of the country that were to cause wonder in the Military Attaché at the British Embassy – he had no idea that detailed maps were on public sale in London, and, many years later – awe at Security Division of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who were under the impression that large-scale maps of Romania didn’t exist.

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## **Brașov & Cluj, Transylvania & Iași, Moldavia**

Pearl and I left Bucharest on a bright spring morning in late April heading for Transylvania via the Prahova Valley. Then we planned to head east to Iași in Moldavia and then north to visit the painted monasteries of Bucovina.

The little yellow Ford Anglia lent to us by the British Consul was one of the few cars on the road as we crossed the Wallachian Plain towards the hills announcing the Prahova Valley. As we climbed, we were welcomed by a view of hills blanketed in white plum blossom stretching to the very slopes of the mountains.

Once in the valley itself and close to the pretty little town of Sinaia with its white cottages surrounded by white picket fences, we caught our first breath-taking sight of Peleş Castle, its turrets and spires standing proudly above the dense forested slopes of the Bucegi range of the Carpathians. The castle – in fact a decorative Neo-Renaissance royal palace – was begun by King Carol I of Romania in 1873. His son, King Carol II, was born at there in 1893 and Peleş became known as the “*cradle of the Romanian nation*”. It was only in 1878 that Romania became recognised as a country after it successfully joined forces with Russia to fight Ottoman domination. Once victorious, Romania declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire.

In 1968 there were virtually no foreign tourists in Romania, except those arriving on package tours from Sweden and Germany to litter the beaches of the Black Sea coast with their white bodies. We had Peleş Castle to ourselves and the charming young woman who was assigned to us as a guide went into mind-numbing historical and architectural detail. The palace was so beautiful and the setting so spectacular that we were content to let the guide recite her byzantine monologue and delight in what we were looking at in the here-and-now.

Back down in the village, we had lunch in one of the villas where I occasionally spent the night after a walking trip. There was no menu – we paid a small fixed sum for lunch and a waitress brought the food to our table – delicious *ciorba* (soup), *mamaliga cu brânză și unt* (a ladle-full of bright yellow polenta topped with a small wedge of white cheese and a spoonful of butter) and thick slices of dark rye bread. We

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both found this meal as we found all Romanian meals, absolutely delicious.

We continued on through the valley stopping briefly at Bușteni and Predeal so that Pearl could see the villages that featured so prominently in my weekly letters to her back home—letters that were shared with my elder sister Vivian and younger brother Euan. These villages were common starting points for my excursions into the mountains. They were the sleeping villages where I would alight from the early-morning train from Bucharest, take a deep breath of cold, pine-scented air, and prepare for several hours steady climb up the rocky trails through the forest and out onto the Bucegi Plateau with its vistas and panoramas. Today, our destination was Brașov in Transylvania.

Brașov is an intriguing, ancient medieval city surrounded by the forested slopes of the Carpathians. Parts of its fortified walls are still standing. Its fortifications were built by Saxon colonists invited by Hungarian kings to settle, build mines, and cultivate the land of Transylvania between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The settlers came primarily from the Rhineland, Flanders, and the Moselle as well as from Thuringia, Bavaria and Wallonia. Over the centuries, the city has been known by many names—*Brassovia*—White Water; *Corona*—Crown; *Kronstadt*—Crown City; and briefly in the 1950s as *Orașul Stalin*—Stalin City! The streets of the old town are cobbled and the *Piața Sfaturului*—the main square—are surrounded by sturdy baroque-style houses painted in tasteful shades of ochre, rust, amber and cinnamon. The carillon in the tower of an elegant Gothic Church, '*Biserica Neagră*'—the Black Church, was ringing to welcome our arrival.

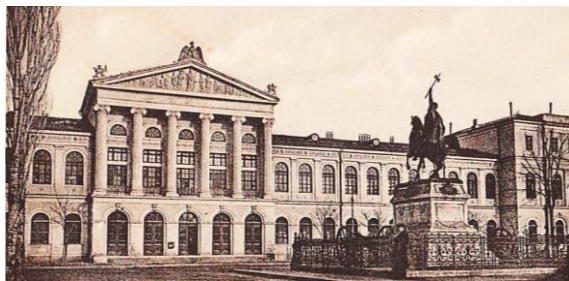
I was to get to know Brasov and another Saxon city, Sibiu, very well the following year when I developed a close friendship with Professor Harald Mesch who also taught at the *Facultate*—but that's a story for a future chapter.

During our two days in Brașov we visited most sites in the city and constantly heard a version of German being spoken by what appeared to be a majority of the population. Not only did many people speak a different language—although they were all fluent in Romanian as well—they looked and dressed differently. Many people had a blond, Germanic air about them and many of the women and girls wore

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distinctive blue headdresses and white blouses lightly embroidered with intricate blue designs.

Although our eventual destination was Bucovina in the north-east, this morning we headed north-west. I first wanted to visit the city and the region that had captured my imagination at school—the city of Cluj in the Magyar Autonomous Region—that intriguing green patch on the wall-map that hung in our classroom at the Morgan Academy. Now, in 1968, the city was called Cluj-Napoca but people still referred to it simply as *Cluj*. Despite being the largest city in Romania after Bucharest, it had fewer than 300,000 inhabitants. Like most old cities in Romania it has slowly grown in phases from an impressive, medieval, central square.

Preparations for the May Day celebrations were in full swing when we reached Cluj and the entire city was decorated in bunting and banners proclaiming the beneficence of the Romanian Communist Party. Enormous poster photographs displayed the twisted grimace and broad forehead of Nicolae Ceaușescu the current General Secretary of the Party who had taken over from Gheorghiu-Dej when he died in 1965, just three years earlier.

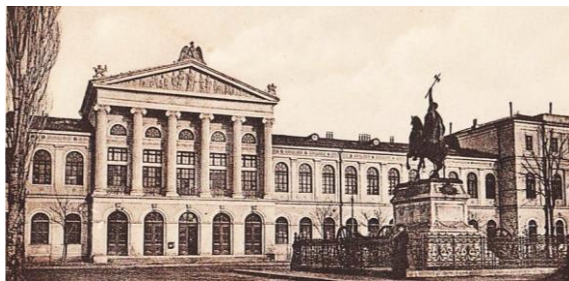
Despite the grandeur of some of the buildings in the centre of the city, their restful ochres and burgundies, the impressive Church of St Michael, and the statues commemorating past national heroes as well as the more modern Marx, Lenin and Stalin, we were struck forcefully by the constant din. In most villages, loudspeakers issued news and military music from dawn till dusk. We simply got used to it and tuned it out as we all tend to ignore *muzak* in an elevator, but in Cluj the blaring, cacophonous music and the strident, braying announcements so pervaded our entire being that we found the city physically uncomfortable.

Although there was almost no traffic in the city other than public transport and the occasional glossy-black, curtained Russian limousine, or occasionally a whole fleet of them accompanied by uniformed motor-cycle outriders with flashing lights, our strategy was always to leave the car parked since the old parts of these ancient cities with their narrow streets and stairs were a delight to be savoured on foot. There were never any foreign tourists other than ourselves and both we and the car stood out and

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attracted curious glances. Nobody, however, would approach us, ask a question or offer assistance if we looked lost.

We parked in Piața Unirii and stepped out of the car into the pleasantly cool late afternoon air. A uniformed officer looked at the car. His eyes widened. I knew that he was going to tell us to move the car simply because he didn't want a foreign vehicle with CD plates on his 'patch'.

The last thing that any Romanian, official or civilian, seemed to want was to accept responsibility for anything. Being accountable opened the door to being judged and being judged carried the risk of being blamed. And so, when making a request of any official I found it expedient to phrase the appeal as a question and indirectly refer to a higher authority – a vague and spectral 'they'. Before the officer had time to usher us back into our car and so rid himself of a potentially unwelcome problem, I marched up to him as if I too were in uniform, and announced in my practised tones, "*Mi-au spus că trebuie să parchezi mașina aici. Este corect?*" – "They told me I must leave my car here, that is correct, isn't it?" The eerie, ill-identified 'they' disconcerted officers, complicating the situation for them – and as a result they usually confirmed my statement. The officer looked at me and then Pearl and then once more at the diplomatic plates on the car, and pointed to a cobbled space by the side of the church.

"There, Comrade!" He said stiffly. "Your car will be looked after." The passive in Romanian was as useful as the spectral 'they' – the person implied and therefore responsible was left unidentified. I nodded, thanked him and did everything but salute him. Pearl gave him an appreciative smile.

We very much enjoyed that elegant old city but because of the constant blaring from loudspeakers we were happy to leave after lunch the next day. It was later than we expected as we headed east across the plain towards the Eastern Carpathians in the general direction of the city of Iași. There was no need to hurry and we enjoyed the beautiful villages and glorious countryside with fruit trees in full bloom as we drove east. That evening we got as far as Piatra Neamț and decided to spend the night. The following morning we took our time to explore this quiet medieval town with its relaxed town square. The sunshine and the quiet atmosphere were so relaxing that we

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remained for lunch.

We were loath to leave the Carpathians and head further east and so we took a roundabout route to Iasi clinging to the mountains as far as Târgu Neamț and only then turning east. Clouds gathered, the temperature dropped and it began to rain.

When we finally arrived in Iași, it was dark, chilly, raining and later than we'd anticipated. All we wanted was to find a hotel, have dinner and sleep. As chance would have it, we stopped close to the centre right in front of what appeared to be a newly-built hotel – a plain, functional, multi-story building with a battery of windows facing the street.

Little did I know it at the time, but back in the UK later that summer of '68, as the Soviet Union and all of its Warsaw Pact allies except Romania were poised to invade Czechoslovakia, I would, quite by accident, have occasion to be quizzed by a British officer of the Royal Air Force responsible for gathering signals intelligence along Romania's north-eastern border with the Soviet Union.

We never booked hotels in advance. Even if our journey had been planned day by day, which it was not, it would have been far too complicated and time-consuming even to attempt to make reservations. Moreover, I was travelling outside Bucharest in contravention of the warnings I'd been given by the official in the Rector's Office when I arrived in the country. I was adamant that I would give the Romanian authorities no opportunity to prevent me from travelling when and where I wanted by giving them advance warning.

Clumsy, unfettered bureaucracy marred every Romanian service industry to the extent that the client came a very poor second to unnecessary, incomprehensible and frequently preposterously insane procedures. It was simpler to take our chances that we would find accommodation. When we arrived in a city we would drive to the centre and would never fail to find a hotel. I would then enter, talk to the receptionist and investigate as to whether or not we were able to rent two rooms. It was seldom the case that hotels were full but gaining access seemed to be an arbitrary business that often required consultations among several people and multiple phone calls.

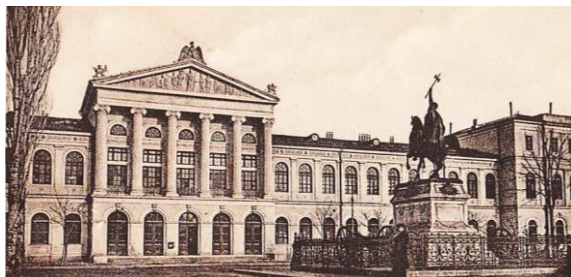
So I pushed open the glass doors and entered the hotel lobby. It was empty. It

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smelled of new construction. I approached the reception desk and the single clerk on duty reluctantly raised her eyes.

*"Good evening. I need two single rooms for tonight, please."*

The clerk, a middle-aged woman whose appearance would have improved had she smiled, scrutinised me in the analytical way that Romanians had perfected. From my accent and my appearance she immediately had identified me as a foreigner. For her, the simplest – and safest – thing to do with foreigners was to get rid of them by denying whatever request they might make. A curt "No!" would, as far as she was concerned, conclusively terminate the inconvenience I represented.

*"The hotel is closed!"* Her words erased me as if I were an unwelcome beggar. She dropped her eyes but not before I had seen the triumph in them – *'Case dismissed!'*

It was late and I was dispirited by her discourtesy – though rudeness was by no means unusual in public servants – and I was tired by the drive in bad weather. 'Hmm,' I thought, 'I'll find a nice old hotel where we may be offered more courteous service,' retraced my steps through the glass doors and walked back to the car.

I could see that Pearl was tired, hungry and disappointed that we would now have to begin a search, so I took a deep breath and said, *"Put on your wig and come with me! Say nothing – just watch very carefully!"* I pushed open the glass doors of the hotel and we entered together. It wasn't until we crossed the empty hall and reached the reception desk itself and I offered a curt "Buna seara!" – "Good evening!" that the receptionist looked up, surprise in her eyes and then hostility. *How dare a problem, once resolved, repeat itself!*

*"Comrade! I told you, the hotel is closed!"*

In confident tones worthy of an officer in the Gordon Highlanders I announced, *"Madame, I have confirmed that this is the hotel – the precise hotel – that the Party Base ordered me to check into when we arrived in Galați!"* I laid my passport and my University ID card very firmly down on the counter in front of her. I was employing the spectral 'they' and intentionally vague about the 'Party'. The word 'base', I knew, would get her attention. I got her immediate and full attention. Sulkily, she examined my passport and my ID without looking at either of us.

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I had simply inverted the process on her.

*She*, initially, by telling me the hotel was closed, was taking the easy way out by refusing to accept the problem of having to provide accommodation not just for a foreign, but worse, a *Western* guest. *I* on the other hand, by returning and insisting that a '*higher authority*' directed us stay in the hotel, sowed a seed of apprehension in her mind. Might taking the easy way out by refusing me a room lead to even greater problems with the '*authorities*'? That's what Romanians seemed always to be asking themselves and I had become quite skilled at exploiting the ambiguity of their situation by making them feel uneasy and then offering what appeared to be a simple solution.

"Madame, I can pay the foreign rate for the rooms. Cash in advance!" That roused her interest. "But, alas, I have no local currency." I ostentatiously pulled some American Dollars from my wallet making sure she could not see the wad of Romanian Lei I was carrying. Credit cards were not widely used in Romania – and not even in the UK – in 1968.

As a foreigner, I was frequently charged a rate considerably higher than a Romanian for any service. I was never certain if this was official policy or not but in any case I didn't find it unfair. Romanians were compensated for low salaries by receiving subsidised services of all kinds. Since I was a foreigner, I contributed nothing towards these subsidies so why should I benefit from them? Besides, since I had a good salary in Lei and was forbidden to convert it into Sterling or take it out of the country when I left, I didn't really mind if I were being overcharged.

I was counting on the receptionist's interest in my American dollars.

"We only accept Romanian national currency." She eyed the dollars in my hand.

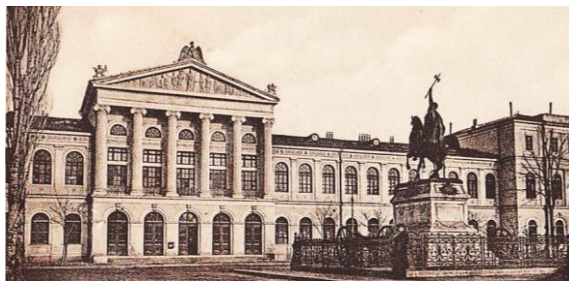
"Perhaps, Madame, the hotel might be kind enough to exchange these into Romanian national currency for me?"

She named a sum and I passed her the American Dollars. She took them, folded them into her hand and disappeared for no more than a minute or two. When she returned she handed me the equivalent in Romanian Lei. Then she completed the

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paperwork for our night's stay and I handed her back the Lei in exchange for her typed receipt stating that I had paid for the rooms in Romanian currency. The deal was done! All three of us were satisfied and Pearl, who had followed the odd transaction and knew exactly what was happening – she was an experienced bookkeeper after all – smiled brightly at the receptionist.

To my amazement, the receptionist smiled back, first at Pearl and then at me.

“Bine ați venit la Galați, Doamna, Domnule!” – “The restaurant is still open but there is only *ciorba* left on the menu.” Romania is the only country I have lived in that can compete with Scotland for the quality and variety of its soups. We smiled our thanks to the receptionist and headed for the restaurant's appealing aromas even before unloading our small suitcases.

“Bine ați venit la Galați!” – Welcome to Galați indeed!

By making her day, we had made ours. Romanians were fundamentally a fair-minded people who appreciated win/win transactions.



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## **The painted churches of Bucovina**

Since arriving in Bucharest in August 1967 almost 10 months earlier, I'd regularly heard extolled the beauty of the famous painted churches in the monasteries dispersed throughout Bucovina in northern Moldavia – Voroneț, Putna, Moldovița, Sucevița, Rădăuți, Humor, Arbore, Proboța, and Dragomirna. I'd shown pictures of them to Pearl and she was delighted with their architectural form and decoration. We agreed to visit as many of them as we could on this, her first, trip.

So we left Iași, drove north to Botoșani, the birthplace of the Romantic poet Mihai Eminescu, and found a hotel. The small town of Botoșani – recorded in 1439, as having been pillaged by the Mongols, no less! – would make a sensible, central base for our excursions to the monasteries. We began the first of these early the next morning.

Constructed from the late 1400s to the late 1500s by princes and governors – “Voievozi” or Voivodes – like Petru Rareș, Ștefan cel Mare and Bogdan the One-eyed, and still beautifully-preserved, Bucovina's painted churches make their claim to world fame because of the brightly-coloured fresco paintings that cover the external walls of most. These frescoes are acknowledged to be masterpieces of Byzantine art. They were commissioned by Romanian ‘voivodes’ – Princes and Governors – and painted for higher and more pragmatic ends than mere decoration. The murals represent an attempt to systematically educate an illiterate faithful in the religious themes of Orthodox Christianity.

Given our own family background rooted firmly in the grim, tenebrous history of the Scottish Reformation which gave us unadorned stone churches and austere interiors, we found the painted churches all the more alluring. Moreover, we're both country people at heart and found the rural setting of these churches as restful and comforting as the tree-clad Scottish glens.

The little town of Gura Humorului was celebrating a public holiday and the entire population seemed to be out in the streets clad in their national dress. Beautiful embroidery covered the breast and back panels of the waistcoats of both the younger

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men and women—usually brightly coloured flowers. The older men wore the handsome woollen coats and little green Tyrolean-like hats. These smart coats appeared to be home-spun from natural wool. The smell of lanolin confirmed the observation. Most had the off-white colour of a sheep’s fleece but occasionally we might see brown or even a grey coat—still natural though less common. Their lapels, sleeves, buttonholes and hem were stitched or embroidered with darker, complementary-coloured wool. Altogether these coats gave the men an august, respectable look.

Pearl discreetly drew my attention to one of these older gentlemen. “Ronald! Who is that man the spitting image of?”

“David Sinclair!”

“Right first time,” Pearl beamed. I too had seen what she had.

David Sinclair, a family friend, had grown up in Coupar Angus, Scotland next door to my grandmother’s house. He had become a successful potato and barley farmer in the Carse of Gowrie. He also bred beef cattle and exported quality bulls to estancias in Patagonia, Argentina. The Romanian gentleman was David’s size—about 5’6” and carried himself in the identical, self-assured, cocky manner. I approached him and asked if I could take his photograph. He graciously agreed and posed for me with a serious look on his face. He could easily have been David’s brother in the village of Abernyte near Perth on his way to the Kirk on a Sunday morning. Some years later I showed David a print and told him the story of how and where we came to take the photograph.

“Your Romanian’s got himself a far better coat than I’ve ever owned! If I turned up at a meeting of the Potato Board in London in something as smart as that, they’d think I’d sold the farm!”

By taking a photograph of the gentleman in the beautiful woollen coat, we seemed to have broken the ice. Couples and families crowded round us and proudly showed us their costumes and happily posed for photographs. Probably because we were in a distant, rural area far from the everyday reminders of governmental authority, people were more relaxed with us than in the city. Nevertheless, they

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maintained a certain reserve and asked us no questions – not even where we came from – in all probability so that they would have little or nothing to tell if they were later quizzed by a local official of the Communist Party.

In a relatively leisurely way, we managed to visit all 8 of the painted churches in two and a half days. At not one did we meet a single foreigner from either the East or the West. The few tourists we did come across admiring the frescoes like us were, judging from their speech, Romanian nationals and they made no effort to talk to us.

Since we were in the extreme northern part of the country, we wanted to get as close to the border with Soviet Union as we could, not for any particular reason, but just because it was shadowy and different and continued to play such a major role in the world events of our post-war lives! I had a multiple entry-exit visa for the Soviet Union but Pearl didn't as we hadn't planned to leave the borders of *Republica Populară Română* – the People's Republic of Romania. So we were content to simply park the car and watch the tiny trickle of traffic at the crossing point including a freight train, thrilled by the thought that what we could see beyond the fence and the armed guards was the Soviet Union, one of the most closed, mysterious and powerful countries in the world.

It was after lunch when we left Sucevița and reluctantly began to head south again. We could have stayed in the villages of Bucovina, surrounded by mountains and forests, for weeks. But we wanted to make it to either the city of Gheorgheni or Piatra-Neamț that night if we could. When we arrived at Câmpulung-Moldovenesc I noticed that there appeared to be shortcut south that avoided a long arc to Vatra Dornei. It meant taking a secondary road but we would emerge back on the main road again much closer to Bicz to the south. Pearl and I discussed the route and consulted the map and the thin zig-zag line of the secondary route. Ahead, we could see the forested mountains that we must cross.

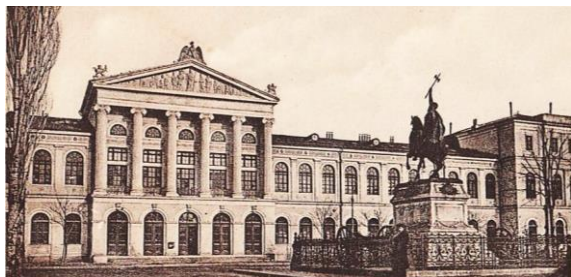
"Let's take the secondary road!" Pearl, like me, was always ready for an adventure. And so we did.

Though unpaved it started off well, with a thick layer of crushed rock under our tyres. As we progressed south, ended our way through valleys and up steep

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mountain-sides, the crushed rock petered out and we were driving on dirt with many a pothole and loose rocks. To avoid damage to the car I was forced to slow down and drive increasingly slowly. We needed time to examine the villages we passed anyway; they were always fascinating. Small, old wooden cottages each with its own vegetable garden to one side and flower garden in front invariably with tall colourful spikes of *nalbă* – hollyhock. Their blooms ranged in colour from black at one extreme to white at the other and all the other colours of the spectrum in between. Since that day, no matter where I am, when I see hollyhock I think of these remote villages in Bucovina. Women would be tending the gardens and men walking home from their work in the forest with double-bladed felling-axes across their shoulders.

These villages offered the perfect setting for a fairy-tale! Perhaps Jack the Giant-Killer or Jack and the Beanstalk. Geese stalked the main road through each village, hens scratched in the dirt, and ducks swam on the ponds. A more peaceful setting could not be imagined.

It was now evening and would soon be dark so we stopped in the next village to find something to eat. There was not a single restaurant. Nor in the next village either. We were not unduly concerned but would have liked to have had something under our belts if we were to be driving late.

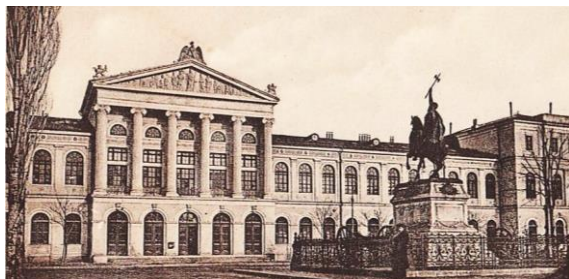
The dirt road had been climbing through pine trees for some time and then all of a sudden we came out of the forest and discovered that the road we were on was a narrow ledge excavated directly out of the side of the mountain. The drop to our right was at least 300' and we could see far over the forest past the winding Moldova River into the fast-darkening range of the Obcinele Bucovinei mountains, part of the Carpathian chain. The road wound up and then down the mountain like a ribbon on a Maypole. The road surface was loose making it necessary to take corners very, very slowly for fear of drifting out over the edge of the precipice.

We'd seen nothing and nobody on the road for at least an hour. We decided to stop the car and admire the view before it was taken from us by darkness. We stepped out of the car into the chilly air and admired the view without venturing close to the edge. Then we noticed a few lights in a valley some miles ahead and felt heartened –

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at least, if there were no hotel, we could get something – anything – to eat.

It was dark by the time we reached the village. It appeared to be more of mining camp with long dormitory-like structures and in the centre, a few public buildings including a restaurant some of whose lights were on. Relieved, we parked the car and made a bee-line for the restaurant. As soon as we opened the door the aroma of ‘mititei’ – grilled meat rolls made from lamb spiced with garlic, black pepper, thyme, coriander, and paprika – made our mouths water. We looked at each other in delight, “We’ve hit the jackpot!”

Once inside, the restaurant looked more like a Wild West saloon – wooden tables and chairs, a long wooden counter and a huge grill set in an open window. The man attending to the grill looked up in surprise.

“Ce vrei?” – “What do you want?”

“Two portions of *mititei* will be just fine!” I gestured to the grill. But now it was our turn to be surprised. Although the large grill sported several hundred skewers of meat rolls sizzling and spattering to perfection, it dawned on us that the saloon was entirely devoid of customers – every table and every last chair, empty!

Our second surprise was immediate when the man declared, “*Mititei? We have none!*” I hadn’t misheard. All I could do was to gesture and utter the word in a pathetic whine – “*Mititei!*” He glanced at Pearl and then at me and decided we were owed an explanation.

“*Tonight is the night that this camp shows a film in the hall. All the families are there. The film is just about due to end and these mititei are for the families that will rush in here in a few minutes to eat and drink beer and țuica for the rest of the evening.*” He opened his hands to emphasize his point and repeat, – “*No mititei! And we have nothing else to offer you either!*”

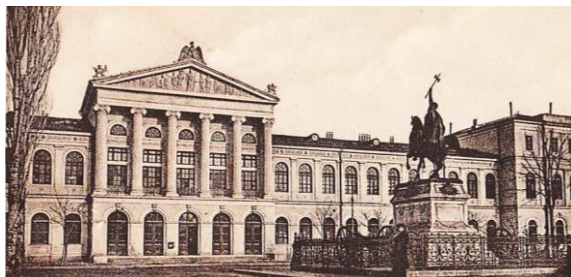
I was lost for words. Pearl was quicker off the mark than I was. She looked at the man and held up one finger and pointed to herself and then repeated the gesture and pointed at me. He must have seen the hunger in her eyes because he glanced at his watch, shrugged, walked over to the grill and picked up two wooden skewers of *mititei*. He handed one to each of us followed by a chunk of dark rye bread. We

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accepted his offerings greedily. He wouldn't take any money—just impatiently gestured for us to leave before, presumably, his act of generosity was witnessed by someone willing to report him for misusing government supplies. I already knew that in restaurants, every item of food on a dish was weighed, recorded and had to be accounted for, so I appreciated all the more this independent gesture of kindness.

As we sat in the car nibbling the delicious grilled lamb off the stick, fragrant with herbs, we watched families exit the largest of the halls and crowd into the restaurant, some with sleeping children in their arms. One of these customers would surely go short this evening—but perhaps that person would have imbibed enough, by then, not to notice!

We drove very carefully for the next hour or so until we joined the main road again and backtracked to Vatra Dornei where we found rooms as well as a late plate of *ciorba*. To continue south was out of the question at that hour, in the dark and in our state of exhaustion.



Cișmigiu, Insula Monte Carlo

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## Driving back to Bucharest

We wanted to see as much as we could of that part of Romania before returning to Bucharest without re-tracing any part of our route and so we headed in a generally southerly direction through the villages of Crucea, Broșteni, Borca, Poiana Teiului and along the shores of Lake Bicăz – a long and beautiful artificial lake that formed when the Bistrița River was dammed to build the Bicăz-Stejaru Hydro Power Plant. We passed enormous quarries and cement plants close to the village of Bistrița before reaching the city of Gheorgheni where we found a hotel for the night.

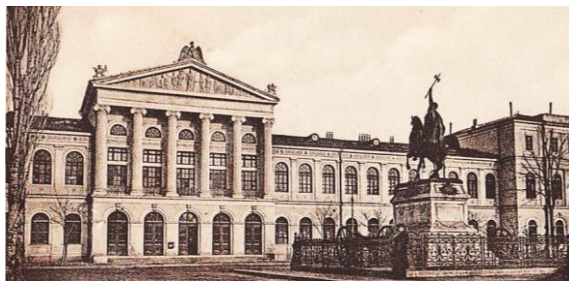
Gheorgheni, the vast majority of whose inhabitants were ethnic Hungarians, is yet another 14<sup>th</sup> century medieval city with a chequered history. It had been part of Transylvania within the Kingdom of Hungary and then from 1876 until 1918 part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The city was ceded by treaty after the First World War, to Romania but was transferred back to Hungary again between 1940 and 1944. After the Second World War, Gheorgheni became part of Romania once more but between 1952 and 1960, it was included in the Magyar Autonomous Province (that green area on the wall map hanging in my school classroom that had daily intrigued me so much when I was 16) until such ethnic-based sovereignty was abolished by Ceaușescu's government in 1968 in favour of *Romanianization*.

Both Pearl and I found excitement, glamour and mystery in moving from Romanian to Hungarian and back to Romanian culture within the space of a relatively few miles. The people we saw, men, women and children going about their daily lives, in these beautiful old cities were clean-cut, formally dressed, dignified, and solemn but we could see the curiosity in their eyes as two Westerners walked their unaccustomed streets. These were small towns where everybody knew everybody and even if we hadn't stood out because of the car or my mother's clothes or my shoes – Romanians were very observant and could spot foreign shoes a hundred yards away – we would have been a focus of curiosity simply because we were not *locals*. Only the enormous portraits of Ceaușescu in the city square and the constant music and rousing speech from the ubiquitous loudspeakers suggested that we were

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in communist Romania.

The following morning we continued through the relatively flat ethnic Hungarian region to Miercurea Ciuc in the Olt River valley in eastern Transylvania. Another city with a past almost identical to that of Gheorgheni – Miercurea Ciuc was part of Hungary but the Soviet Red Army captured the town in 1944 and in 1945 it became part of Romania once more. When Pearl and I arrived that day in the spring of 1968 the city was part of the Magyar Autonomous Region but autonomy would end that very year and the city would revert once again to Romanian control from Bucharest.

When Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power in the 1960s first as General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party in 1965 and then the country's head of state from 1967, he gave new impetus to the drive to assimilate ethnic minorities. This sometimes included the confiscation of property and businesses belonging to Hungarians (and other non-Romanian minorities) and the withdrawal of privileges including the abolition of the Magyar Autonomous Region. Romanians were forcibly uprooted and settled into regions that had hitherto been almost entirely Hungarian, and the local bureaucracies were staffed by quota proportional not to the ethnic make-up of the region, which would have given the Hungarians a majority, but to the ethnic make-up of the entire country and so favouring Romanians. These measures forced inward migration of Romanians into Hungarian areas but equally effective policies to ensure the outward migration of Hungarians were also adopted. Many Hungarian intellectuals were coerced into leaving their homes and accepting work in non-Hungarian areas in order to dilute their ethnic concentration even further.

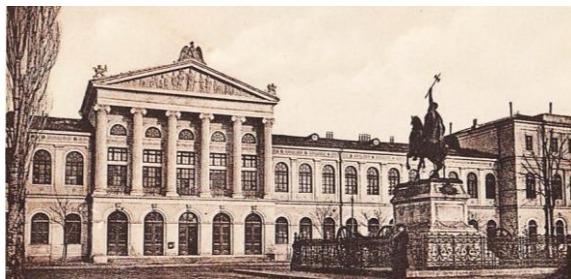
I was to learn a little more about what the government policy of *Romanianization* meant to the average person who belonged to an ethnic minority in Romania during my second year in the country.

Pearl and I were happiest in the tiny villages and small towns. Because most of the time we were in no hurry and there was no traffic of any kind on the roads to worry us, whenever we saw something of interest we would stop the car and explore. One of these spontaneous stops was made at what looked like an enormous ceramic

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oven in the front yard of a peasant house in a village in the still predominantly Hungarian 'Ciuc' region. We parked the car and approached the owner, a middle-aged, country-woman who appeared about to open the oven. We had visions of loaves of scented bread, whole roast sucking-pigs, baked geese, or perhaps a haunch of venison. The woman explained that her oven contained no food. She was the local potter and her last batch of pots had just ended their several days of firing and the oven had been allowed to cool for several more days. She had no objection to us watching her open the kiln so long as we kept our distance.

She did allow us to peek inside before she began her task – and we saw plates, bowls and mugs of all shapes and sizes stacked from the floor up into the kiln's dark, domed interior. As she carefully removed items, we noticed that they all had the same distinctive colours and patterns of blue on ivory. The dishes were made to be used and were often fairly crude, no two being identical. We had seen similar dishes in the home of a Hungarian friend of Pearl's, Maria Magdalena Szell, in St. John's Wood in London. I had always admired Maria's pots (as well as some beautifully embroidered Hungarian cushion covers) and so I asked the potter if I could buy one or two. She told me that unfortunately pottery taken immediately from the oven is very brittle – the pieces she was removing now would break before I could get them back to Bucharest.

Sensing our disappointment, she went into her house, brought back several flawed pieces that had not been sold from her previous batch and offered them to us. We asked – *How much?* – She refused money but asked if we had anything that we might be willing to exchange. We travelled very lightly with only the barest of essentials and so I was at a loss, but Pearl immediately returned to the car, opened the trunk, and took several items out of her shower bag – an unopened bar of soap, some sachets containing shampoo, and a tub of skin cream. The potter's face lit up in delight. She proclaimed that she now had to give us even more items to even the score. Regretfully and graciously we refused – our space was very limited and I already had all I wanted. We left the village potter scratching her head and smiling at the good fortune visited on her out of the blue that warm spring afternoon with the bees

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buzzing in the apple blossom of her orchard.

When we arrived back in Bucharest, we were dying to tell somebody about our trip through Transylvania, the Ciuc, Moldavia and Bucovina. Fortunately we had willing audiences. We had two more social invitations – both from fellow-professors in the *Facultate*.

The first was from Professor Ștefanescu-Draganești and his wife for afternoon tea. I knew that he lived not far from me but I didn't know where, or anything else at all about his family. My apartment building was one of many that fronted onto a major crossroads about a mile from the city centre. Behind these apartment buildings, however, were streets of plain middle-class houses that had been built between the First and Second World Wars. Professor and Madame Ștefanescu-Draganești lived in one of these, or at least in part of one.

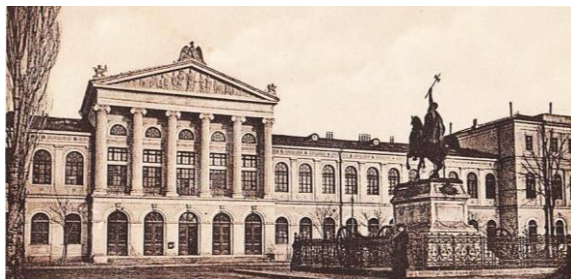
They met us at the front door and guided us carefully into large pleasant room so full of furniture, book-cases and divans that we had to be guided to our chairs set at a small table already set for tea. Mrs Ștefanescu-Draganești explained very briefly and neutrally that they had owned the entire house before the War. In 1944, the Communist Party staged a coup that ousted the pro-German government of Ion Antonescu and with Soviet assistance, exiled King Michael I, took over the government, and ruled as the only legally permitted party from 1948 until the present. They took the measure of confiscating private homes and dividing them up into multi-family units. Since 1949 they had been restricted to this single room and shared the bathroom and the kitchen with other families who also had rooms in 'their' house. After her short explanation the conversation turned to our trip and how beautiful a country Romania was.

In the 9 months I'd been in the country his was the first Romanian home I had been invited into – not counting the few uncomfortable moments when Madame Cartianu had questioned my ethnicity. I had no idea at all about how Romanians lived. Now I began to understand why one of the questions I was inevitably asked was, "How many rooms do you have to live in?" And now I appreciated the naked envy on the face of my questioners when I told them, "I have an apartment all to myself."

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Professor and Mrs Ștefanescu-Drăganescu were delightful, sophisticated and entertaining hosts. They smiled constantly and made us feel that we were doing them a favour by accepting their invitation. They served tea in china cups from a china teapot and offered us tiny sweet pastries on china plates.

When later Pearl and I talked together, we agreed that we had both been humbled by the graciousness of our hosts, felt the profound sadness of their situation, and admired the fortitude with which they bore the years of enforced, daily humbling. I admitted to Pearl that here had been times when I had shown my impatience with Professor Ștefanescu-Drăganescu's unannounced appearances at my door and often inconvenient demands on my time and felt ashamed of myself for not showing this kind and cultivated gentleman, who was clearly making the best of very difficult circumstances, more consideration.

The poignant memory of that afternoon, the kindness of the gesture made by that genteel couple to ensure we largely ignorant Westerners felt at home in their single room, and the decades of heart-rending, silent suffering that they had endured and would continue to endure, has never left me.

The same week we were invited to the house of Professor Dan Duțescu and his wife.

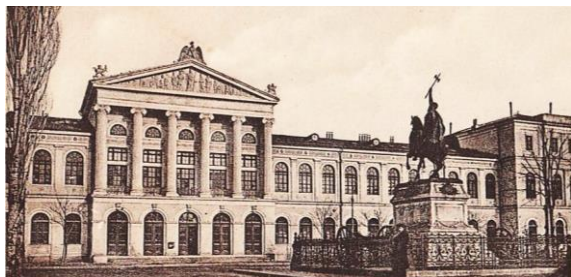
To my surprise, Professor Duțescu and his wife lived even closer to my apartment than the Ștefanescu-Drăganescu. They lived in a new building not 200 yards from my own, in an apartment that they shared with their adult daughter. I recognised their daughter immediately – she was a junior professor in the English department but had never uttered a word to me beyond "Buna ziua!" before removing herself from my presence as did all of her colleagues.

That evening she made up for her previous silence. She told us eagerly that she was a keen hiker and rock-climber. Though she knew the Carpathians far better than I did, she was delighted to meet a person who shared her enthusiasm for isolated places. After we'd been chatting merrily together with the Duțescus for an hour or so the doorbell rang. Professor Duțescu left the room and went to the door. I could hear him greet more than one person. *How would he deal with callers, I wondered, while Pearl*

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*and I – two forbidden Westerners – were in his house?*

And so I was surprised when he ushered in Professor Leon Levițchi and his wife. Professor Levițchi was yet another colleague from the *Facultate* that I saw several times a week but who rarely talked to me. The Duțescus and the Levițchis were obviously great friends of long-standing. We shared a very pleasant evening with lots of laughter. They were pleased that most of what we had to say about Romanians and Romania was positive and that we treated the negative with good humour. Of course, really sensitive matters were carefully avoided by all parties.

This was the most normal evening Pearl had spent in Bucharest since arriving almost a month earlier; the most normal evening I had spent in the country since arriving 9 months previously – simply talking comfortably and contentedly with acquaintances.

A day or so later, as we waited in the departure lounge of Otopeni Airport, Pearl raved about her visit, our adventures together, and the people we had seen and met. We promised to explore another part of this intriguing country the following year. Tony Mann, the Cultural Attaché, had indicated that both the British and the Romanian signatories to the bilateral cultural exchange expressed the desire that I renew my contract for a second year. I, for my part, was willing to do so.

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## **Year One draws to an end**

### **Head of Mission**

*“Thank you for agreeing to have dinner with me, Mr Mackay,”* Mr ‘Jones’ of the Foreign Office gave me his best mandarin smile across the elegant table in the dining room of the Athénée Palace Hotel in the centre of Bucharest. He had come as head of the British mission in order to negotiate the next period of the bilateral cultural exchange between the UK and Romania. *“I understand that you have accepted to extend your service as Visiting Exchange Professor in Phonetics at Bucharest University for a second year?”*

*“Yes, Sir, I have.”*

*“I invited you to this little tête-à-tête, Mr Mackay, because I wanted to hear your frank views on your position at the university, your living conditions and your experience in general.”*

I had dined the previous evening at Ambassador Sir John Chadwick’s residence with the entire visiting group from Whitehall along with most of the diplomats from the British Embassy. As we were leaving, Mr Jones asked if I would have dinner with him in his hotel, the Athénée Palace, the following evening. I said I’d be happy to but suggested a different restaurant.

*“Where?”* He looked doubtful.

*“Casa Capșa.”*

*“Why?”* He wanted to know.

*“It has more character.”*

*“Character?”* He squinted.

*“It dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It’s very grand”.* His squint intensified. *“It’s more mysterious, more exciting than the Athénée Palace.”* I added.

*“Mysterious? Exciting?”* The squint turned to alarm.

*“Local gossip has it that Casa Capșa is the favourite meeting place for senior Securitate agents and foreign spies”*

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“Let’s just meet at the Athénée Palace!”

And so, here we were, both slightly ill at ease.

It was a slow night for the restaurant. Although the menu was long and varied, what actually ‘existed’ was extremely limited and neither of us was granted our first nor even our second choice.

As we ate in the empty dining room I told him objectively and without any unnecessary detail about my teaching experience, my students, my colleagues, my apartment and how I spent my spare time.

“You’ve encountered no challenges? No obstacles?” Whitehall mandarins didn’t seem to want enthusiasm; they appeared to want hitches, stumbling blocks and pitfalls.

I had to assume that Tony Mann had already briefed him on certain matters such as that my teaching assignment had been changed, my bugged apartment, even about Karen, and so I mentioned these matters without embroidering.

“So you still see this person, this Karen, this informer?”

“She’d come out of this badly if I didn’t.” I pointed out. “And It’s only every couple of weeks until the end of this year’s contract.”

“Any restrictions on your movements around the country?” His face was impassive.

I admitted to him that on my arrival I’d been informed that I was restricted to a limited region around Bucharest unless I applied for and received written permission to leave the city. “But I chose to ignore that instruction.”

“Chose to?”

“Yes Sir.”

“Why?”

“I felt that if I respected that restriction, I’d be doing their job for them, Sir. The way I see it, it’s up to them to control my movements, not up to police myself.”

He nodded for me to go on.

“Being stuck in Bucharest would have been too restricting, Sir. I didn’t want to

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disadvantage myself by being overly cooperative with them.”

“So you’re disobeying their rules!”

“They’re free to enforce them if they want, Sir.”

He considered this. “No repercussions?”

“None at all, Sir. I go where I want. I buy a return train ticket at the central station. Sometimes the Consul lends me her car. Occasionally the Vice-Consul comes with me. Nobody has ever tried to stop me.”

He seemed satisfied, paused, and changed the subject.

“You appreciate that this bilateral exchange...”

“The cultural exchange, Sir?” I asked for clarification; I was a novice in diplomatic jargon.

“The cultural exchange between the UK and Romania—is only incidentally about culture.”

“It is?” I had never given the matter a thought.

“Language, literature,” he made a dismissive gesture with his hand, “these are merely the soft end, what we expect to follow is commerce, trade, exports.”

“I didn’t know that, Sir. Commerce isn’t my area of expertise.” I thought ruefully how recently and at what considerable effort I had mastered phonetics and how that course had been snatched from me by rose that made up my dozen. For the first time I wondered what my ‘area of expertise’ might turn out to be. I could think of nothing—nothing at all that I really and truly had consequential ‘expertise’ in—and the discovery concerned me.

“Nevertheless,” Jones went on, “you should be aware that our goal is to expand trade with Romania.” He paused. “You don’t attend ‘open night’ at the Embassy.” His accusation was correct.

Once a fortnight, on Thursday evenings, there was an open bar in what must have been the carriage house of the Embassy in those days when it had been a fine, private residence. I’d been invited as soon as I’d arrived and had turned up once or twice. I barely drank alcohol and had seldom entered pubs in the UK, was not a fan of dark places, and found two or three Embassy support staff and the odd visiting British

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businessman drinking British beer and reminiscing excruciatingly boring. I had other priorities, was sufficiently satisfied with my own company, and too interested in Romania to become a regular at the bar.

“Mr Mann advised me not to become too closely associated with the Embassy.” I excused my lack of sociability. “And I find myself occupied most of the time.”

“It wouldn’t do any harm to offer your experience occasionally to our visiting businessmen.”

I mentioned that I had in fact befriended a British businessman – Ron Walker, the representative of Hymac, a heavy hydraulic equipment manufacturer in Derby, but that far from lending him my experience, it was he who was teaching me great deal. I told Jones that on several occasions Ron had taken me to the area known as the Dobrogea in the low-lying area south of the Danube Delta where Hymac’s huge excavators were digging canals to drain vast areas of land and make them fit for agricultural production.

Jones looked at me sceptically – more was clearly expected of me and so I uttered a vague promise about making a greater effort to attend the open bar more regularly in the future. Thankfully, he let the matter drop.

By this point we’d finished our main course and I was hoping that I could excuse myself and go home. But Jones asked, “What would you recommend for pudding?” I looked at him to see if he were joking but what I saw was a lonely civil servant unaccustomed to being so far from home who liked dessert and so I suggested we order two portions of ‘*clatite*’. *Clatite* were a total novelty to me. Karen introduced me to them at our first dinner together in the Athénée Palace.

“Clatite?” Jones was doubtful, so I explained what it was as best I could.

“Oh, you mean *crêpe suzette*!” He cried out, pleased at the thought. “A thin pancake smothered with a sauce of caramelized butter and sugar topped with an orange liqueur and served flambé?”

I agreed that his description of *clatite* was better than mine. I had no idea there was a Western equivalent.

I managed to summon the idle waiter – it was always difficult to get a waiter’s

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attention even if there were few or no diners – and, slightly crestfallen that Jones was already familiar with what was for me a totally innovative and exotic dessert, ordered “*Doua porții de clatite!*” – Crêpe suzette for two!

The waiter cleared away the plates and cutlery from our main course and after a considerable time had passed, emerged from the kitchen with a large platter containing two pallid pancakes. At his work station within the dining room, he folded the pancakes, poured alcohol of some sort from a crystal decanter over them and struck a match.

There was a loud “*Whoosh!*” as the alcohol ignited and we both watched the waiter triumphantly raise the tray above his head and stride smartly over to our table doing his best to ensure that the great yellow flame didn’t singe his hair. I was impressed at the spectacle. Jones more so.

Good, I thought, at least the flames are brighter in Romania than Jones is used to. I made a feeble joke about how the official newspaper of the Romanian Communist Party was called *Scînteia* – the Spark – and that perhaps this flaming offering was the Party’s official crêpe suzette. But Jones hardly heard. His eyes were on the conflagration. Instead of reducing to a blue glow and extinguishing itself, the alcoholic flame was growing even higher!

The waiter, expressionless, extended the tray containing the incendiary crêpe towards us at the full length of his arms, his head well back. The heat was such that the butter and sugar sauce had ignited and the once pale crêpes were fast darkening from ochre to brown and worse. By the time the flame had extinguished itself – there was nothing left to burn! – two black, elongated cinders lay on the large plate offered us by the expressionless waiter. Jones eyes had almost popped out of his head.

I knew exactly what was going through the waiter’s mind. He had already taken delivery of two perfectly good *crêpe suzette* from the chef and signed them out from the kitchen. At his own service table he had measured out the alcohol. The unforeseen event had occurred on his watch and there was no question of returning the cinders to the kitchen. What possible solution existed to allow him to extricate himself from a dreadful situation and absolve himself from all responsibility?

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Romanians, I had observed during the eight or nine months I'd spent in the country, greatly feared accountability because it could lead to liability, guilt and possibly punishment. The look in the waiter's now startled eyes said, "*How can I escape responsibility for this act of cremation?*" And then the inspired answer came to him. "*When the Crêpe were in the kitchen, they were the chef's responsibility. When I brought them to my service station they became my responsibility. The moment they are placed on the diners' plates they become the diners' property.*" And so with great aplomb and to the utter amazement of Jones, the waiter served one black cinder each, first to my dining companion and then to me, bowed graciously, and fled from the room.

I was amused at the entire event. I also felt rather pleased with myself for having accurately foreseen how the waiter would handle the disaster. Like any self-respecting Romanian waiter in a government-controlled hotel, he had flambéed the crêpe, delighted the diners and, served them to the letter what they had ordered – "*Doua porții de clatite!*" Crêpe suzette for two!

He had successfully rid himself of the uncomfortable monkey riding on his back and transferred it to the backs of his only two clients for the evening. And now the vexation was – Slavă Domnului! / Thank God! No longer *his*, but *our* monkey.

As a young boy, I had eaten a lot of burnt toast. For years, it had been my job to toast the bread for breakfast. My responsibility was to watch it carefully as it browned under the gas grill – we had no electric toaster. Any burned slice was deemed the result of my negligence and therefore nobody but me should have to eat it. My parents and brother and sister had the right to nicely-browned slices.

Now I was curious to see how Foreign Office Jones would rise to the occasion.

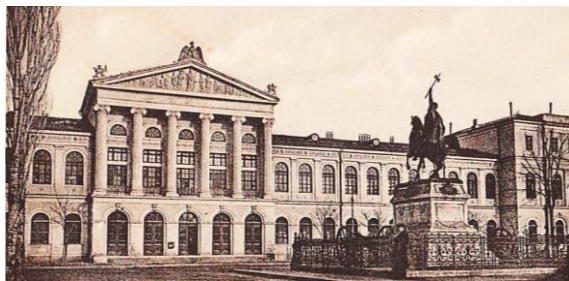
And so, inured by years of my own negligence to the sharp taste and sandy texture of cold carbon, I crunched my way joyfully through the burnt offering on my plate. Jones, the ever-polite ever respectful English-public-schoolboy-become-public-servant, followed my example. Albeit more slowly and with noticeably less joy. It pleased me to see that he left more black crumbs on his plate than I did on mine.

Tony and Sheila Mann laughed when I told them the story a few days later.

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## **The end of Year One**

Alexander Dubček was elected First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in early 1968. Like Romania and the other Eastern European countries, Czechoslovakia had become a satellite country of the Soviet Union after World War II. Dubček began taking steps towards political liberalization, steps that caused the Soviet Union great concern. The Soviets were exerting pressure on their satellites to ready themselves for an invasion of Czechoslovakia should Dubček's reforms threaten Communist Block unity. Romania's Ceaușescu, unlike the political leaders of East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria, claimed to be unwilling to invade Czechoslovakia.

Romanians seemed to react to this unconventional position taken by their leader in two different ways at one and the same time. Ceaușescu's seemingly autonomous line encouraged hope but also promoted uneasiness in the minds of Romanians. They lived their daily lives under the repression and fear created and exploited by Ceaușescu's secret security apparatus. Was Ceaușescu's stance a true act of courage or did it disguise a deeper, more sinister pact with the Soviet Union? In order to pursue a more independent foreign policy was Romania being forced to guarantee Russia that internal dissent would not be tolerated? All seemed to be speculation; nobody appeared to have any clear answers.

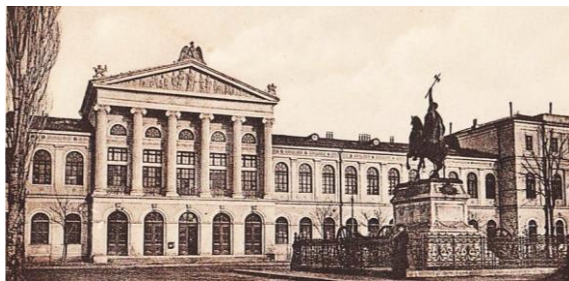
I knew I would enjoy remaining in Romania after the teaching semester ended simply to be part of the rising political excitement as the Soviet Union continued to bully Czechoslovakia and the repercussions spilled over into neighbouring countries. However, I had to consider more immediately personal and pragmatic matters.

The first and most important matter was financial. The British Government deposited only £30 a month into my bank account in the UK and made no contributions towards any social benefits. I had managed to save most of that monthly sum by living almost entirely on my Romanian salary but it still meant that I had less than £240 to my name in the whole wide world. Tony Mann was sympathetic to my financial situation and had given me the names of several privately-run summer

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schools in the UK that required instructors to teach English to foreigners. One of these, in Bournemouth, had offered me £200 a month for a period of 10-12 weeks. That meant that even allowing for purchasing my return ticket to the UK and my modest living and other costs, I could if I lived frugally, more than double my savings before returning to teach my classes at the *Facultate* in Bucharest in September.

The second factor was that if I remained in Bucharest, I would be isolated, without even the consolation of the company of my students. The uncertainty over the fate of Czechoslovakia was causing Romanians to be ever more careful not to compromise themselves with a Westerner. Colleagues in the *Facultate* encouraged me to spend the summer 'at the beach', that is, in one or other of the seaside resorts on the Black Sea coast of Romania. Their descriptions of resorts flooded with holidaying Swedes and Germans held far less attraction for me than gaining a little financial security. I was considering returning to the UK after I completed my second contract in Romania to pursue a graduate degree. I would need money to pay for that.

While I was considering these options a third factor intruded. Ron Walker the Hymac engineer had turned up – unexpectedly as always.

"Three days only in Bucharest, Ron, and then I'll be driving back to the UK. There's room in the car if you want to come back with me!" That did it. Economic security, saving the one-way fare and getting to see some more of Europe by car – all of these reasons convinced me.

"Count me in, Ron. I'm ready when you are!" He was happy to have the company.

A few days later, we left Bucharest early in the morning and headed south-west to Alexandria and then north-west, passing through Rosiorii de Verde, Draganești-Olt, Craiova, Turnu-Severin, and Timișoara.

Ron Walker was a wonderful companion. He had hundreds of stories about inspecting Hymac excavators and back-hoes throughout the length and breadth of Europe – East and West. He seemed always to be in a good humour and to find everything amusing. He had very incisive observations to make about Romanians and I was happy to see that many of his analyses rang true for me as well. He was never

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critical; he preferred to describe what he saw rather than to judge it. He often had perfectly logical explanations for puzzling encounters and events.

I laughed at one of these explanations. The day before we left to drive to the UK he had invited me to make a quick, one-day trip to Dobrogea with him to inspect a fleet of Hymac excavators working there.

“Meet me in front of the Lido Hotel before 0500 hours,” he’d said. “I’m leaving at 0500 hours sharp whether you’re there or not.”

All my life I’ve been an early riser and I was at the Grand Hotel ten minutes before 0500. Ron appeared out of the gloom accompanied by another man—a Romanian by the looks of him. Ron said he was a Romanian engineer and he’d accompany us to Dobrogea where he’d remain at the site of the drainage project.

The engineer smiled at me, shot out his hand and gave me a cheery, “Chirilă!” I took his hand and gave him a “Chirilă!” back, happy to learn a new greeting. We reached the project site in Dobrogea, Ron delivered the engineer to his location. Ron disappeared inside for a few minutes with the engineer, came out, and we continued on so that Ron could inspect the fleet of back-hoes working at full pace excavating drainage channels some kilometres further on.

Now, the following day, as we were approaching Arad, Ron began to chuckle.

“What is it now?” I asked.

“Remember the engineer we drove from Bucharest to Dobrogea yesterday?” I nodded. “He thinks you and he must be related!”

“Related?” How could he think we might be related? Does he have a Scottish background?

“No—but he thinks you share the same name!” Ron continued to chuckle.

“Mackay? Ronald?” I was totally puzzled.

Ron laughed openly. “When you met, yesterday at 5 o’clock he introduced himself!”

Then it struck me. I thought that I’d learned a new early morning greeting from the engineer—“Chirilă!” and was very proud at my having immediately returned the same greeting, “Chirilă!” However, the engineer had introduced himself using his

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name, “Chirilă!” and I had replied using his name – “Chirilă!” No wonder the poor fellow was confused and wondered if we had a common ancestry!

Ron continued to chuckle about my absurd error until we stopped for a rest in Arad.

No sooner had we alighted from the car in a huge empty square in front of a very imposing white building that Ron told me was the seat of the municipal government than there rose an excited voice.

“Ron!” We both looked up.

There was an attractive woman in her 40s, her arms open and a huge smile on her face. But it was Hymac Ron that she hugged, not me. She unwound herself, her face glowing. But it was Ron’s face that I caught my attention. He moved his mouth and his cheeks a couple of times and his face took on a still-benign but very different appearance. And he began talking to the woman in competent Hungarian. They talked for several minutes, embraced again and off she went with a happy swing to her hips. Ron didn’t explain the encounter and I used the same rules with him as I did with Romanians – *No questions!*

I was to discover that Ron could speak five or six languages and each time he switched, he would adjust his face and take on a different appearance. As a phonetician I appreciated that one language demands a different ‘set’ to the visible speech organs – the lips, the mouth the cheeks, the tongue, the teeth – from that demanded by another language. Watch a film without sound and you will see that the facial ‘set’ used by a speaker of English differs from that adopted by a speaker of French, or German or any other language.

After a brief rest in the square in Arad, we drove on until we arrived at the crossing point at the border at the frontier with Hungary.

Frontiers between Eastern Bloc countries were heavily guarded and immigration and customs procedures were time-consuming and very thorough. Ron had appointments to keep in Switzerland and so all we needed was a transit visa. By the terms of that visa we had to be out of Hungary within 24 hours after being admitted. Nevertheless, the Customs and Immigration insisted that we exchange

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enough hard currency into Hungarian Forints to last three days. Since we transacted the 24-hour visa at a different counter from the one where they insisted on our making the currency exchange, there was no way that we could rationalise the process and so I was out a further £60 or so. The authorities informed us that we could neither convert the Hungarian Forint into hard currency when we left, nor could we take any Forints out of the country – we had either to spend our 3-day allowance within the 24-hours that our visa gave us in Hungary or surrender up the unspent portion as we left. Like so many bureaucratic procedures in Eastern Europe, this one made no logical sense at all – but we were subject to it nevertheless.

In the 1960s there were no freeways or superhighways in the UK let alone in Eastern Europe. We had about 350 miles to cover until we reached the Austrian border. Ron wanted to go to Switzerland via Graz in Austria by the most direct route and that meant travelling through Hungary across-country as all of Hungary's roads seemed to lead to the north towards Budapest. Ron delegated me the role of navigator – I was an experienced map-reader – and we managed to get as far as the city of Szeged just at twilight. Szeged, in the great Southern Plain of Hungary was a very distinguished city and Ron decided we would stop for dinner before driving on to Baja to spend the night.

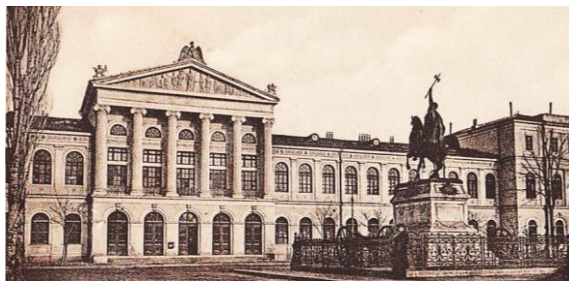
At that hour of the evening when the day has unwound and colours take on their true hues that during the day they're robbed of by the sun we parked the car by a leafy park where a temporary outdoor restaurant had been set up. There appeared to be some kind of festival because there was also a stage and an orchestra. Couples were taking their seats at beautifully appointed tables and so did Ron and I.

Service was casual and it was dark by the time the waiter handed us our menus. Most of the diners were eating an appetising stew and we asked the waiter what it was. "Birkagulyás!" He said and nothing more. Keen to make time, we asked for two plates of Birkagulyás. The waiter brought it almost immediately and the scent of the mutton and vegetable stew flavoured with herbs and paprika was mouth-watering. What a glorious warm evening! An orchestra was playing folk-music on the stage, we were surrounded by sophisticated people in conversation and had an appetizing meal

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on the table in front of us.

I noticed a barman filling sparkling glasses with ruby-red wine that caught the light. I looked around at our fellow-diners and most were drinking wine with their meals. The waiter saw my look and came over to the table with two full glasses.

“Csongrád!” He said.

Ron screwed up his eyes, adjusted his face and began a short conversation with the waiter.

“The wine is a local wine from this region – Csongrád,” Ron told me. “He says it complements the Birkagulyás. What the waiter actually said was that the Birkagulyás *‘demands’* a glass of this wine.” Ron chuckled.

“Then I think we should surrender to the demand!” I was enthralled by the beauty and romance of the evening.

We made our calculations. If we had a glass of wine, we wouldn’t want to drive any further that night. We had approximately 19 hours of our 24 left. If we dined with a glass of wine and then found a hotel and slept the night, we would have about 10 or 11 hours left to cover the 300 or so miles to the frontier with Austria. These 300 miles were not straightforward; they required us to constantly find minor east-west roads linking the predominantly south-north major roads. Inevitably we would make a mistake or two and have to back-track. Ron had been impressed with navigation skills that had got us this far and so resolved the matter.

“Two more glasses of red wine from Csongrád!” He called to the waiter.

We had a memorable dinner sitting out there in the warm evening at the edge of the park, Hungarian being spoken all round us, music filling the darkness. To help us get rid of some Forints, we tipped the waiter so well that he insisted we had made a mistake, but we shook our heads and reluctantly left the park. Then we found a hotel and slept. The following morning we were on the road by 0600 hours heading to Austria across a wide green plain on quiet country roads that passed through villages where white geese were unaware of our deadline and not always willing to let us share the road.

When we finally reached the frontier on the Austrian border, the immigration

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and customs police took an inordinate amount of time to clear us. They had as stand to one side of the car while they removed and examined every item inside with great care. Then they examined the front and back seats and the trunk. They ran a mirror on wheels under the frame of the car in case we had anything – or anybody – hidden there.

By the time we reached Graz it was well after 2200 hours. Ron didn't seem in the least bothered by the late hour. He drove to a garage on the outskirts and drew in by the unlit gas pumps. He switched off the car engine.

"Grab whatever you need for the night. This is where we're staying." He proceeded to knock very loudly at the locked door behind the pumps. A window above us was thrown open and a woman's head appeared.

"Wer ist es? Es ist mitten in der Nacht!" The head complained; extended itself further out to get a view of the callers.

"Frau Fritzl, ist es mir, Ron!"

She exploded in a paroxysm of excitement, "Ron, mein Liebling! Wunderbar! Eine Minute!"

The head was withdrawn, the window closed and 20 seconds later a delighted, middle-aged woman flung the door open and threw herself into Ron's arms.

I have no idea where Ron spent the night, but I slept under the whitest, cleanest and warmest comforter that I have ever had the good fortune to enjoy. The next morning when I went downstairs the table was laid as if for lunch – half a dozen different kinds of breads and double that of cold meats and cheeses.

Frau Fritzl gave us both hugs – mine of shorter duration than Ron's – and we were off on the road to Switzerland before 0800 hours. We were definitely back in the West. Whereas in Romania and Hungary there were virtually no cars on the narrow roads, the wide highways of Austria and then Germany and finally Switzerland were busy with vehicles of all kinds.

Ron booked a hotel room in a chalet outside St Gallen in his name and disappeared for two nights leaving the room for my exclusive use. I spent the days sitting on the wooden balcony overlooking the city with green hills and snowy peaks

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beyond. Ron came back, paid the room bill and the restaurant bill for the meals I had eaten for two days and we drove all the way to Antwerp where we spent the night. The following day we took the ferry from the Hook of Holland to Harwich. Ron was heading back to Hymac headquarters in Derby and so we parted ways in Colchester where I could get a train to London. My sister Vivian and brother-in-law John lived in Seven Kings and would, I knew, be happy – if a little surprised – to see me.

I sat on the train and read Victor Zorza's column in *The Guardian* about developments in Eastern Europe. Prodded by the Soviet Union, the armed forces of Poland, East Germany and Hungary were massing on the borders they shared with Czechoslovakia. Bulgaria was also cooperating. Romania was refusing.

I was physically back in England. My life in Romania seemed so distant that I wondered if it had been a figment of my imagination. I looked at the *Guardian* in my hands and realised that this was the very paper in which I had seen, only a year earlier, the advertisement for the university post I now held in Bucharest. *Exchange lecturer in phonetics*. Whether I lectured on phonetics or some other aspect of linguistics was merely a quibble. I was the British Exchange Professor in Phonetics at Bucharest University and I would be back in Romania within less than three months to spend yet another year there.

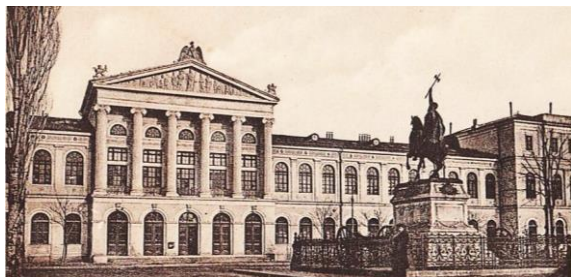
I wanted to tell somebody. I looked at the other passengers in the compartment. They studiously avoided eye-contact.

I realised that all the experienced I'd had were important to absolutely nobody other than myself. I drew comfort from watching the telegraph posts whipping by so close I felt I could have touched them and imagined myself running up and down along the swooping telephone lines, effortlessly keeping up with the speed of the train.

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## **Summer of '68 in Bournemouth**

### **Anglo-Continental School of English**

I rented a single room in a boarding house in Bournemouth and taught young mainly Western European adults five days a week at the Anglo-Continental School of English. The school was housed in a large, efficient, new building that stood in its own grounds overlooking the town. All of the other teachers had extensive overseas experience in a wide variety of countries, none in Eastern Europe. Most had been earning reasonably large amounts of money – those working in Saudi Arabia had been earning huge sums. Most, like me, were teaching for the summer before heading off to new posts abroad. Virtually all of them had post-graduate certificates or degrees in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language – a profession I didn't even know existed.

My experience consisted of only my year of teaching semantics and encouraging students' spoken English at Bucharest University, so I listened carefully to my colleagues and began to make sense of their profession and the skills it demanded. They told me about the year-long courses they had followed at universities in Leeds or Essex or Aberystwyth. I studied the books they lent me in the evenings.

Soon I was able to figure out that Teaching English as a Foreign Language was an eclectic application of the principles of the broader descriptive fields of phonetics and linguistics combined with random assumptions drawn from educational psychology and pedagogy. The same ideas could be equally well applied to Czech, Chinese or any other language.

I taught any and all classes that the Principal assigned me and became familiar with how the English language was broken up into teachable 'chunks' and 'skills' so that students might learn to speak and understand it in a reasonably systematic and incremental way. The principal textbooks written to promote English and the names of their authors I became familiar with. One of the more technologically-oriented

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teachers taught me how to operate a language laboratory and how to record exercises on tape suitable for students to practice the sounds, sentence structures, verb tenses and vocabulary of English.

There was, I usefully discovered, a particular area of expertise that most teachers shied away from – the field of testing students. Someone had to test students' language proficiency on arrival so that they could be placed at the appropriate level – beginner, intermediate or advanced. Later, someone had to test their achievement – what they had learned while at the school – so that they might receive certificates signed by the Principal attesting that they could use English effectively. Students coveted their achievement certificates and used them to impress their parents and potential employers.

Most teachers, even very enthusiastic ones who took a pride in their work (some did not), shied away from these twin fields of proficiency and achievement testing for the simple reason that they were terrified of working with numbers.

Numbers, simple arithmetic scared most teachers – and they fled in absolute terror when faced with calculating simple descriptive statistics. Statistics involved the distribution of an assumed variable such as '*proficiency*' or '*achievement*' to offer numbers that described central tendency like the *mean*, *median*, and *mode* and measures of spread such as the *variance* and *standard deviation* displayed by a group's performance.

Sensing the opportunity to acquire a competitive advantage, I became friends with the individual in charge of all student-testing in the school. Willie was a Scot, ten years my senior, from the Orkney Islands. He told me that he had taken up testing when he discovered that the other teachers – let alone the foreign students – were unable to understand his accent. The Principal threatened him with redundancy so he mastered the skills that others shunned. Now he ran the prestigious 'Testing Unit' and had one of the few, full-time, permanent jobs in the school. The school couldn't function without him.

*"If it's security you're looking for – become a testing specialist. Most teachers have a fear of numbers, so you'll have little competition,"* Tom said in his sing-song Orcadian

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accent.

“Good advice,” I remembered it. It stood me in good stead throughout my career.

A second valuable experience for me at the school in Bournemouth was the arrival of a small group of Swiss bank employees for a 3-week intensive English course. All were already intermediate or advanced speakers of English and became bored with their teachers and the content of their course after only a few days. As a group, they went to the Principal and asked for more challenging classes that were ‘related to their work’. For some reason – perhaps because being relatively new to the field I had few preconceptions – the Principal called me into his office and asked my advice.

*“What do they claim to want?”* I asked.

*“Something more challenging!”* He was as vague as they were.

*“Why don’t I take these students for a couple of hours a day, find out exactly what it is that they would like to have that they’re not getting and then design a course to suit them?”*

The Principal was delighted with the suggestion. *“It’s not the way we normally work,”* he warned me. *“Students come here so that we can give them what we offer. But your idea has potential and I’m willing to give it a try.”* It seemed to me perfectly logical that if students were paying, they should get what they wanted not merely what the school and its teachers had on offer – instruction that was demand-driven rather than supply driven. The supply driven shops in Romania satisfied few customers.

And so I became familiar with eliciting and analysing the learning needs of students who, themselves, might not be 100% clear as to what they wanted but were smart enough to know that it wasn’t what they were getting.

I had the Swiss students think about the answer to one simple question:

*“Once you become even more proficient in English, what do you see yourselves being able to do at work that you are unable to do now?”*

Within a day or so each student, with their classmates’ and my help, had a set of individual goals to accomplish that would serve them well on their return. Where their goals were more or less common, they worked in a group with a teacher. When

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their goals were unique, I worked with each separately in the classroom and the language laboratory to master the language to perform the tasks they envisaged themselves engaged in, in their bank.

By the end of the first week the students were delighted and so was the Principal. He assigned me 'Course Tutor the Swiss bankers'. In that role, I learned – and shared with the Principal – a great deal about aspects of instruction that I had never previously imagined – learner needs analysis, curriculum and syllabus design, individualised learning, goal setting, task-based language exercises, materials development, criterion-referenced testing – everything that was needed to teach English as an ancillary skill to adults who already had a profession and wanted to be able to practise it successfully not just in their mother tongue, but also in English. The Principal invited me back to teach the summer of 1969 at a higher rate of pay.

Every other weekend I went up to London to visit my mother. She had taken the post of domestic bursar in a girls' boarding school in Queens Gate and had an apartment in the school with a guest bedroom. She was officially off-duty every second weekend and so we were able to go to the theatre on the Saturday evening and explore more of London or go further afield on the Sunday.

The weekends I didn't go up to London, I spent exploring the harbours around Bournemouth and Poole. The way the little sailing boats beat against the wind to return to port fascinated me. I loved the variety of shore birds that fed at the edge of the waves and the mouths of the rivers. Occasionally I went to parties given by one or other of the teachers who, unlike me with my single room, had or shared apartments. From time to time I would invite a female colleague or student out for dinner at an Indian restaurant where I was working my way through the entire menu in order to become familiar with Indian food which I loved. None of these dates kindled any flames in me although most of my colleagues, male and female, seemed to be enjoying the freedoms that had suddenly hit Britain along with The Beatles, Carnaby Street and the pill.

The demands made when one had a regular girlfriend, I noticed from observing my fellow-teachers, were considerable. As soon as a new group of male and

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female students arrived from Switzerland or Germany or wherever, both teachers – male and female – and students would immediately begin the search for a partner. Students might stay for only a two- or three-week intensive course and wanted to pack in as much fun as they could in that short time. They wanted to go out with their new-found boyfriends and girlfriends almost every night – to bars or restaurants on weeknights and to dance-halls, pubs or parties at the weekends. I had no desire to spend several evenings a week out on the town and so I had less to offer a young woman intent on making the best of her brief summer course at the Anglo-Continental.

I was more happy to be learning, becoming familiar with a new profession; spending a couple of weekends a month in London; following Victor Zorza's column in the Guardian that offered a breathless, blow-by-blow account of the political events evolving in Eastern Europe. Mulling over what I might do in the future, after my second year's contract in Bucharest ended also took up time. And most importantly, I was saving money. On the whole, I was reasonably content with my lot.

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## **Unanticipated security matters**

### **Lincolnshire**

Shortly before leaving the UK in the Summer of 1968 to resume my post in Bucharest, I visited my brother and his family in Hemswell, Lincolnshire. Euan was a Royal Air Force officer, a navigator in Vulcans, the delta-wing strategic bombers capable of carrying out the critical nuclear strike mission in the event of an atomic war. Those who flew the Vulcan were also capable of performing conventional bombing missions. It was a Vulcan crew, in 1982 after the Argentine Military invaded and occupied the Falkland Islands, who bombed the airfield runway at Port Stanley, put it out of action, and eliminated the Argentine Air Force from the war.

I arrived at Euan's, by train. My timing was inconvenient. He lent me a spritely sports car, a Ford Capri, and suggested I go off and enjoy myself for a couple of days.

### **Inconvenient for Ron Walker**

With nothing special to do and nowhere special to go, I decided to put the sports car through its paces down the A1 and telephone my friend Ron Walker, the Hymac engineer, when I got close to the exit for Derby. I stopped at a transport cafe near Newark-on-Trent and found the coins for the call from a public booth. Ron at first refused to recognise me. Puzzled, I insisted – *'Ron Mackay! Your Scottish friend from Bucharest!'*

*"Sorry Ron!"* Came his answer, *"it's an inconvenient time. We'll meet up in Bucharest later on in the autumn!"*

His reaction surprised me since he'd always been so friendly in Romania; but there again, my experience of Ron Walker told me he was a man full of evasions and surprises. Living and working in Eastern Europe made you resilient. I put the rejection behind me, had a cup of hot, strong, sweet, transport cafe tea, and consulted my map. I'd go to Oxford, a lovely, if not exactly medieval city, an old city with old traditions.

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Travelling in Transylvania and Moldavia had made me realise how much I felt at peace in old cities. An added advantage was that, since it was university vacation time, inexpensive accommodation would be easy to find and in those relatively deprived days, parsimony was ever my watchword.

### **The “Terriers”!**

I cruised down the A1 with the windows open, enjoying the speed and the breeze. At a roundabout near Grantham I saw a soldier in uniform trying to hitch a lift so I stopped and picked him up. When he asked me where I was going I said, *“South! I’m making for Oxford.”*

I’d done thousands of miles of hitch-hiking in my time and now that I was behind the wheel, felt kindly disposed to those who travelled this way – especially soldiers in uniform. I asked him about his regiment. He was in the Territorials – the Engineers. He was on a special qualifying exercise. He’d left his army camp in Yorkshire that morning and had to get to Brussels in as short a time as possible and using the least possible funds. It was some kind of combined NATO exercise to encourage independence and resourcefulness. Promotion might depend on the outcome.

*“I’ll take you as far as Watford on the A1.”* He was delighted.

I told him about my time in the Gordon Highlanders 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion – also a territorial unit – and we chatted amiably about his training, his current exercise and his ambitions. We were able to go into some detail.

*“What do you do?”* He asked me.

*“I’m a phonetician. I work in Romania,”* I told him.

He froze. *“Romania!”* His face was incredulous. *“Isn’t that behind the Iron Curtain?”*

*“Yes,”* I said, secretly satisfied with the mystery and the romance that the phrase ‘Behind the Iron Curtain’ held for the British. *“Romania’s on the Black Sea, surrounded on the south, west and north by other communist countries.”*

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*"There's trouble over there now, isn't there?"*

*"Russia and its satellites are poised to invade Czechoslovakia."* In the UK we commonly used 'Russia' to refer to the USSR.

He fell silent, faced straight ahead and peered at me out of the corner of his eye.

*"Drop me at the next roundabout, please!"* We were approaching one of the occasional roundabouts that allowed traffic from minor east-west roads to join the A1, the main north-south artery.

*"But I can take you much further south,"* I reminded him.

*"Here's fine,"* he insisted and when I stopped he and the small bag he was carrying were out of the car and gone in a trice. He must, I realised on reflection, have thought that I was a 'player' in his exercise – getting chummy with him by posing as a trained infantryman, then telling him I worked in a communist country, was perhaps a fellow-traveller – a communist sympathiser. His test would be to quickly assess the situation and conclude that he was being wrung for sensitive information about his regiment and his mission.

I was sorry that I'd inadvertently and unthinkingly scared that serious young man and hoped he'd have better luck with his next lift. My two months in the comfort of Britain had taken the edge off my political sensitive. Slightly annoyed with myself, I decided I'd had my fill of speed for one day and so I left the A1 at Stamford, and drove leisurely on minor roads through beautiful English countryside towards the south-west and Oxford.

## **Bletchley Park**

Just outside Milton Keynes I noticed that the oil temperature gauge was showing red. I cruised towards a small garage and stopped. The garage owner came out, opened the hood and found a puncture in the radiator hose. We talked while the engine cooled sufficiently so he could uncup the radiator and replace the hose.

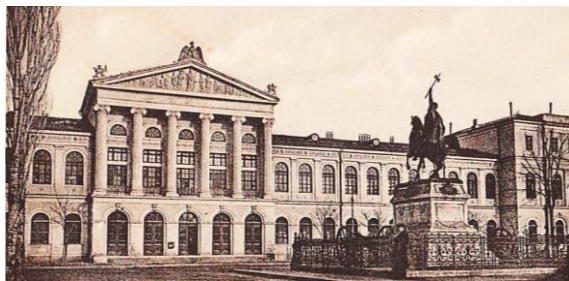
*"Are you on holiday from Scotland?"* he asked.

*"I'm from Scotland but I work in Bucharest, Romania."*

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“Ah, you’re a short-wave radio operator in the Embassy in Bucharest.”

My utter surprise must have shown, because he said, “Don’t worry, everybody knows. This is where you guys train, where you get to play with all the latest gadgets.”

I was totally lost for words. He continued, “Everybody around here knows what Bletchley Park’s used for these days!”

Bent over the engine, he went on to tell me *‘what everybody round here knows’* — namely that between the Foreign Office in London and British embassies around the world, coded communications were sent and received by short-wave radio signals. The technicians responsible for the equipment and the coding and decoding of the signals were trained at Bletchley Park. The specialist technicians, he told me, were also skilled in the detection of hidden microphones and bugs in the telephones and walls of embassies and in senior diplomats’ rented homes in Russia and Eastern Europe.

I knew Bletchley Park as the centre where, during the Second World War, code breakers had successfully mastered the secrets of the German *‘Enigma’* cipher machine. I also knew that there were communications specialists at the British Embassy in Bucharest who transmitted and received coded messages between the Ambassador and London, that they maintained a *‘safe’* room in the Chancery and regularly *‘swept’* the Embassy for bugs.

Shortly after I arrived in Bucharest in August 1967, a senior officer in the British Embassy had authorised one of these technicians to visit my apartment— I never met the technician and wasn’t allowed to be present when he made the visit. All he was able to do was to confirm that my telephone was bugged and that there were eavesdropping devices in the apartment. The news hadn’t caused me any undue concern since there was nothing that the technician *would* do and nothing I *could* do, under the circumstances. Now, here in Milton Keynes, on the edge of Bletchley Park, this village mechanic was calmly telling me far more than I knew about the training of technicians who served the Embassy in the city where I was working!

I paid the mechanic, thanked him and drove as slowly as I dared past the wall that separated the top-secret modern equivalent of the wartime Government Code and Cypher School from the outside world.

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### **Strike command, RAF Waddington**

I enjoyed Oxford and returned to a welcome at Euan's house in Hemswell a couple of days later. I was sorry to have to surrender the flashy Ford Capri! That evening he invited me to accompany him to 'happy hour' at the Officers' Mess at RAF Waddington.

Euan must have lent me appropriate clothes because I doubt if I had with me the dress necessary to be admitted to an RAF Officers' Mess. *Happy Hour* was a bit like an embassy cocktail party only chummier. Drinks, instead of being free, were charged to the officers' accounts.

To the pleasure of his 'men' the Wing Commander and his wife arrived. The 'Wingco' made for the bar and his dutiful wife, spotting a new face, came and introduced herself to me. I gave her my name and in Romanian style, kissed her hand. She was surprised and delighted.

"Where on earth did you learn such courtesy?"

"In Romania."

"Romania!"

"I work in Bucharest." I explained.

She looked at me in alarm. "Bucharest? Romania? Behind the Iron Curtain?" The phrase that conjured up unfathomable mystery.

"That's right, behind the Iron Curtain," I assured her.

Clutching my hand and still with the horrified look on her face, she dragged me over to the bar, "Darling! Darling!" Her voice was desperate, "This nice man is from Romania! Bucharest! Behind-The-Iron-Curtain!" She enunciated each of the four words with emphasis.

"Yes, Darling. That's Euan's brother. It's fine. Not to worry!"

She regained her composure but continued to give me curious glances while managing to avoid me for the rest of the evening.

The following day, Euan took me back to his base. I wanted to understand

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better what he did and if possible see one of the Vulcans he flew in. By then he'd been in the RAF for 6 years but, because we were both fully occupied and many miles apart, enjoyed few holidays and little surplus income, our paths tended to cross only at our mother's apartment in St. John's Wood in London and all too infrequently. He took me to the QRA room – short for Quick Action Alert – where aircrew for one or more Vulcan bombers at any given time were battle-ready twenty-four hours a day.

"We can have our aircraft war-ready and in the air within a few minutes of receiving an alert." Rightly proud.

Euan introduced me to the crew members – all young, hand-selected, highly-trained men like himself. They were dressed in flying kit, reading, talking, playing cards – ready to run to their waiting delta-wing bomber that carried the atomic bomb and head for their target immediately given the signal.

Each of Euan's fellow officers introduced himself and talked with me. One in particular – I wasn't sure if he was a member of the aircrew or not – engaged me in a longer conversation and after a few minutes I became aware that he and I were alone in the room. All the others had quietly withdrawn.

"You've been to Iași recently, I understand?" His tone suggested casual interest.

"Yes," I told him, "My mother and I spent the night in Iași on our way to visit the painted monasteries of Bucovina." I began talking about the painted monasteries but he steered the conversation back to Iași. I told him we'd arrived there late one night, stayed in a hotel, and left for Bucovina the following morning. I told him that we planned to make a trip into the Danube Delta when my mother came to visit later that year or the following.

But this officer wasn't interested in the Danube Delta. He steered the conversation back to the city of Iași.

"You stayed the night?"

"We did – in a brand new hotel!"

"What was the hotel like? Can you describe it?"

This was not, I began to realise, a random conversation about Romanian

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tourism, this officer had something very specific in mind. And so I listened very carefully to his questions and what it was in my answers that interested him. Steel reinforced concrete construction and glass interested him. The dimensions of the hotel interested him—it's height in storeys, its length, its depth. He was interested in its compass orientation; on which sides it had windows, my best estimate of proportion of concrete wall to glass window.

I described the building, its orientation, all its dimensions including glass and concrete as precisely and as accurately as I could. We'd been trained in observation skills in the Gordons. He seemed pleased with how detailed my memory for the hotel was. He thanked me, told me how nice it was to meet Euan's brother. Without Euan's unerring navigation skills, he joked, the Cold War would have been lost to Russia long ago! Members of the QRA team drifted back into the room, we all chatted a little more and then Euan and I took our leave ahead of a shower of good-natured banter.

It was only decades later that Euan was able to tell me why his colleague might have been so intensely interested in that hotel in Iași.

Crews on advanced bombers like the Vulcan, used radar to assist the accurate delivery of warheads to their target. Radar creates a picture of the ground directly below the aircraft and for a significant distance ahead. The picture helps the crew to identify both their exact position and their target in relation to easily identifiable landmarks such as large buildings and lakes. A concrete wall reflects the radar pulse back to the aircraft; a lake does not. A hotel constructed from concrete will give a strong return but rows of large glass windows on one side will reduce the strength of the return. Ideally, the navigation system needs advance intelligence supplied by '*a man on the ground*' to predict what the navigator's radar is *likely* to tell him. The navigator is then able to compare the predicted radar picture with the actual return and so reduce uncertainty about the aircraft's position and guarantee the exact location of their target even if it's some distance away.

Euan's justification for the importance of '*human intelligence*' provided by the simple *man-on-the-ground* to complement '*imagery intelligence*' provided by radar, brought home to me the unromantic nature of the former. The popular image of the

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swashbuckling spy in Ian Fleming's dramatic novels is more often than not, far from reality. The work of an agent who discreetly paces out the length of a new building, counts the windows, estimates the height and confirms its precise location, is far less sensational but likely to be equally or occasionally even more important than the dramatic exploits of James Bond. It also served to remind me that valuable information can be rendered unwittingly if the questioner is sufficiently well-skilled and knows precisely what he or she wants. It was, I reflected, a lesson I would do well to remember when I returned to Romania.

The information elicited from me by that officer in the Quick Reaction Alert room in RAF Waddington would likely have been fed to an intelligence group whose specialty was the creation of 'predicted' radar maps. Such maps would include landmarks previously identified by a human agent on the ground and would help navigators locate their target which, for obvious reasons in the case of Iași, they had never had the opportunity to fly over before.

I took leave of Euan and his family the following day. A day or two after that, the Warsaw pact counties with the exception of Romania, invaded Czechoslovakia and brought Alexander Dubček's reforms to a violent and dramatic end.

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## **Second Year begins**

### **Return to Bucharest**

A few days later, feeling a little trepidation but greater excitement, I flew from London to Bucharest. From the sky, the difference was acute. Looking down on London I saw a brightly-lit, vast and energetic city. By comparison, Bucharest appeared, as the BAC One-Eleven circled to land, as if it were a dimly-lit, quiet, provincial town. I rode in a taxi from the airport through the tenebrous boulevards to my apartment on the corner of Bălcescu and Mărășești, and unpacked my suitcase.

So began my second year in Bucharest. I felt happy to be back home in Romania and much better prepared to meet my new students and teach my new classes at the *Facultate*.

### **My blunder**

That same week, the American Cultural Attaché invited me to a party at the American Embassy to welcome new members of the British Embassy to Bucharest. Relations between the two Embassies tended to be very good. I was happy that Tony and Sheila Mann were still in place. The Manns and the British Consul – and of course Bob the Embassy guard – were dependable points of reference.

*“Ron, I want you to meet two newly-arrived members of the British Embassy!”* Tony and Sheila presented two couples in their 40s. Two reserved, clean cut men with Thames Valley accents. I was a phonetician after all and took pride in identifying what part of the UK British people I met came from! They and their wives appeared to be slightly overwhelmed at the grandeur of the American Embassy and the many guests.

*“Where have you come from,”* I asked to get the conversation going, expecting them to tell me the last overseas country they’d served in.

*“From England.”* One man was spokesman for all four. *“This is our first overseas posting.”*

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Their age and their accents and their *fish-out-of-water* manner told me they were not members of the Diplomatic Corps.

“England? Where were you working?”

The men exchanged glances and the spokesman said, “North of London.”

“Doing what?”

The spokesman looked uncomfortable. “Instructing. We were instructors.”

“Very far north of London?” I asked?

“Not very.”

“Near Milton Keynes?”

The men looked increasingly uncomfortable. The spokesman inclined his head.

“Then you were instructors at Bletchley Park! You’re the new short-wave radio operators!”

The two men and their wives looked stunned. Tony gripped my elbow and led me firmly to the side of the room out of earshot.

*“Ron! What the...! That’s not like you! You’re usually so diplomatic!”*

It had just slipped out. In Britain, my remark would have been laughed off. I would have told the story of how I’d learned, quite by accident, about Bletchley Hall and its training role from a simple village car mechanic who replaced a faulty hose on my car radiator. We would all have laughed at the incongruity between the importance of the information and its improbable source. But I was in Bucharest; back in *Bucharest, Romania*, where nothing was simple, nothing was just ‘*just laughed off*’. The Soviets were at this very moment brutalizing their brothers and sisters in Communist Czechoslovakia. There was some real concern that Romania might be next. I had thoughtlessly blundered.

“I’ve been gone too long. I’d better tune back into cautious mode,” I apologised.

“Damn right you’d better!” Tony glared at me. It was, I believe, the only time I badly blundered.

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## Resolutions

Before returning to Bucharest, I had made up my mind that this year I would make more Romanian friends. I would try to integrate myself into the daily life of the city in order to have a broader social life. Given that I was stuck with the stigma of being a 'Westerner' and therefore an 'outsider' and that the law discouraged Romanians from associating with foreigners, I realised that this resolution was easier to make than to execute. Even if I could accomplish my goal, there could be complications, perhaps even unfortunate consequences, for the people in question, although less likely for myself.

I'd given this matter a lot of thought. In order to eliminate complications for the Romanian, or at least to minimize them, I knew that I could not be proactive; I would have to limit myself to a responsive role. Romanians, I reasoned – both men and women – knew the risks inherent in consorting with a Westerner much better than I did. Hence, if a man or a woman made the first move, I reasoned, he or she had already taken precautions to protect themselves from the *Securitate* and its vast net of informants. Of course they might be part of that system, as Karen had been.

If she were not already an informer – I was already thinking in terms of a girlfriend – she might be persuaded to become one and thereby acquire protection. Or she might already possess immunity based on some factor that I was not even able to imagine clearly – Party membership, family or political connexions – however it was that some Romanians seemed to acquire immunity. My first year in Romania had taught me a lot. More than anything, I had learned that there was much, much more going on under the surface of the daily lives of the people I met than I could imagine. Not having been born and brought up there, I was simply not equipped to understand the intricacies of private-public life.

So, I reasoned, if I were unable to protect a potential friend, all that I was left to protect was myself. Doubtlessly I could, for some misdemeanour real or imagined, be expelled from the country. A greater risk, however, bearing more far-reaching consequences, would result from allowing myself to be manipulated by a woman so

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that she could indulge her desire to leave Romania.

At the Embassy bar, I'd met and talked to the occasional British technician come to install a piece of technology in a Romanian factory. Two in particular I remember were accompanied by their Romanian fiancées. They would, I knew, have left school at 15 and completed an apprenticeship in a foundry or factory. Perhaps, if they were sufficiently ambitious, they might have completed a Lower or Higher *National Certificate* by attending evening classes, attesting to their knowledge and skill. They would live satisfactorily working-class lives in an industrial city in the Midlands. Each had, however, ended up engaged to a beautiful Romanian university graduate with years of higher education and bursting with ambition and expectations for life in the West. These relatively naive technicians were, in my view, being used for a premeditated end. I decided that as much as I would avoid intentionally exposing any friend to danger, to the same extent I would protect myself.

My approach credited Romanians with the capacity and foresight to look after their own interests. By never initiating contact I was offering the greatest protection I could. If they chose to initiate contact I could safely assume that they knew precisely what they were doing. If they asked me to adopt additional protective strategies to help them protect themselves – and me – I would. There was nothing more I could do.

Before the teaching semester began, Ion Preda, as he had done a year previously, invited me to lunch and told me what my teaching assignment was to be for the year. It would be the same – I would have first year students – but instead of my classes being spread across four days, they would be concentrated into three. This fitted neatly into my plans to continue my excursions into the Carpathians and also explore further afield.

Colleagues at the *Facultate* welcomed me back but kept their distance just as they had the previous year – all except two, that is. I had never met either of them before and to my joy they made a point, separately, of introducing themselves and conversing with me.

There was Professor Dino Sandulescu, a scholar some 10 years my senior who

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had just returned from having spent two years in Leeds University where he had written a dissertation on James Joyce. He was three-quarters Romanian and a quarter Greek. Dino was erudite, entertaining and like most Romanians, secretive.

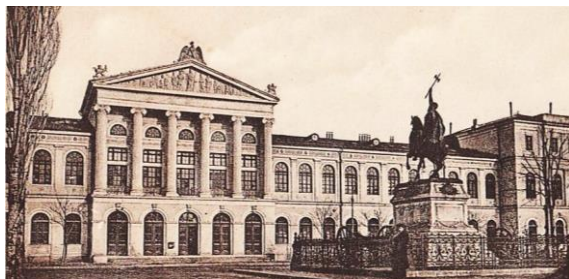
Then there was Harald Mesch – a very serious young man. I don't know why I hadn't met him the previous year. He taught American literature in the *Facultate*, belonged to the ethnic Saxon minority, and came from the medieval town of Sibiu in Transylvania. Harald was no more than a year or two older than myself and by far the most forthcoming colleague I had met so far.

Both Dino and Harald, quite individually and separately, made it clear that they wanted to befriend me. I had learned and become used to keeping the various strands of my life quite separate. Never did I talk with one person about another or even mention the name of a third party. Never did I reveal or pass on information no matter how innocuous it might appear. I simply kept the different people in my life and the different parts of my life isolated, sealed in totally separate boxes and never, ever allowed the contents of one box percolate into another. Romanians were hypertensive to anything at all that might put them at risk. They recognised my caution, appreciated it, and as a result were willing to place a little – perhaps just a very little – trust in me.

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## **American counterparts**

The visiting American professors I had met—Dale-something or other in '67 and Tom Fitzsimons in '68 seemed to have difficulty acting in a way that put their Romanian colleagues at relative ease. Tom found this especially difficult. In his ponderous manner, his blatant failure to understand the need for a minimum of discretion could cause a Romanian colleague to freeze and cringe inwardly, but he failed to notice.

One day, Tom invited Ion Preda and me to the coffee shop on Magheru, used by the Faculty. To my surprise, Ion accepted. Tom talked in a loud, leisurely, drawling tone that hushed other conversations around us.

*"Well, I dunno, Ion, you say that things are like this in Romania but let me tell ya, just yesterday, I was talkin' to Dan – you know Dan? Dan Duțescu? 'Course you know him! An' Dan, he was tellin' me the very opposite. And Leon too – you know, Leon Levițchi – I was talkin' to him and he would disagree with you too. Now what I wanna know is this – how is it that two people, two Romanians, teachin' in the same Faculty, can tell me two completely different things, eh? Tell me, Ion! Go on, tell me! I really wanna know, Ion. I'm serious! I really wanna understand! I really wanna know what makes you guys tick!"*

Ion shuddered visibly, looked at his watch, politely excused himself and fled!

Poor Tom, all puzzlement, turned to me, shook his head and drawled, *"Shit Ron! Did I say sumpin? Do you get these guys? I just don't get these guys! I just don't! Gotta be sumpin' – sumpin' in their diet – maybe that ciorba they eat or the polenta stuff, or maybe it's just the commie way of life they got here! I just don't get 'em!"*

And I would think to myself, *"You bet, Tom, you bet your sweet ass you don't! An' you just ain't never ever gonna get 'em!"*

That is why, or at least one reason why, without being in any way uncivil, I preferred to keep my distance from Tom or at least meet him just one-on-one. On their own turf, in their own company, Americans like Tom were outgoing, generous and delightful.

The other reason I kept my distance from Tom was because he seemed to

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consider himself quite the ladies' man. He was married, but not accompanied by his wife. She may have been happy to be free of him for a year. I noticed that Tom tended to force his attentions on the younger female faculty members.

Women faculty members, at least those who used the Faculty Common Room appeared to enjoy a lesser status than the men. Relative status seemed to be signalled in very subtle ways. One was the area of the Faculty Common Room they made use of. The senior, more prestigious male faculty members took up the area of the room closest to the door; the female professors frequented the more distant part.

When I entered, I hung my coat on the coat stand close to the door, greeted those already in the room and invariably left. The women would never come forward to greet me or talk to me and I took that as a warning that I should respect their privacy. Tom liked to wade through the room and latch on to the younger female professors. One in particular he would make a beeline for and I had the impression that his attentions were not particularly welcome but that he was either unable or unwilling to recognize the signals she was giving him.

Tom knew I could have the occasional use of a car from the Embassy and he pestered me to take him and this young woman on a weekend trip to Brașov.

"How do you know she'll accept?" I asked him.

"I know these things," he liked to display what he considered to be his worldliness.

It appeared that Tom's advances were rebuffed because I ended up taking only him to Brașov and spent the weekend feeling as if I were baby-sitting a particularly demanding and ungrateful child.

I was only a month into my new semester's teaching when one of my students, the most exotic, glamorous and alluring young woman in the class, made an unexpected move.

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## **Failed romance and white wine**

### **Doina**

It was close to the autumnal equinox and I'd been teaching my new classes at the *Facultate* for more than a month. Early one dreary morning as I was walking to class I was thinking about the murky mornings of Old Aberdeen despite that city being on the 57<sup>th</sup> parallel and Bucharest being more than 12 degrees further south on the 44<sup>th</sup>. I arrived at my tutorial room 15 minutes before my 8 o'clock class.

This year's students were as delightful as my previous year's had been. We had bonded well and we were working hard as well as enjoying ourselves. Most of my students were young women but there were a couple of young men and one older man who appeared to be about 30. All were enthusiastic, the women even more so than the men. The only exception was the older male student who behaved dutifully but seldom asked questions and often appeared listless. The other students tended to avoid him. I could understand that at his age – 10 years older than the average – and with his experience, he probably found his classmates immature, even boring, so I tried very hard to relate to him and encourage his active participation. Perhaps as a result of my good intentions, he hung around me more than I wanted, especially during the break when I preferred either to be on my own to think, or with my students and enjoy their banter.

As I walked into my tutorial room that particular morning, I found it dismal. And so, to start the day off on a brighter note, I went to switch on the lights. Just as I reached for the switch, a woman's voice came from the gloom.

*"Professor Mackay, please don't open the lights."*

I started, paused and turned. Doina, the most exotic, the most glamorous, the most alluring student in the class was half-hidden in the shadows.

*"I was just thinking of kissing you!"* Bold, she!

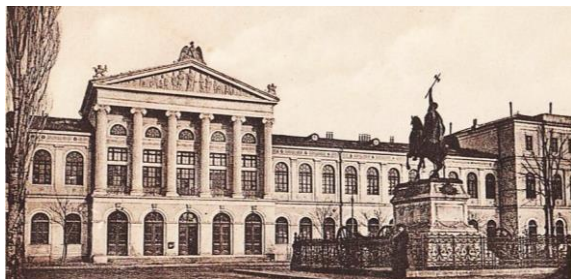
*"Here? Not a good idea!"* Startled, me!

Truth be told, I was slightly intimidated by Doina's very apparent physical

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charms. During class, she had the habit of subtly adjusting her body so that her outstanding attributes were impossible to ignore. I sometimes wondered what a girl like Doina was doing in an English programme. In London or Paris she would have been securely engaged to a successful barrister, or to a junior doctor at the very least, and would never give the likes of me a first, let alone a second look.

*"Then where?"*

Stunned, I could come up with no answer.

*"Invite me!"* Teasing.

And so, to my own astonishment, I did. We dined in Capșa's the following week. Every covetous male eye – and many a jealous female one – was on Doina the entire evening. Now I really felt like 007! She flirted outrageously with me. I was thoroughly flattered even though I knew she was flirting not with 'me' but with some chimera of her own.

After an hour and a half, to my creeping consternation, our conversation began to dry up. I was becoming bored and I suspected Doina was feeling the same. It was a weekday; we both had classes the following morning. I mentioned the hour and then asked the waiter for the bill. Doina leaned intimately across the table, *"You will walk me home?"*

She made sure we kept to quiet streets off the main boulevard. She stopped in front of a row of old, once-grand houses.

*"This where you live?"* I was unfamiliar with such grandeur.

*"No. Close. But you must leave me here."*

I leant towards her for the kiss I'd coveted all evening.

She drew back, *"Not here!"*

I paused. Her face was beautiful and her body as fragrant as a rose. My puzzlement showed because she relented, *"We will! Next time! You will take me to your apartment!"*

What a promise! I said nothing and briefly watched her haunches swing leisurely, seductively, towards her invisible home.

As I walked back to my apartment, I asked myself questions. *Did I really want*

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*an affair with someone who, under normal circumstances, would never give me a second glance? And, "What it would be like for us to have an affair where the only chemistry was physical attraction."*

*"No!" and "Pointless!"* I had little difficulty answering my own questions.

So I never again invited Doina and Doina never again lay for me in ambush. Like me, she had found the answers to *her own* questions. Perhaps, like me, she gave thanks for a lucky escape.

Six months in the future, before the academic year ended, I learned that she had found herself a designer-suited Italian businessman some years her senior, who was expanding his enterprise to Bucharest. She was seen, I was told, driving his bright red sports car around Bucharest and waiting impatiently for permission to leave Romania and marry her Romeo.

*"Good for you, Doina!"* I thought. And after a moment added, *"Good for you too, Ronald!"*

Nevertheless I envied, just a little bit, the Italian entrepreneur his *'aventura'* with the sumptuous Doina.

## **Serious students**

All of my students at the *Facultate* were serious, hard-working and remarkably proficient in English despite never having spoken to a native-speaker in their lives before attending my class. Several were outstanding – all of them women. What made them *outstanding* as compared to just *very good* like the majority was their incredible attention to detail. They wanted to perform not just *well*, but *perfectly*.

Having just spent the two summer months in Bournemouth teaching English to Western Europeans, I'd been able to compare the characteristics of different nationalities. Many students were enthusiastic but fewer set themselves high standards and strove to reach them. The separating factor seemed to be national culture. Spanish students for example brimmed with enthusiasm but generally appeared content to reach a very mediocre level of proficiency and then stagnate in

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comfort. German students on the other hand were less ebullient but strove for ever greater accuracy and precision.

These contrasts showed themselves as soon as students at the Anglo-Continental School in Bournemouth took the proficiency test that allowed the Principal to assign each to a class appropriate to their level – elementary, intermediate or advanced.

Typically, a Spanish student who believed that he or she had been assigned to a level lower than that which corresponded with their self-image – invariably inflated – would, standing toe-to-toe with me and nose almost touching mine, complain vociferously:

*“Meester teacher! Isa beeg meestake! Beeg meestake! I eena helementary – butta helementary eesa very mucha seempel fora me! I wanna hintermediate! Ia no learna nothin’ eena helementary! You eseea? Ia espika Inglisa gooda! Ia espika Inglis!”*

On the other hand, I well remember a German student, fairly representative of her nation, whose proficiency score had placed her in my advanced class. At the end of that first day, she waited until the other students had left, approached me politely and at a comfortable distance of three feet expressed her concern calmly and clearly:

*“Mr Mackay, I am very sorry to have to say this but I think there has been a mistake. I have been placed in the advanced class whereas I think I should have been placed at an intermediate level. There is so much I do not know and so many pronunciations that I have difficulty making. Might it be possible for you to arrange to accommodate me to an intermediate class? I have so much to learn.”*

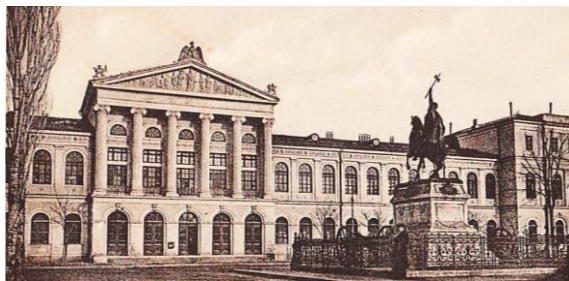
Romanians liked to think of themselves as Latin. I knew the Latin people of Spain and Portugal. Romanians spoke a Latin language – the only Latin-based language that evolved east of Rome. They demonstrated the enthusiasm of the Spanish but Romanians, in my estimation, also showed the discipline, industriousness, self-control, assiduity and persistence of the more northerly nations like the Germans. In addition they possessed a keen capacity for objective self-evaluation and a powerful drive for self-improvement.

Every time I heard Romanians say they were like the Spanish – whom I knew

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very well, or the Italians whom I knew less well, I believed they were selling themselves short. I felt that what they really wanted to say was that they had the educational and cultural standards of the very best of the West but for historical, political, nationalistic and ethnic reasons they were unable to cite Germany as the more appropriate standard for comparison. There was not a single student in my classes who could not have competed favourably with his or her counterpart in any British university.

### **Outstanding students**

The three outstanding students in my class were very different in looks personality and character.

Astrid, was a quiet, modest, dark-haired young woman who seldom met my eyes, undertook her tasks very quietly and produced near-perfect work. 'M' was Astrid's antithesis; she conducted herself in a self-assured manner, had an open, smiling face and clear bright eyes, showed charismatic leadership among her peers, and constantly surprised and impressed me with her quick mind and sharp intelligence. The third, Liliana was totally unlike either Astrid or A. M., indeed she was unlike most other students, men or women. She cared not a jot for her appearance, had a mind like a steel trap, an impressive memory, an enormous capacity for learning—she was teaching herself Japanese in her spare time so that she could be hired by the Government to host visiting Japanese businessmen—and she always produced work for me that was double the required length. However, she possessed few social or interpersonal skills.

Most of my students were not yet 20 years old and radiated the enthusiasm and freshness of youth. All appeared to get on very well together and showed amused tolerance for one another's foibles, including Liliana's eccentricities. There appeared to be little or no jealousy and they were constantly making fun of one another. Whoever happened to be the butt of the current joke never took offence but cheerfully joined in the fun even if the laughter was at their expense.

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## **Trips to a *Lipoveni* community and Murfatlar**

I went walking in the Carpathians most weekends but when Ron Walker occasionally came to Bucharest, I would adjust my plans. Ron, together with his girlfriend and I, would drive in his car to the little *Lipoveni* community of 2 Mai on the Black Sea coast. It was Ron's favourite spot. On one of these trips to the coast Ron invited along Dave, a Scottish engineer who had been overseeing the installation of a food-processing and canning plant in the north of the country for more than a year. He spent a month in the UK and a month at the factory site.

I had never met Dave before – probably because I still didn't haunt the open bar at the British Embassy every second Thursday. He must have been in his late 50s – a very practical, very fit Scot from Glasgow who had left school at 15, and completed his apprenticeship as a millwright. He had begun to work with a British business that planned, sold and installed fully-mechanised systems designed to start with fresh fruit or vegetables and end up with the canned product. As the company grew and began to export its equipment and expertise, Dave became their chief trouble-shooter. He had never married. He had a longstanding, very pleasant, Romanian girlfriend, Anca – a divorcée in her 40s – who lived in Bucharest and with whom he regularly spent weekends and holidays. At Anca's urging they had become 'engaged' but as neither of them knew much about how to go about marrying in Romania or acquiring exit papers, their relationship seems to have settled into a comfortable friendship.

The five of us would leave Bucharest late in the afternoon on a Thursday and reach 2 Mai late the same night.

All of them – Ron and his girlfriend Eva and Dave and Anca liked Murfatlar wine – a very pleasant medium-dry white wine that more often than not '*no longer existed*' when they asked for it in Bucharest restaurants. The wine was made from grapes in a region close to the Black Sea coast. One day when the five of us were walking through 2 Mai together and talking about finding a place to have lunch, we passed an unusually attractive shop window. Most shop windows had little or nothing on display but this one looked like an Italian delicatessen – filled with crusty

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bread, great balls of pale cheeses and – and this is what caught our attention – bottles of Murfatlar!

The girls were ecstatic! *“Look at the price! That’s a fraction of what we’d pay for Murfatlar in Bucharest!”*

*“That can’t be right!”* Dave the pragmatist.

*“It’s right!”* Eva and Anca insisted. *“It’s inexpensive because it’s produced in this region!”* Ever optimistic.

*“Let’s go in and ask,”* Ron suggested. And so we did.

*“That Murfatlar in the window – is it really just 12 Lei a bottle?”*

*“Twelve Lei the bottle, that’s correct,”* the shopkeeper confirmed.

Ron and Dave were for buying a bottle each along with some bread and cheese and heading for lunch on the beach. The girls, overawed by the low price, insisted they buy a full case. So they bought a full case, stowed it and the bread and the cheese and some glasses bought in the same store into the trunk and we drove to the beach close-by.

We spread our coats on the sand and sat down to enjoy lunch despite the inclement weather. The girls handed round bread and cheese. The wind gusted and the cheese became gritty.

*“Hurry up and open that wine, Dave! We’ll need it to wash down the sand!”*

Dave finally got the cork out of one of the bottles, poured, and glasses with a straw-coloured liquid, were handed round.

*“Cheers!”* Each of us took a large gulp to rinse the grit down. There was an explosion of coughing and spluttering.

*“Oțet!” – “Vinegar! Yuk!”*

*“This wine is off!”* All agreed.

*“Open another bottle!”* Dave did; poured.

*“Cheers!”* The explosion of coughing and spluttering was repeated.

*“See!” – said Ron. “I knew there had to be a catch. The price was too good to be true!”*

Eva and Anca were affronted. *“No!”* They insisted. *“No catch! The wine’s off!”*

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We'll take it back. The shopkeeper must replace it with good wine!"

And so Ron re-corked both bottles, placed them back in the full box, walked up the beach to the car and drove off back to the delicatessen with Eva and Anca. Meanwhile, Dave and I sat on our coats with our backs to the rising wind and spat sandy grit.

When they returned, Ron was triumphant and the girls sheepish. Each carried a bottle of water. They had presented their complaint to the shopkeeper and thumped the box of wine down on his wooden counter. Equally indignant, the shopkeeper had pointed to the back label over which a purple stamp announced that the contents were 'Vinegarised Murfatlar'.

"The shopkeeper accused us of being illiterate!" The girls were affronted.

And so our lunch consisted of gritty bread, gritty sand and gritty water. None of us were satisfied.

The box of 12 bottles of wine, 2 opened and 10 virgin, was deposited at a convenient spot on the roadside on our way back to Bucharest.

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## Making Friends

The so called ‘Warsaw Pact’ invasion of Czechoslovakia – *Operation Danube* – in August of ‘68 was, as far as I was able to gather from my reading of the British press, a Soviet invasion. The military divisions from Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria that took part in the invasion, were integrated into the Soviet Armies commanded by generals of the Soviet Armed Forces.

When I returned to Bucharest shortly after the invasion, I thought I could feel the subtle changes that the event had brought about in Romania. There was a rising level of uncertainty among Romanians about their immediate future. Ceaușescu’s government had refused to allow the Romanian army to participate and even denounced the invasion as ‘aggression’. For some time, Romania had, for trading purposes, been cozying up to traditional enemies of the USSR – China and Israel. Israel had captured almost 100 Soviet-built tanks when it invaded Egypt the previous year in 1967 and it was rumoured that Romania had been supplying Israel with the necessary spare parts for these tanks. Would the USSR use Romania’s defiant behaviour as the excuse for a full-scale military invasion from the north? In such an event, Romania would receive no help from the West. It was surrounded by only Warsaw Pact countries that had already collaborated to invade Czechoslovakia. In the eyes of the USSR, Romania might be nothing more than an obstinate and unruly neighbour. To preserve its own existence, the Soviet Communist dictatorship had already shown it was ready and willing to stamp out the slightest spark of dissidence within its own territory as well as beyond its borders.

Day by day after my return to Bucharest, I continued to follow events by reading Victor Zorza’s column in the Guardian at the British Embassy and other newspapers at the reading room of the American Embassy. I tried to read the local Romanian press and watched the news on the television set in my apartment. No clear picture for Romania’s future was emerging. My experience had taught me that any attempts to draw parallels with superficially-similar events in other parts of the world were futile. Romania – and its fellow Communist countries – each seemed to have its

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own logic, its own brand of *common sense* that was impenetrable to an ingénue like myself.

The greatest changes I experienced – but they may, in fact, have been totally unrelated to *Operation Danube* – was that two colleagues in the *Facultate*, quite independently, showed a willingness to befriend me.



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## **Dino Sandulescu**

“Professor Mackay, please excuse the awkward timing. I am a fellow-professor here in the *Catedra*.” He used the Romanian word my colleagues used to refer to the School of Foreign Languages. “My name is Constantin George Sandulescu but you may call me Dino.” He addressed me in a beautifully-modulated, deep, self-assured voice that any BBC announcer would covet.

Dino was slim, several years older than myself, distinguished in formal, dark, double-breasted suit. Even with his slight stoop he towered over me. His spectacles drew my attention to his eyes – wise, lively, unafraid. In the impeccable English used by all my colleagues, he expressed his pleasure at meeting me and suggested we have a coffee together later. Since I spent most of my time alone – whether in Bucharest, or hiking in the Carpathians at weekends – I was more than willing to hear someone say they actually wanted to speak to me. Moreover this year, I had decided, I would respond to every overture made to me.

We met after class, in a busy coffee-shop on the main boulevard. It was a coffee shop I avoided because, through the open door, I often saw colleagues there. I had learned, from experience, that if I entered they invariably excused themselves after a very few moments and left. Having no wish to embarrass or compromise any of them, I simply avoided inflicting my company on them.

Dino and I sat at a table sipping Turkish coffee and talked for at an hour as if we were already friends. He explained that we had not met before because he had spent the previous two years in England. It occurred to me as he told me about his literary interests and the dissertation he had just written on Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* at Leeds University, how much I missed simple, informal, human contact.

That hour’s conversation showed Dino to be a well-educated, well-read scholar of a kind I had seldom met outside Romania. Not given to small-talk, he brought up and pursued very profound and complex matters involving literary criticism, philosophy, communication theory and cybernetics. His mind moved rapidly and he frequently stopped in mid-sentence leaving me struggling to complete it. I was

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flattered that he appeared to assume that I could follow his simultaneous, multiple lines of thought and sudden digressions.

Despite a good degree that had covered English and Spanish literature, English and Spanish language, moral philosophy and general psychology, I was far less well-read than he was. Like many educated Romanians, he preferred to read literature in the language it had been written in—Romanian, French Italian and German. I was gradually beginning to appreciate that Dino was an educated person rather than a person who had acquired an education. In Scotland, at least the Scotland I knew, we talked of my generation ‘*getting an education*’ as if I were somehow *myself* first and education were a mantle that I could add on top of *me*. Many Romanians I had been meeting since my arrival in the country in the autumn of 1967, struck me as quintessentially ‘*educated people*’ rather than simply persons who had added a cape of education to their being.

I immediately liked Dino. I liked his enthusiasm, his willingness to sit and converse about matters important to him in a busy cafe and pay me the compliment of assuming they were also important to me. Before we left, he wanted to know exactly where my apartment was. I gave him the address and described the intersection where my building stood. He listened carefully and told me he was familiar with that location.

“Are there any distinctive shops close by?”

I told him that there was a *Gospodina* on the ground floor of my apartment block—a shop that sold ready-made food. I very seldom made use of it, preferring to cook from scratch for myself with what I bought from the peasants’ market. I also told him there was a baker’s shop across the road where I liked to buy, on the occasions that I could find it, ‘*pâine Graham*’—as close to a whole-wheat loaf as I was able to find in Bucharest. I liked ‘*pâine Graham*’ for another reason—it bore a familiar Scottish name!

Dino took the telephone number of my apartment and promised to call me. He wanted to show me a translation of ‘*Giacomo Joyce*’ that he had just completed. He appeared to assume I knew what *Giacomo Joyce* was, but I hadn’t the faintest idea.

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The following day my telephone rang. *“Bună dimineața Profesorul Mackay!”* I immediately recognized Dino’s clear voice. I was about to greet him but he intentionally overrode me – *“Profesorul Mackay, ai nevoie de a cumpăra pâine Graham – acum!”* “You need to buy a loaf of Graham bread, *now!*”

My mind raced. I was used to reading between the lines when Romanians spoke. I knew there was a concealed message for me but was uncertain exactly what it was. When a Romanian sent you a message you either got it or you did not. If you got it, you were elevated in their estimation. If not, your capacity was suspect.

*“Acum?”* I repeated, playing for time. *“Now?”*

*“Imediat!”* He insisted, *“This very minute!”*

The penny dropped!

Quickly I donned shoes and coat, left my apartment, walked down the stairs and stepped out onto the street. At the corner, the lights took forever to change. With virtually no private cars, there was seldom any traffic at all but Romanians did not jay-walk and I had learned that if I behaved in every way like a Romanian, I drew less attention to myself.

On green, I crossed Bălcescu and walked half a block to the baker’s shop. Dino was standing there looking at the empty window but did not raise his head. When I was within twenty paces of him he turned and began walking to the trolley-bus stop and waited. I caught up to him but he gave a barely detectable shake of his head. I knew I was not to recognize or talk to him. He let the first trolley-bus go and mounted the second. Allowing a couple of passengers between him and me, I followed. In a loud voice he asked the passenger standing next to him, *“Comrade, does this bus go as far as Cișmiugu Gardens?”* and got the reply, *“It does comrade!”* So that’s where we were going! To the beautiful Cișmiugu Gardens that I knew and enjoyed so much.

At a discreet distance I followed Dino around the gardens, past the seated men playing silent games of chess. Eventually he sat down on an empty bench, raised his head and indicated that I should join him.

*“Buna dimineața, Profesor Mackay!”* He drew a thin soft-covered folio out of his brief case explaining, in Romanian, as he did so that this was a pre-publication,

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proof version of *Giacomo Joyce* about to be published by Faber and Faber. Joyce had written, but never published the 16-page manuscript more than fifty years earlier. It was a love poem in which he tries to enter the mind of a 'dark lady' with whom he had apparently had an extra-marital affair. Dino was very excited about this about-to-be-published posthumous work. He had obtained the printer's proofs before he left England a few days previously and told me he had sat down immediately and translated the entire work. He had already extracted a promise from one of the Romanian State presses that they would publish his translation right away.

"My translation and the Faber and Faber edition of *Giacomo Joyce* will appear simultaneously!" He could not have been more proud of the literary coup he was about to bring off! "The Romanian version will beat all other languages to the press!"

He made no mention of his call, the coded message and the precautions he had taken before we finally spoke in the gardens. I fully understood that had I failed to understand his message or any of his precautions, Dino would simply have written me off. That was simply how things worked in Romania at that time, given the circumstances. Had I not learned well in my first year in the country, we would never have developed the profound trust, mutual respect and solid friendship that began that September of 1968 in Bucharest and continues to this day.

That day I had no idea of the adventures that lay ahead for us both in Sweden, the UK, Canada and Monaco.

## **Harald Mesch**

Harald Mesch, also a colleague at the Facultate, approached me in a more cautious way than Dino had done. He waited until I left the building, followed me until I turned the corner onto Rosetti and then caught up with me as if by accident on Magheru Boulevard.

Harald, about 27, was very Germanic in looks and manner. He had fair hair, heavy features, and an athletic build on a solid frame. He stood several inches taller than my meagre 5'7".

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“Welcome to the *Facultate*, Professor Mackay. Can we talk?”

Since he had shown the initiative, I was delighted to make time for him. I suggested a restaurant where I occasionally had lunch about half a kilometre in the general direction of my house. I had never bumped into any faculty member there nor seen anybody I knew. I'd tasted my first *ciorba* in that restaurant shortly after arriving in Bucharest and went back sufficiently often for the waiters to recognise me and give me a menu without my having to beg several times for one to be brought. Service in Romania was notoriously poor.

If Harald explained why we had not met during my first year in Bucharest, I've forgotten the reason. We talked about our university teaching. When he spoke to me he chose his words very carefully and listened with equal care when I talked. I was used to being assessed, checked out and scrutinised. It was what Romanians did when they first met me and I appreciated the reasons for their circumspection.

His specialty was 20<sup>th</sup> century American poetry – EE Cummings, Wallace Stevens, Carlos Williams, Carl Sandburg and Robert Frost. My courses at Aberdeen University hadn't included American poetry but I had read much for myself and had emigrated to the USA in 1964 when Robert Frost was made Poet Laureate and loved Frost's work. That set us off to a good start.

He told me that he was married and his home was in Hermannstadt, a Saxon town in Transylvania. When he described its location – I realised I knew it by its Romanian name, Sibiu. I knew that name for two reasons. The hikers I met in the Bucegi talked enthusiastically about the *Munții Făgărașului*, the highest mountains in the Southern Carpathians. The place to start from, they agreed, was one of the villages on the road between Brașov and Sibiu. These hikers talked of peaks a uniform 2,500 metres in height on the southern flank of the Olt Valley. The mountains bore romantic names – *Moldoveanu*, *Negoiu*, *Urleanu* and the ringing *Vânătoarea lui Buteanu*.

The other reason I knew the name Sibiu was because it was the major town north of Râmnicu Vâlcea in the Olt River valley. On two occasions the previous year I had visited and stayed in the one of the few functioning Romanian Orthodox convents – Horezu – just east of Râmnicu Vâlcea and I planned on taking my mother

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there when she came for another visit in 1969.

Harald was a proud Saxon. The colonization of Transylvania by Germans, he told me, began in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. King Géza II of Hungary invited Saxons to settle in Transylvania in order to defend the south-eastern border of the Kingdom of Hungary. The colonization from Germanic lands to the west, continued for well over a hundred years. The colonists spoke Franconian dialects and they survived, Harald was proud to say, to the present day. In addition to 12<sup>th</sup> century Franconian German, his mother-tongue, he also spoke fluent High German, Romanian, English and French. Most educated Romanians regarded multilingualism as a perfectly natural part of education and scorned those who spoke only a single language.

Harald said he would like to show me Hermannstadt and promised to let me know in advance when a suitable weekend might be for him. I received invitations so infrequently from Romanians, for obvious reasons related to their self-protection, that I accepted his promise with enthusiasm.

### **Domnul Zamfirescu**

Once, the previous year, instead of waiting for an invitation to be issued, I had made the reprehensible mistake of thoughtlessly inviting myself on a day trip with a Romanian, Domnul Zamfirescu. That taught me an abiding lesson.

The gentlemanly Domnul Zamfirescu was the official translator at the British Embassy. With his dignified bearing and perfect upper-class English accent, I mistook him for the British Ambassador the first time we met. Well-dressed, always with a pleasant expression on his tanned face, he invariably greeted me pleasantly and made few minutes conversation if I bumped into him on my occasional visits to the Cultural Attaché, Tony Mann.

He never failed to ask about my excursions into the mountains. He too, had been a keen outdoorsman in his youth although now his passion was for fishing. He told me he made regular trips with rods and lures to the shallow lakes that drained the Argeș River just a short train-ride to the north-west of Bucharest.

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I'd been in the country perhaps two or three months and was feeling frustrated by my failure to make close contact with Romanians. So, one day, when Domnul Zamfirescu greeted me in the Embassy and told me he was going fishing that weekend, I seized the opportunity.

*"May I come with you?"* I asked.

He was silent for a moment and then soberly agreed. I should meet him at the Gara de Nord at 0600 hours on Saturday morning. I should dress warmly. He would bring fishing equipment and food. I could tell that he wasn't overly enthusiastic about my forwardness.

At 0600 I was waiting for him at the Gara de Nord. He was dressed for a day in the country with heavy shoes, heavy pants and an old, worn, but beautifully-tailored, tweed jacket. Separately, we bought tickets, boarded an almost empty train and sat together in a vacant compartment. An hour later we alighted at a tiny village station on a desolate plain under an overcast sky and began to walk.

Within half an hour we arrived at a cluster of wooden sheds round a pier on the shore of a lake. I could see a score of wooden cobbles tied up to the pier. Domnul Zamfirescu exchanged polite greetings with the man in charge of the boats and we were helped into one.

*"Can you row?"* He asked me.

*"I can,"* and took the oars while he sat in the stern arranging his fishing rods and tackle. He gestured in the direction he wanted to go. With the oars, I steered and rowed.

As children we had learned to row small boats on ponds and lochs in Scotland. As a student, I'd also worked as a grouse-beater on Highland estates and often spent the weekends with one or other of the gamekeepers fishing or shooting rabbits. And so with strong, deliberate and uniform strokes I headed into the cold wind that was blowing off the water and by the looks of things would blow all day. When we'd reached a point he liked, he asked me to ship the oars and we drifted on the broad expanse of water. He handed me a rod with a spinning reel and a lure on the line. I began to cast from the prow while he balanced the boat and cast from the rear.

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“What are we fishing for?” I asked.

“Pike!” I was delighted. I’d never seen one, but the ghillies I’d worked with in Scotland told me how fierce they were.

We rowed and cast and rowed and cast for a couple of hours without as much as a single bite.

He suggested a break and produced sandwiches and a flask and, with backs to the wind, we ate and drank to warm ourselves.

“I admire your jacket,” I told him. “It could almost be Harris Tweed.” His face lit up. He undid his jacket buttons and showed me the label inside. It bore the characteristic *orb* – the symbol given by the inspectors of the Harris Tweed Authority to authentic tweed, hand-woven by islanders in their homes on the Outer Hebrides of Scotland.

“It is real Harris Tweed!” I showed my astonishment. He was pleased that I had correctly recognized the *orb* of authenticity.

As we ate, we talked. In a very matter-of-fact way, he told me that his family had owned large estates in the region known as Maramureș in northern Romania. Their family had maintained their estates, their many employees and their home in the capital, by logging their forests, milling the lumber in their own sawmills and selling the boards to the construction industry. From the age of 12 until he was 18, he had been sent by his parents to attend a minor public school in England as a boarder. Later, he had studied economics at London University and, when he returned to Romania, became the manager of his family’s lumber business in the forested valleys of his beloved Maramureș. After the Second World War, the Communist Party took over the government in Romania, the family estates were confiscated and those who had had businesses and employees were branded exploiters of the people. He had had difficulty finding work until he had been assigned – he was vague on precisely how this came about – as the governmentally-approved interpreter and translator to the British Embassy.

“My jacket that you correctly identified as genuine Harris Tweed was made for me in Saville Row in 1935!” Said proudly. No doubt he had worn it for my benefit that

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day and I was pleased to have recognized it and to have given him the opportunity of telling me a little of its history, and his own. Always understated, Romanians limited their communication to the minimum.

From time to time we saw other boats each with two or sometimes three fishermen. But then I became aware of a boat with a single man at the oars that appeared to be closing in on us over the dark, choppy water. Domnul Zamfirescu's attention was on casting and trolling and so I felt I had to draw his attention to the approaching coble. When he saw it and the back of the man at the oars, he appeared disconcerted.

At a hundred yards, the single rower turned and hailed him by name. Domnul Zamfirescu returned the greeting rather awkwardly, I noticed, and without much enthusiasm.

*"Yesterday you cancelled on me! You told me you couldn't come fishing today. And what do I find – I find you fishing with someone else!"* The speaker called above the wind in Romanian. He was a gentleman similar in age to Domnul Zamfirescu and he eyed me curiously. Domnul Zamfirescu made no attempt to introduce me and the gentleman made no attempt to introduce himself to me. 'Par for the course,' I thought.

*"Imi pare foarte rau!" – "My sincere apologies!"* Domnul Zamfirescu gestured in my general direction as if my presence were all the explanation needed. The boatman gave me one last penetrating look, nodded his acknowledgement, and rowed off to fish alone.

*"My friend and fishing companion of many years,"* Domnul Zamfirescu gestured helplessly. *"I called him yesterday. I told him I was unwell and couldn't make today's appointment. I thought he would cancel."*

I felt Domnul Zamfirescu's desolation. I spent the rest of that cold, invigorating day feeling guilty and swore never again to impose my company uninvited on a Romanian. It was a sound resolution that served me well in that complex and often perplexing country.

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## **Making more friends**

### **Dudu Popescu**

Try as I might, I'm unable to bring to mind how I met Dudu Popescu. Dudu was an engineer, probably in his mid 30s, with a ready smile but an appearance of fatigue and resignation. I may have met him and his girl-friend Gabriela – Gabi for short – in Sinaia on one of my walking excursions in the Prahova Valley or an acquaintance in Bucharest may have introduced us but however we came to know each other, we became friends.

Dudu was one of the few Romanians who would allow me to speak exclusively in Romanian. Most others would switch to English the moment I got into difficulties. Dudu put up with my bad Romanian because, as a speaker of just Romanian and Russian, he had no option, but we enjoyed each other's company. He liked the fact that I appreciated the city of Bucharest and knew many of its parks very well. He, Gabi and I often walked in these parks, watched the chess players and, if the weather was good – which was often, sat each with a glass of beer and a plate of gherkins and cheese at one of the outside tables by a lake.

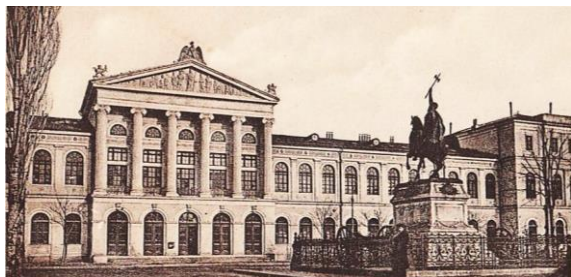
Dudu was one of the most open Romanians I met during my two years in the country. It seemed as if he understood how detached my life in Bucharest was from normal human society and had decided to make up for that by showing me how the average Romanian lived. He invited me to his apartment in a block of flats not far from mine. His block was on the main boulevard that I took daily to the *Facultate*. His was a tiny bachelor apartment – what I would have called a bed-sitting room – no more than 16' long and 8' wide. At the far end was his bed and a bookcase, in the middle two easy chairs, and the space to the left of the door was divided into two by a wall that separated a minute sink and cooking area from a tiny bathroom with a shower spout directly over the water closet.

Dudu showed his sense of humour by laughing uproariously when I commented that his bathroom arrangement proved that Romanians were more

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efficient than the British – Romanians could undertake all of their morning's activities in the same place and at the one time!

He told me that he had been an engineering student when the USSR successfully put the first satellite into orbit in 1957. The achievement was widely talked about around the world and of course in Romania. A fellow-student initiated a discussion about the relative scientific capabilities of the USSR and the USA asserting that Sputnik proved the USSR was superior. Dudu and several other students expressed the view that the USA was just as, if not more capable, and would soon better the Soviet Union's triumph.

It turned out that the student was an *agent-provocateur* for the *Securitate*. He informed on Dudu and his fellow-students. They were accused, tried, found guilty and interned in a labour camp for two years. Only two years after their release, were they admitted back into their engineering programme. Since graduating, his career had been hampered.

Like most Romanians I met, Dudu assumed that I was under surveillance by agents of the *Securitate* at all times and my apartment and phone bugged. He developed a set of procedures should we want to contact each other. I had to use not my own but a telephone in the street. I had to learn to slip several fingers into the rotary dial at the same time. Watching agents, he warned me, were trained to identify the number I was calling from across the street if I dialled using a single finger. If he was home and picked up, I simply gave him a number. That number had to change frequently and represented, when multiplied by 2, the precise number of minutes within which I would knock at this apartment door. If he could accept my visit, he doubled the number I gave him; if not, he uttered the single word, "Nu!" – "No!" He used the same procedure to contact me at my apartment. We could never enter either his building or mine together. One of us must enter independently first; the other circle the block and make his entry alone.

Dudu and Gabi liked to visit my apartment – probably because of the relatively larger space they were free to move about in. I also cooked meals that they enjoyed. The fish or meat or chicken, I bought, as they did, at the peasants' market but I had

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spices like curry that they'd never tasted before and a table to eat at. They liked music and I'd brought back with me from the UK a radio-cum-cassette-tape-player and some Beatles' tapes – *Hey Jude* had just been released. They loved the music and we would have a glass of Johnny Walker from the British Embassy Commissary and spend the evening laughing and talking in the darkening apartment. Dudu had a private source who supplied him with fragrant white wine and occasionally I would trade him one or two bottles of whisky for a small demijohn of the wine when he was able to get it.

My mastery of Romanian and my social life improved immeasurably because of my friendship with Dudu and Gabi.

One day in the early spring of 1969, after I had known Dudu for several months, he announced that he had procured a ticket for a State-organized tour to Istanbul. The Romanian Government was under pressure to show the West that it was not a closed country or a prison and had begun to organize a small number of tours to other Eastern European countries and even to cities in countries outside the Warsaw Pact group such as Paris and Istanbul. It was extremely difficult for a Romanian to purchase a place on such a tour and clients were on waiting lists for months and months before being accepted, or rejected without any explanation. The cheapest of these trips was to Istanbul which was just a relatively short flight to the south-east.

Such trips to the West were not without their risks for the Romanian Government. Every week the CIA-funded, propaganda station called *Radio Free Europe* would read the list of the names of Romanian nationals who had defected and been granted political asylum. Both the Romanian and the Soviet Governments jammed the broadcast but so ineffectively that I was often, with patience, able to pick it up.

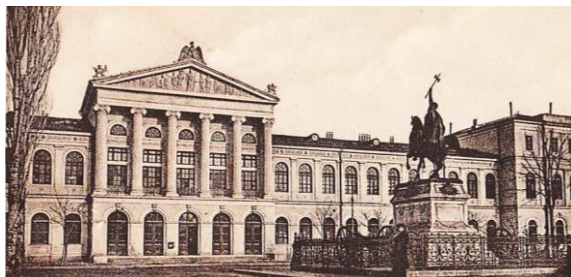
Dudu's excitement increased weekly. Now he had the ticket, he told me. And with ticket in hand he could apply for a passport. He applied for and obtained his passport. For a couple of weeks we didn't see each other. If I called his number from a street phone (with multiple fingers disguising the number I was dialling) and said, "15!" or "20!" Dudu always replied "Nu!" I'd learned that I could never hope to understand everything I encountered in Romania and so I'd adopted the capability of

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accepting odd behaviours without having to understand in detail what lay behind them. I hoped I might see him before he left on his 10-day trip.

My phone rang. "Five!"

"Ten!" I answered. And Dudu was at my door 10 minutes later. I opened the door but he silently gestured me to follow him and left. I put on my shoes and a jacket, closed the door and walked down to the street. Dudu boarded a bus. I followed. He alighted at a park and so did I. After a circulating walk he sat down on a bench and I joined him. He came straight to the point.

"You know I leave for Istanbul with the tour tomorrow evening."

"I do."

"I've spent the last two weeks selling everything I own." Dudu looked at me his face impassive.

He wasn't coming back! I nodded.

"I'm going to defect in Istanbul. I'll request political asylum. My request will be accepted and I'll be allocated to a camp for displaced-persons, within Turkey. There I'll apply to enter the USA. If I'm lucky, I'll be admitted after a year or two." Like a good Romanian, he'd done his research, exercised due diligence. I nodded.

Then he looked at me with pain in his eyes. "I dare not tell Gabi. I want you to explain to her when she finds out!"

"Me?"

"You can make her understand, Ron."

I felt some of the hurt he was feeling. In a country where you could never know who was an informant, you dare not risk confiding even in your lover!

"I will, Dudu!" We shook hands. He walked away. I sat and watched the forlorn figure fail to get on a crowded trolley bus and resign himself to a lonely walk back to his tiny, now empty, apartment.

For the next few days I listened for Dudu's name on Radio Free Europe but didn't hear it. The CIA was thorough and milked every ounce of propaganda they could from gleefully broadcasting the regular lists of defectors from Eastern European countries to the West – or, in the case of Turkey to the East. I was afraid that something

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had gone wrong but couldn't imagine what.

I waited five days. Then I left my apartment, went down into the street, found a phone and rang Dudu's number using multiple digits to dial. I let the phone ring. It rang and rang. And then it was picked up. I was so surprised that I couldn't talk at first and then found my voice.

"Ten!" If it was a Securitate agent who had picked up he would not respond correctly.

"Twenty!" It was Dudu! In Bucharest!

I waited 20 long, painful minutes before knocking at his door. He opened just far enough for me to see a grim, sleepless face. He gestured that I should leave; that he would follow shortly. At a distance of 50 yards I followed him to a park. After a circular walk he sat down and minutes later, I joined him. He looked at me, despondent.

"I got as far as Otopeni airport. I joined the tour group. We passed through immigration and customs and then came a final security check. They searched each of us thoroughly. I was carrying my Romanian address book. They confiscated it. Securitate was called. Uniformed agents told me I was carrying forbidden material. I showed them that all it contained were the names and telephone numbers of my family and close friends in Bucharest – all Romanians. Nevertheless, they refused to let me board the plane and sent me home."

I was flabbergasted. "Why?"

Dudu shook his head as if blaming himself. "The night before I left, there was a knock at my door. Very late. After 11 o'clock. I didn't answer. The knocking continued. When I opened the door there was a civilian standing there with his ID in his hand. His ID identified him as an officer of the Securitate. He said he wanted to talk to me. I agreed, prepared to talk. But he insisted on being admitted to my apartment. He told me that what he had to say was confidential. I could not refuse him entry.

He came in, looked around but made no comment whatsoever about my apartment being empty. I'd sold everything I could sell and had given away the rest!

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Only my small suitcase stood ready in the corner. We stood there, awkwardly.”

“When you reach Istanbul, Domnul Popescu, we would like you to watch your fellow tourists continuously during the trip and report any anomalous behaviour to us on your return. Agreed?”

“What did you say?” I immediately bit my tongue for asking such a foolish question.

“What could I say, Ron?” I could see the defeat deep in his eyes.

“After I agreed, he told me how to contact him when I got back, and he left. I couldn’t sleep all night and it wasn’t just because I was lying on the floor! Late the following afternoon I presented myself at the airport.” He shrugged. “I’ve told you what happened.”

There was nothing I could say to alleviate his misery.

“Now I’ll never again be given permission to leave!” He looked desolate. “I still have my job and I still have Gabi!” He tried to smile. “I just have to buy my furniture back before Gabi finds out what I planned to do. Nobody knows, absolutely nobody, that I’m still here. Except you.” He knew I had already learned that confidentiality was paramount in Romanian friendships.

I offered him all the Romanian Lei I had saved. He accepted and I returned to my apartment to fetch them.

‘M’

One morning after my last class, I left the *Facultate* to walk home as usual. I noticed that M. A., one of my very best and brightest students, fell-in 20 paces behind me when I left the building. There seemed to be an unspoken rule that forbade my students walking with me or I with them in public, so I thought nothing about it. We were simply going in the same direction. But I was a fast walker and she had, I decided, to be adjusting her pace to remain that fixed distance behind me. To check if our directions coincided by mere coincidence, I turned off the boulevard, at random, onto side-street. Five minutes later, ‘M’ was still behind me.

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## Romance

*'M' is the random initials I have chosen for this young woman in order to protect her identity. 'D' is the random initial I have given her mother.*

### 'M' and 'D'

The side-street I'd chosen was quiet. I turned and stopped. 'M' caught up with me and smiled.

"I wanted to speak with you, but not in the *Facultate* and not on Magheru Boulevard." The explanation was friendly. Her English was excellent. She had an open, intelligent face and clear, warm, alert eyes that twinkled with amusement. Cheeks flushed from the exertion of keeping up with my habitually fast pace, she positively glowed with health. I noticed she still carried just a little late-teenage puppy-fat.

In class, 'M' was a delight. In addition to being attentive, highly intelligent and often a step ahead of most of the other students and sometimes of me, she had a quick wit and could see humour in everything. It was clear that despite being one of the best students, her companions liked her. She never tried to score points at the expense of anyone else; she was a true team-player; a natural leader. Although in her late teens, she gave the impression of possessing wisdom beyond her years. Like her fellows, she was anything but staid and her observations sometimes had all of us laughing out loud. I think she was popular with her fellow-students because she was naturally outstanding, never thrusting to impress.

Together, we continued to walk away from Magheru Boulevard. Although the side-street was quiet, walkers drew less attention than couples who stood still.

*"I love your classes. We all love your classes, Professor Mackay!"* I thanked her. My classes were the social highpoints in my week. Besides providing me with pleasant human company, my students taught me a great deal about the lives of young Romanians and how they spent their free time. They were not unlike I and my fellow-

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students had been in our first year at Aberdeen – our studies came first, our hobbies and interests second and our social lives confined to a few hours at the weekend.

'M' asked me where I had studied and how I had learned so much. I knew I was being flattered and enjoyed it. I told her a little of my background – two years of experience working and travelling in Europe, Morocco and the Canary Islands before I went to university; my third year of studies at the University of Madrid. Arriving at Idlewild Airport in New York as an immigrant; leaving the US and abandoning my *green card* a few months later because I'd been obliged to register for the draft and would almost certainly have been drafted to serve in Vietnam had I stayed. Then back to Aberdeen to complete my degree.

'M' knew about the Vietnam War. She had a cousin in California – slightly older than herself and he might have to serve unless he won an exemption by being admitted to graduate school. Because she was interested, I went into a little more detail of my encounter with the draft board. The Americans were giving the last, and ultimately futile, thrust to win the war in Vietnam. I presented myself, as demanded by the official letter, at the military office in Boston, Massachusetts to register. Hoping to win a reprieve, I explained to the contemptuous, overweight officer that I had already done military service in a special unit.

"Special training?"

"Winter warfare." She looked blank so I added, "Our role was, in small groups, to create havoc behind enemy lines." Her eyes lit up.

"Weapons?"

"All weapons used by the British infantry – rifle, rocket launcher, mortar, machine gun, bren-gun, grenades, hand-to-hand combat-" She interrupted me.

"That's exactly why we want you, Sir!"

'And that's exactly why I'm going to leave the US, Sir!' I thought. And I did leave.

Eventually, 'M' explained the reason for having tailed me from the *Facultate*.

"My mother wants to invite you to have tea with us one afternoon next week." My surprise must have been apparent. 'M' continued.

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*"My mother trained as a concert pianist. She used to teach at the music conservatory here in Bucharest. Now she works for Romanian State Radio. She also offers master classes to pianists prior to their giving recitals abroad."* This information didn't help me to understand why 'D's' mother might want to invite me to tea. But I knew better than to ask. Had 'M' wanted me to know, she would have told me.

"None of the students and none of the professors should know," she warned.

"I'd be delighted to accept your mother's invitation," I said. "And I understand the need for discretion." I listed the afternoons I was free the following week.

'M' smiled her pleasure and returned towards Magheru. I walked back to my apartment, mulling over what had just happened.

Experience had taught me that there was nothing for nothing in Romania. All encounters were transactions of one sort or another; there was always a *quid pro quo*. I had no objection to friendships as exchanges so long as the objects of trade and the rules of the game were transparent. Romanians invariably adopted a win-win approach; they knew the importance of both parties ending up satisfied.

I couldn't for the life of me fathom why a teacher of piano would want to invite me to tea.

A couple of days later 'M' again followed me. She caught up with me at the same point as she had a few days earlier. The appointment for tea was set. I had to memorise her address but not write it down. A. M. explained exactly where the street was. I would find her waiting for me by the gate bearing the street number at precisely 4 p.m. on Thursday.

At a quarter to four the following Thursday, I was smartly dressed and buying flowers in the same florist's shop in Piața Romana as the day I had visited Madame Cartianu some 14 months earlier. To the florist's delight I asked for 11 roses. She congratulated me on my improved command of Romanian. Then I had her wrap a 12<sup>th</sup> rose separately. She nodded knowingly.

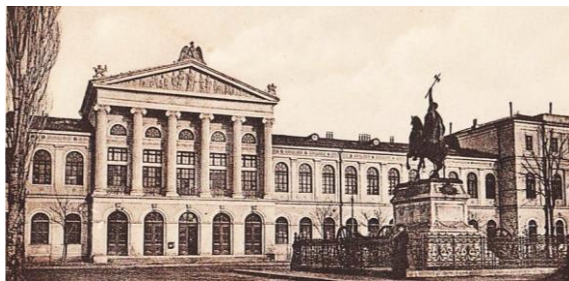
"For your sweetheart's little girl!"

"Ați ghicit! Pentru fiica iubitei meu." – "You guessed correctly!" I congratulated her. I was flattered that she thought I might have a lover.

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Leaving the florist's, I crossed the Piața when the lights turned green for pedestrians and wondered what lay in store for me at 'D's' tea party.

I paced myself so that I arrived at 4 p.m. precisely. The house was in a quiet street. All the houses were set back from the road and looked grand but in need of maintenance, some desperately. There were two wrought iron gates—one large double gate that appeared to have served as the entrance for carriages and later cars, and a narrow gate for people.

As I approached, 'M' opened the smaller gate, gave me a huge smile when she saw the roses, and put her finger to her lips for me not to speak. I was used to being asked not to speak. My accent and the many mistakes I made in Romanian attracted attention to me as a foreigner and no companion wanted to be identified as associating with a foreigner.

We approached the service door of the house and I could see that this had indeed been a grand home thirty years earlier. It even had what appeared to be mature cedar trees, small abandoned lawns and gardens round it. 'M' ushered me through the service door and again raising her finger to her lips led me along a corridor with 10' ceilings, up a set of stairs, along another corridor with equally high ceilings and paused in front of a tall wooden door. "Here!" she indicated, silently.

Closing the door firmly behind her, 'M' ushered me into a very large and elegant room at least 30' by 30' with a set of large windows on one wall and an alcove in another. The remaining two walls were taken up with book cases, paintings and framed black-and-white photographs. The warm-coloured, hardwood floor was well-worn. At one end was a highly-polished grand piano and at the other, an equally well-polished upright. The 12' ceilings had decorative mouldings. A chandelier hung at the mid-point. Under the chandelier, 'D's' mother stood, poised, elegant, beside a table set with a china tea set and polished silverware.

She greeted me in both Romanian and English and asked me to call her 'D' She was a slim, good-looking, woman about the same age as my own mother – in her early 50s. I got the impression that her eyes missed nothing. She offered me her hand in a way that suggested I should kiss rather than shake it. I hope I had the presence of

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mind to fulfil her expectations. It was not uncommon to see a well-dressed man kiss the hand of a well-dressed woman at a concert or at the theatre. I have even seen that beautiful gesture made in broad daylight on the main boulevard.

When we meet a person for the first time we rely on innumerable cues to help us to decide – all within a few fractions of a second – who we think they are. We use context, gender, age, dress, bearing, speech. We draw on what we already know about the person – their training, profession, place of work, position, hobbies. We use their voice, pronunciation, bearing, their demeanour and the look in their eyes.

Like so many Romanians I met, I could immediately appreciate that ‘D’ was someone used to a refined existence. There is a kind of person whose quality of life, while fortified by material possessions, is neither wholly conditioned by nor entirely dependent on them. Hence, if some or most, or perhaps even all, of the material props are taken away, confiscated, removed, or withheld, these individuals find ways to retain the richness and continue to live their lives with dignity and value. They draw first on inner resources, then on the beauty of nature, on music, paintings, literature, friends and conversation. The dignity and depth of their minds ensures that their spirit is cared for and in turn nourishes everything around them, home, family, workplace and even other people.

‘D’ immediately struck me as that kind of person.

Switching from Romanian to French, then English and back to Romanian, she told me very briefly about her work as musical director with the State Radio. With noticeably greater enthusiasm she told me about preparing musicians for major performances. A little, a very little, about her background.

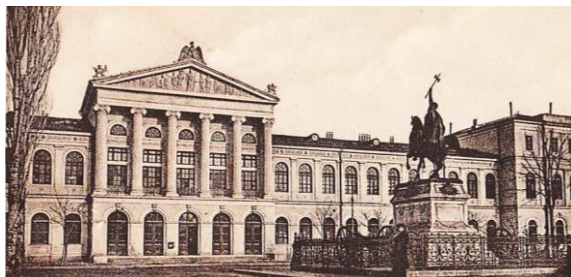
“I am from Timișoara, a Hungarian-Jewish family. In Budapest I studied piano at the conservatory. My husband was also a musician. I was appointed to teach at the conservatory here in Bucharest. This-” she gestured widely to embrace the whole house and garden, “was our home. Then came the War. After the War, the Communist Party took over. My husband,” she paused, “My husband died. I lost my position in the conservatory. Now I am a musical director for State Radio.” She shrugged as if all this were normal.

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D's voice was dispassionate; no drama, no bid for sympathy. The voice of a proud survivor.

'M' poured tea. 'D' offered me first, *flódni*—pastry layered with black poppy seeds, plum jam, crunchy walnuts and sliced apples and then *profiterol*—tiny chocolate-covered pastries filled with cream. I drank tea, ate as little as was polite— not having a sweet tooth— and listened, fascinated.

'D' and 'M', it was clear, were more than mother and daughter; they were best friends. 'M' even addressed her mother by her first name.

'D' asked me about her daughter as a student. I found the question embarrassing with 'M' sitting right there at the table beside me. To my relief, 'D' answered for me. She listed all of 'M's' talents—some I had seen for myself, many I hadn't. My nodding head seemed to satisfy her. 'M' smiled openly, recognising the truth in D's laudatory description.

'D' asked me about myself and I understood that she wanted to hear particularly about my academic and intellectual pursuits. I'd had a thorough grounding in English literature from Beowulf to the post-war poets; I knew British drama and the contemporary theatre; I had read widely in English and in Spanish. These credentials along with my position as Exchange Professor—I ran into a little difficulty trying to explain that the post my counterpart from the *Facultate* had taken up in Cambridge was not in fact 'mine'—appeared to satisfy 'D'

"Success for a student in the *Facultate* depends on being the very best!" She said and I could only agree with her. "I would like you to tutor 'M' in English literature using the English language so that she can improve in both simultaneously." 'M' smiled broadly at me. So this was the purpose of the invitation!

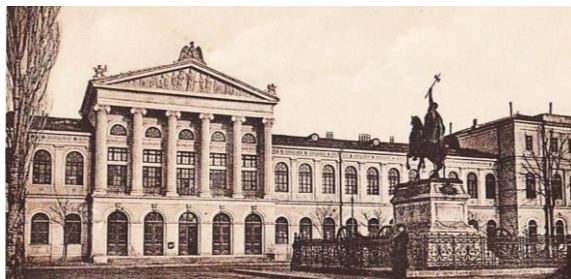
"Of course," 'D' added, "I will pay your fee."

By the time I left their home as quietly and as unobtrusively as I had entered—for this elegant room with the alcove which contained their divans was indeed their entire home—I had, to my surprise, agreed to serve as M. A's tutor. Two hours every second week. Because the weather was still good, we agreed to meet for the first time at a table in the restaurant on the lake in distant *Parcul Herăstrău* where the tramline

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ended.

As I walked the mile or so back to my apartment, I asked myself questions. How had I allowed myself to be persuaded so easily? How cavalier had I been in dismissing the matter of a fee. Above all, I asked myself why didn't I regret what I'd done?

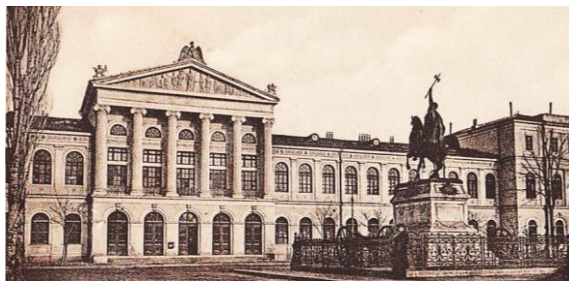
I failed to reach any satisfactory answers. Two weeks later on a sunny afternoon, I was riding in one clattering cars of the dual-carriage tram on its way towards the terminus at *Parcul Herăstrău*. 'M' was riding in the other.



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## 'M' and 'D'

### Quality of life

For those who have something to say and the desire to say it, the task of mastering a foreign language is easier than for those with little to speak about and no feeling of urgency. 'M' was eager and had interesting things to say – but never too much – about herself, her family, the *Facultate*, life in Bucharest. She talked enthusiastically about what she was studying for each of her courses and what she was reading for pleasure. And I was a willing listener and commentator.

I gathered that 'M' and 'D' had a vibrant group of intellectual friends who talked about the content of the books they lent each other, attended and discussed films and theatre together and, always, always, listened to music. Perhaps because all of these things were hard to come by in Romania, they were highly prized, attended to attentively, pursued, valued and appreciated. In Western cities the range of stimulating cultural options is so great that the population can take them for granted, dismiss and reject, disparage and ignore them. Not so in Romania.

The Claude Lelouch film *A Man and a Woman* came to Bucharest. It tells the poignant story of Jean-Louis, widower and single father, and Anouk Aimée, a single, widowed mother who meet through their children and form a friendship that turns into a romance. In Aberdeen or Edinburgh or London it would have been one of a choice of many films that people might have gone to see and they would certainly have given it a miss if it were not in English. In Bucharest, where the acquisition of foreign languages was a social expectation, showings were sold out. Those who had seen it discussed its every scene in great detail and those who hadn't lined up for tickets. 'M' discussed the film with me and recounted the discussions about it that she and her mother had had with their friends without mentioning who the friends were. Every detail of the narrative, the drama, the characterisation and the photography was reflected on, assessed and critiqued. It was a nutritious bone to chew on and to revisit with pleasure.

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An American drama series called *The Fugitive*—*Evadatul*— was shown on Romanian TV every Thursday evening for weeks. On that evening, I observed, there was nobody on the streets, nobody in the restaurants. Everybody stayed at home or visited somebody else's home to watch the American serial.

Through 'D's' eyes, in the naturally-guarded, understated anecdotes she told, I earned a deeper insight into the vibrancy of intellectual life in Romania and how the essence of a penetrating anecdote could be captured while withholding personal details and thereby compromise no one.

We walked, talked, and held hands as the leaves changed colour.

'M' was very forthright about her life. Like most of the girls in her class at school, she had had a boyfriend from the time she was 16. She chose him because he was the most intelligent boy in the class. They went off to State-organised camps together for two joyous summers. But the previous summer, M.'s cousin had come from California for a visit between high-school and university. It wasn't uncommon for cousins in the West to marry cousins in the East so that they might obtain a visa and leave the country. The best time for this kind of liaison to occur was after graduating from high-school because the exit visa did not come with a huge financial penalty. However, if the individual leaving the country was a university graduate, then the contracting spouse had to repay to the State the entire cost of that university education before an exit permit would be issued.

'M' did not tell me in so many words that it was with the prospect of contracting marriage that brought her male cousin to visit from California immediately after she graduated from high-school. Romanians were often intentionally inexplicit, crediting the listener with the capacity to fill in the gaps. They had enjoyed a summer affair together with D's full approval; after all, a prudent Romanian protects her assets and takes precautions to ensure that they are not appropriated by another. Marriageable relatives in the west were an asset to be safeguarded.

However, no marriage was contracted, no exit visa applied for. Now 'M' was a student in University with no regrets, only pleasant memories which she shared without embarrassment.

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The leaves fell and the late autumn blooms lost their colour and shrivelled. The parks lost their appeal for most people but not for us. The first snow turned Herăstrău Park into even more of a wonderland.

'M' had raised the hood of her coat – her only one that was slightly too small for her – and her eager face was framed in green corduroy lined with white felt that created a halo about her head. Her cheeks were aglow from eagerness and the cold. She smiled with happiness at the beauty of the first, pristine snow and raised her eyes to mine. We kissed.

And quite naturally, in comfortable silence, we took the tram-car all the way back to my apartment.

### **Apprehension**

One day after my afternoon class, 'M' and I, at separate ends of the trolley-bus, were heading – as I thought – to my apartment. I was about to get off at the usual stop, where the Bălcescu and Mărășești boulevards meet. 'M' caught my eye and gave an almost imperceptible shake of her head; neither I nor she should alight. Plans changed as a matter of course in Romania, and were, I was aware, even more likely to change without explanation to protect an affair. So we continued to ride the trolley-bus several more stops. I assumed that 'M' had spotted someone who knew her, wished to avoid them, and that we would simply alter our plans and visit Parcul Tineretului – another of Bucharest's many beautiful, quiet parks where we occasionally walked.

'M' alighted just before the boulevard took a swing to the right towards where the city began to give way to countryside. I alighted from the door at the other end. But 'M' didn't, as I expected, head for the entrance to Parcul Tineretului. Instead, she entered a small lawned area separated from the road by black wrought-iron railings separating a Doric-looking building from the boulevard. The building, I reckoned, must have backed onto the park itself. On my solitary walks, I had passed this peaceful-looking corner and puzzled over what it might be, but I'd never dared to enter.

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The boulevard was almost empty and I had closed the distance between us to 20 paces. A. M., strode through the open wrought-iron gates and made for the entrance to the Doric building, mounted the steps and disappeared inside. I sped up to keep her in sight. I was slightly nervous and had absolutely no idea where I was being led. I trusted 'M' as much as I trusted anybody in Romania and knew she wished me no harm. What concerned me was what a person could do when they were subject to insupportable pressure. As I entered the domed building I passed a uniformed man – a guard or custodian. Without breaking my stride I bade the guard a curt "*Good day, Comrade!*" as I assumed 'M' had done.

When I was a teenage delivery boy, after school hours, for a pharmacist in Dundee I had learned that a nod and a confident step that suggested you knew where you were going could get you into most buildings without being challenged. The guard said something as I passed but I kept on going towards the steps to the basement down which I'd seen 'M' disappear.

As I descended the circular staircase it got darker and I ended up in a poorly-lit corridor that had no daylight and no exit. In my mind was something I'd been told about the Lubyanka being an underground prison.

I was relieved, somewhat, to see 'M' waiting for me in the corridor. Her smile lit up the darkness and put my mind as much at rest as I was willing to permit.

*"Do you know where you are?"* She asked.

*"I don't have the slightest idea where I am,"* I admitted. She saw the unease in my face.

*"Look!"* She drew my attention to the stone walls. Now I could see that they were divided up into what appeared to be uniform blocks with writing on them. *"You see! Now?"*

I shook my head. I had no clue.

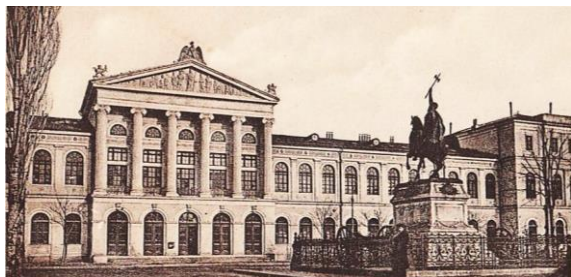
'M' went over to one of the blocks. She touched the bronze letters.

*"This is my father,"* she said. *"This part of the crypt is for Hungarian Jews."* And she read me her father's name, his date of birth and the date of his early death when he was in his 30s. *"This is the crypt of the Cenușa, where the ashes of the cremated are placed*

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*behind remembrance plaques."*

My apprehension slipped away and guilt replaced it. Even I, a Westerner, I reflected, was vulnerable to the seeping fear that was given body and intentionally nourished by the State. Fear promoted for the State's own ends.

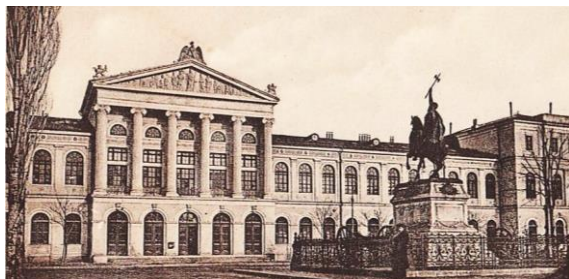


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## **Skiing at Sinaia**

When the Christmas holidays arrived, I let 'M' know that I was going to Sinaia to ski. I'd booked myself a room in the villa I often used as a base for hiking. She told me that she and 'D' also planned to spend a few days in Sinaia at a villa she had access to through her work with the State Radio.

"We'll arrive on the Tuesday and in the evening we can arrange to bump into each other near the ski-slopes at the time they turn on the lights."

Tuesday evening came and after dinner I walked back to the ski-lift. The air smelled of snow to come. 'M' and 'D' were two hundred yards away, walking along one of the paths in my direction; daughter and mother, arm in arm. I exercised the appropriate caution. No acknowledgement on my part before they greeted me.

Unhurriedly, they approached, arm in arm, leaning in to each other, sharing their warmth, protecting each other against the sub-zero temperature. I could recognise details now, coats, woollen scarves wound round heads, cheeks red, breath smoking in the cold as they talked, laughed. And now I could see eyes; D's slightly unfocused, relishing the moment, perhaps reliving happier days from her past. 'M's eyes, now smiling directly into mine. No gestures, no voices raised in greeting, only 'D's' eyes, breath white in the air.

As we took slow, steady steps through the creaking snow towards one another I sought to detect the slightest message in 'M's eyes. Must I go by unrecognised and unrecognising with no more than the impersonal nod that people who pass in isolated places offer to allay one another's fears?

No! A warning was there, I could detect it, but it seemed to me that it was other. Perhaps consciously perhaps unconsciously, 'D's unblinking look was cautioning me.

"See! I must adapt to my environment but I don't dissemble. Here I am, 'M' and 'D', both of me! Note well! We are intertwined, interdependent, wholly protective, with a single-double consciousness finely tempered on the anvil of necessity and pragmatism. You do well to be cautious, watchful, you with your single unproven mind. This is me, us; pay close heed; adjust, tune your unaccustomed senses to capture

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the unseen, the unexpected, the un-bargained-for.”

So much could be transmitted in a look.

And then the explosive, *“Ce surpriză plăcută! Ce noroc! Pentru a atinge atât de neașteptat!”* – “What a surprise! We had no idea you might be here!”

And the kissing – warm lips on cold hands, cheeks. We walked, one on each arm, as darkness fell and went to have a glass of hot mulled wine. I walked ‘M’ and ‘D’ half-way back to the villa where they had their rented room and then all the way back to my own, trying to put into words ‘M’'s unspoken message.

### **A very special villa**

In Sinaia, my solitude had come to the notice of the maid who cleaned my room in the villa where I slept and ate. Always a morning person, I went for walks at dawn but tended to return to my room after dinner to read and then sleep early. The other reason for my relative isolation was that as soon as Romanians recognised that I was from the West, they became inhibited and I was made to feel uncomfortable. I enjoyed my own company and I enjoyed reading, so by going to my room early, their interests and my own were well served.

“There are many parties and celebrations in the evenings,” the maid told me “You should go out. Join the fun. Enjoy yourself.”

Whatever excuse I made to her must have sounded unconvincing because the following day she told me that I was invited to a party in a villa from which, every night, came the sounds of music and dancing. She also cleaned there and had somehow obtained the invitation for me.

“I am from the West,” I told her, “I’m British. That could be a problem.”

“It’s no problem. Not for the couple who have this villa. I told them and they want to meet you.”

I was surprised and curious. And so, that evening I came back from the slopes, took a shower, changed, and made my way to the villa with the lights and the music. The maid had told me that there would be food and so I cancelled dinner.

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I went up the wooden steps to the porch along with others – mostly couples my own age or a little older. I was met by the same smiling maid, in a crisp new uniform. Without a word, she escorted me to meet my hosts. Sică and Anica Stevoiu, in their late 20s, greeted me warmly.

“We heard about the solitary Englishman! We wanted to meet you.” I was in the company of the kind of people I had never met before. They introduced themselves using both their given names and their surnames.

To give myself time to stake stock I explained that if I called them *Transylvanians*, I would be making the same mistake as they were making by calling me *English*. The ensuing discussion took several minutes and by the time the matter was resolved to everybody’s satisfaction, I felt less uncertain about my new environment.

Sică and Anica examined me but not as if assessing how I could be useful to them – rather the opposite – they appeared to want to serve me, to offer hospitality, introductions to their friends, to make me feel at home. They had no reservations about my being from the West. There was food and drink aplenty. In my villa, meals were scanty, more plate than food. But not in Sică and Anica Stevoiu’s villa.

Sică excused himself and went off to greet new guests. Anica wanted me to herself and drew me aside into a quiet corner. She asked me lots of personal questions in a friendly, even motherly, sort of way. The expression on her rather lovely face suggested that she couldn’t imagine a person coming to Sinaia and spending the evenings alone in his room. Sinaia was for mixing, dancing, laughing, having fun.

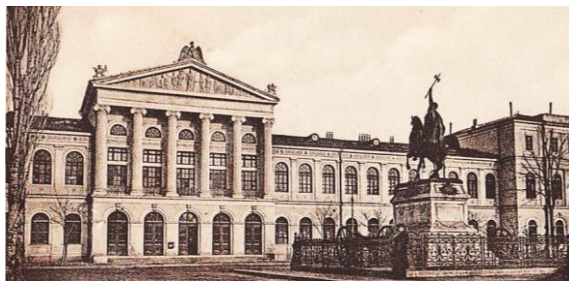
By this time, with 18 months in the country, I’d come to trust my intuitions to a great extent and decided that Anica wasn’t Securitate. In the room, I had, I was certain, spotted Securitate agents. They remained low-key but made little attempt to mix. Whereas the guests were dressed informally the agents kept their suit jackets on – to conceal their pistols, I was sure – and tended to stand silently by the doors and the staircase without mixing and occasionally exchanging low whispers with one another.

I had a feeling similar to that I’d experienced when ‘M’ had taken me to the

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crypt of the *Cenușa* and before I understood where I was. In this villa, I was out of my depth with few firm points of reference. I saw things I recognized but I couldn't put them together to come up with the whole picture. Key elements seemed to be missing.

Like most Romanians I met, Anica was highly intuitive and seemed to guess that I was bewildered. With her body disconcertingly close to mine, she proceeded to explain.

"My father was a director of national security."

It was with enormous difficulty that I displayed no overt reaction. Over the past 18 months I'd done my level best to avoid, hinder, frustrate and obstruct the Securitate and now, here I was, in a beautiful villa in the Prahova Valley with my beloved Carpathians rising above us, in the company of the daughter of one of the directors of that detested institution and to boot – on the point of helpless infatuation.

She went on, "My father died, but my mother and I and the family continue to enjoy privileges."

Some of these I could already see; I would find out there were many more.

When, a couple of days later, I told the Stevoiu's I was going back to Bucharest, Anica insisted I not take the train.

"Our driver has nothing to do. I will have him take you back!" She refused to take no for an answer.

That's how I came to be speeding across the Wallachian Plain that separated the Prahova Valley from Bucharest in the plush back seat of an enormous, shiny, black *Chaika*. The *Chaika*, a Soviet-made saloon, was the preferred limousine of Nikita Khrushchev. He liked the *Chaika* so much that he gave Fidel Castro one as a personal gift. Khrushchev also decreed the *Chaika* the obligatory car for serving Soviet ambassadors. It had leather-upholstery, yellow curtains, fold-down tables and reading-lights. Anica's *Chaika* also came with a taciturn driver who wore a cap and treated me respectfully as a valuable *Tovariș*, a fellow-comrade!

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## Scholarships

### My task

Tony Mann, the Cultural Attaché at the British Embassy invited me in for a meeting. He was busy and so came straight to the point.

“The new bilateral cultural exchange between the UK and Romania has been accepted by both countries. A new feature allows for one or even two undergraduates to complete their degree in English at a British University, all expenses paid: travel, university fees, living and clothing expenses and spending money. This will take effect in October 1969 about 9 months from now.” This was good news indeed! But Tony went on.

“I want you, Ron, to begin to draw up a short list containing the names of your best students. I’ll forward your list to the scholarships committee who will make the final decision. In addition to their being outstanding students they must be able to cope successfully with life in a British university. We want those we send to be happy and successful. By the middle of the spring semester, I need three names and your word that they have given their approval to allow me to put their names forward for consideration.”

A sudden thought occurred to me – my drawing up such a list could present me with a dilemma. Tony saw my hesitation.

“What’s wrong, Ron? Don’t you think this is a great opportunity?”

“I may have a conflict of interests, Tony,” I was going to have to tell him.

“How so?” Tony and I appreciated and trusted each other. We were on good terms.

“I’m having an affair with one of the best students in the class,” I admitted as casually as I could.

Tony looked at me, raised his eyebrows and then looked back at the papers on his desk. He pondered for a few moments.

“Look Ron, you handle life in Romania very well. I know that you’re well

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respected both by your colleagues in the *Facultate* and by the officers serving in this Embassy. I know members of the US Embassy who also respect you." I was flattered but was still concerned.

"Be totally objective," he went on. "I can help you draw up the criteria candidates must meet. Then using the criteria, draw up a list of the top four or five students. Obtain the approval to be nominated of at least three. Give me the list unranked. The final decision has nothing to do with you—it's entirely up to the committee. We'll no doubt have additional information to go on—from the Dean and from Madame Cartianu. All right?"

"Yes, all right, Tony. Thanks for the vote of confidence." I was gratified.

"You don't think your friend's an informant for *Securitate* do you?" He asked. Tony knew all about the Karen business from my first year in the country.

"I've learned that in Romania, you can never be really certain about anything, Tony," I answered truthfully. "Believe me, I've asked myself that question many times and, based on the evidence I've collected, I would say that she's not an informant for *Securitate*."

Although I didn't mention this to Tony, I was under the impression that this second year in-country, *Securitate* had appointed nobody to inform on me. I liked to think that they'd learned enough about me during my first year and had decided that I posed no threat.

"Good," he said. "Because if you thought she were we would automatically eliminate her. We can't make it too easy for *Securitate* to place agents in the UK."

I repeated that I believed she had no links to *Securitate*.

"Fine, I trust your judgement," said Tony and added, "Don't tell me her name. It's better I don't know."

I left Tony's office, relieved. On my way out, I exchanged news about my recent hiking activities in the Carpathians with the wind-burned fisherman Domnul Zamfirescu, and then a few words of banter with the British guards, who were cleaning their shotguns, and began my walk home.

Back in my apartment, I began the task of drawing up criteria to determine the

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suitability of the students to study in the UK. Tony and I refined the criteria and over the following few weeks I observed my students very, very carefully. In addition to English proficiency and related matters we also decided to consider personality and the social skills necessary for a young person to live and study alone in a foreign country. The successful Romanian student would have to compete successfully with British students following the same courses.

I decided to say nothing at all to 'M'

After a month, I'd identified four excellent students I believed would succeed academically and socially in any British university. Now I had the difficult task of approaching each of them separately, telling them about the scholarship, have them think carefully about it, discuss it with their parents, and let me know if I had their approval to pass their names to the Cultural Attaché at British Embassy. The task presented logistical difficulties because I normally had no contact with my students outside of class – the one-evening at Capșa's with Doina and the affair with 'M' were the exceptions.

## **Astrid**

I decided to approach Astrid first. She was a reserved, quiet, modest young woman, who contributed thoughtful comments to class discussions, had a near-perfect command of English and, I thought, had the inner resources and determination to succeed in a British university.

As chance would have it, when I turned up early for class one morning, she was sitting alone at the table in my seminar room. I greeted her and then told her I had something serious to talk about and immediately began to explain the matter of the scholarship. Astrid became agitated.

"Please do not speak to me here!" She begged, "I can meet you at the National Museum of Art half an hour after class." I agreed. "Look for the room with the Nicolae Grigorescu paintings."

So, after my class and the smiles and the goodbyes were over, I packed my

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briefcase and left the building. Instead of turning left, as I usually did, onto Magheru Boulevard, I crossed the boulevard with the help of an extremely efficient traffic policeman. I always found him highly entertaining—he conducted the pedestrians and the traffic with as much energy and aplomb as if he were conducting the George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra. I made my way to the Muzeul Național de Artă al României. It had been the royal palace before the Second World War and its grandeur never ceased to impress me. I'd visited the gallery many times with Karen the previous year and was familiar with its Brâncuși sculptures and its beautiful collections of paintings.

I was distracted as I walked to the art gallery. I was wondering how to present this proposal to Astrid in simple terms that made it clear that I did not have the final word. I found her in the hall admiring the Nicolae Grigorescu paintings.

We began to talk quietly as we walked. I outlined the nature and conditions of the scholarship; told her that if she agreed, she would be on a short list and a committee that did not include me, would make the final choice. She let me finish without interrupting and then regarded me very seriously.

"Professor Mackay," she looked rather sad, "I very much appreciate your considering me for such a scholarship." She paused and I knew she was going to refuse but I couldn't imagine why. "I cannot let you put my name forward. My national identity card contains information that would exclude me." She could see that I was puzzled. She drew her identity card from the wallet in her briefcase. It contained a small head-and-shoulders picture of her as well as her full name and additional information, numbers and codes.

"This card shows that I'm the daughter of a Hungarian. In addition to belonging to an ethnic minority, before the War, my father was a capitalist. He had a factory and employed people. That is recorded here and is an additional black mark against me. I count myself very fortunate to be admitted to the *Facultate* and I will try to graduate with as high marks as I can so that I may have a good job. But it would not be wise of me to attract attention to myself by having my name put forward for this scholarship."

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I looked at her – all 19 years of her – and realised that behind every sweet face of probably every one of my students lay histories of hurt, hardship, pain and suffering that I could know nothing about.

As so often happened in Romania, I had difficulty knowing what to say, so I said nothing. I hadn't been aware that there was any institutionalised discrimination against the minorities that made up the Socialist Republic of Romania. For a brief moment I imagined what 'D's' reaction might be when finally I approached her about the scholarship.

Astrid and I continued to stroll from hall to hall looking at the paintings and saying little. We entered an empty room from one direction and Petru, the older male student in my class, entered from the other. He came to greet us as if the encounter were a coincidence. As soon as he appeared I remembered having seen him a couple of times as I walked from Pitar Moș to Piața Revoluției fifteen minutes earlier. And then images of having spotted him in other unexpected places on odd occasions came to mind. I felt a little sorry for Petru. I'd come to the conclusion that he felt like a fish out of water among the 19-year-olds in the class and so I did my best to be kind to him and make time to speak to him whenever he initiated contact.

After he joined us Astrid became silent. Then she made an excuse and escaped, leaving me stuck with Petru.

I wasn't in a very congenial frame of mind as a result of Astrid's negative reaction to my invitation and the depressing news that, embedded in the national identity card, was information that could be used to discriminate against the holder for accidents of birth beyond their control. I felt that I hadn't brought the matter with Astrid to a satisfactory closing point before Petru put in an appearance and I knew that the opportunity wouldn't arise again.

Petru, unfazed by Astrid's hurried departure, was talking to me, asking questions at my elbow as I made my way towards the exit. We stepped outside into the sunshine and I turned on him.

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## **Petru**

“Petru, did you follow me from Pitar Moș to the art gallery?”

He remained silent but his face told me what I needed to know.

“Petru,” I said, “I give you a generous amount of my time both in class and out.” He nodded. “I really do not appreciate your following me.” The words erupted with more anger than I’d intended.

Petru looked as though he might burst into tears. That made me all the more annoyed – mainly with myself for taking out my frustration on this poor man.

“Professor Mackay,” he looked at me with sorrowful eyes. We had now reached Magheru and I was heading for the bus stop to get on a trolley-bus and away from him. “Please let me offer you my sincere apologies!”

My trolley-bus was approaching and I waved his apologies away. He caught hold of my arm.

“Please!” he begged, “Let me explain.” He seemed to be suffering so I let my bus leave. He let go of my arm and continued, “I was engaged by *Securitate* to inform on you for the academic year.” Now he had my full attention. “I completed my first degree in a different Faculty several years ago but this is what they make me do. This year I am in your English class. It is the job they have given me.”

I’d forgotten about going home. I was taken aback. I hadn’t the slightest suspicion Petru was my informer. I wanted to know more.

“How can they make you do something like this? Can’t you simply find a job that you like and forget about *Securitate*?” It was so easy to ask what to me were logical questions but to Romanians made absolutely no sense at all.

And right there in the winter sunshine on Magheru Boulevard with people walking by us in both directions and trolley-buses sighing and spattering sparks, Petru outlined his story. Six years earlier he had been picked up by two *Securitate* officers and driven to their headquarters. There, they confronted with undeniable evidence of his homosexual liaisons. “You will be prosecuted and jailed,” they told him, “unless you agree to cooperate fully with us.” What option did he have? And

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since that day his assignments were to get close to and inform on targeted visitors from both West and East.

“Why?” I asked.

“The Party feeds on suspicion. Especially suspicion of foreigners and especially those from the capitalist countries.”

“What does the Party suspect them of?”

“Anti-revolutionary activities.” He didn’t expand and I suspected that phrase made as little sense to him as it did to me.

He went on to tell me that he was assigned principally to inform on visitors who might be homosexual and to compromise them if possible.

I listened, appalled with the *Securitate* and heartbroken for this poor, unhappy young man. I was also puzzled and a little offended at the implications of what he was saying. Why would Securitate think I was homosexual? And then I remembered Karen and how I had rebuffed her advances in 1967. Now I understood! In our 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century drama course we had read William Congreve’s tragedy *The Mourning Bride* and the classic line came to mind:

*“Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,  
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.”*

“I’m very sorry, Petru!” And I was. I was sorry for Petru, for his predicament, for his entrapment, for the blackmail he was suffering, for his being prevented from getting on with his life like any other normal human being. And I felt just as sorry that I had treated him with unkindness and anger after Astrid left us. “I am very, very sorry, Petru,” conscious that I was repeating myself but quite unable to find anything more adequate to say. Now I felt as I were the one who might weep.

My apology, my commiseration with his condition, seemed to cheer him. He almost smiled. “It’s all right, Professor Mackay, I will report to *Securitate* that you became annoyed with my persistent attention and that you asked me to keep away from you. I will give my report in such a way that it will harm neither you nor me. They will listen, accept, and give me a new assignment.”

Now I really wanted to weep at this poor man’s unresisting acceptance of the

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lot he was cast, of *Securitate's* stranglehold over him.

“But before I write my report, Professor Mackay, “let me invite you to my home. I would like you to meet my mother and my father. And my sister. It will help you understand.” He was concerned for *me!* He wanted me to gain an understanding of how *Securitate* could degrade and brutalise its own citizens.

Before we parted I agreed that I would accompany him to his home for *masa de pranz* – lunch – two days hence. And so, two days later we met again on Magheru and together walked to where he lived with his mother and father and his sister not far from Piața Romană.



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## **Lunch with Petru's family**

Petru lived in one room with his mother, his father and his sister in what had been an elegant old house similar to the one 'M' and 'D' shared but less well maintained and far more cluttered. Whereas 'M' and D's divans had been discreetly tucked away in an alcove, the room Petru and his family lived in had no alcove and the divans were pushed to the wall leaving space for the table and chairs in the middle. There was evidence that they had rearranged the furniture to welcome me. Normally, I noticed, curtains divided the room up to afford each member of the family some privacy.

I felt as though I were in an auction sale-room where items had been stacked hither and thither to make way for the bidders to follow the auctioneer and offer their bids.

Petru's mother and father greeted me in an ingratiating manner that neither became them nor served me well. It had the opposite effect – it merely accentuated my feeling of discomfort and guilt. *I* was the occasion of the failure of Petru's current mission with *Securitate*. I was the occasion of this invasion of their privacy, the witness to their misfortunes.

I hoped that the *Securitate* would accept Petru's explanation for ending his surveillance of me and offer him a more congenial assignment. And then I thought, "No! Petru should never have been entrapped into the degrading mire of eavesdropping in the first place! The system has no right to treat a human being this way!" I raged at my inability to do nothing but stand on the sidelines and bear witness.

His parents might have been in their late 50s but looked a decade older, their faces old and lined their once-smart clothes threadbare. His sister, who looked to me to be a year or two Petru's elder, greeted me when I entered and then didn't say another word before I left. She appeared to be mortified that the first guest they had probably had in years had been invited for the sole purpose of witnessing her and her family's humiliation. We sat at a large wooden table on matching wooden chairs that were as run-down and as shabby as their room, although all had been splendid and

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dignified in their heyday between the two World Wars.

Petru, in a matter-of-fact voice, offered me a commentary on the scene as if explaining exhibits in a national museum to a curious visitor.

“This is how we live. It’s how we’ve lived for a long time now.”

His father and mother grinned their pathetic, apologetic grins and nodded their heads to confirm the truth of Petru’s toneless remarks.

Petru went on to tell me that before the War, his father had had his own successful dental practice in the city and his mother had been an opera singer. This had been their home, inherited from his father’s parents. After the Second World War he was allowed, at first, to work as a dentist but his practice and all its equipment was nationalised and he became a State employee.

With many houses damaged during the War and large numbers of displaced Romanians arriving in the city, the government had also nationalised his house – as they had done most others – and allocated space in it on a square-metre basis per person. His father and mother, Petru pointed out, had had the good fortune to retain one of the larger rooms in their house – now the State’s – for the use of their family. They shared the use of a kitchen and a bathroom with the newly appointed residents.

There had been little work for an opera singer and his mother supplemented her husband’s income by giving voice lessons. For some reason that Petru didn’t go into, his father had further blotted his copy-book with the Party and as a consequence was forbidden to continue practicing as a dentist. Now, for many years he had worked at the new job assigned to him – that of caretaker and doorman at the dental establishment where he had been employed as a dental surgeon. Every morning he opened to door to admit his erstwhile colleagues into the clinic and, in the evening, swept the corridors after they left.

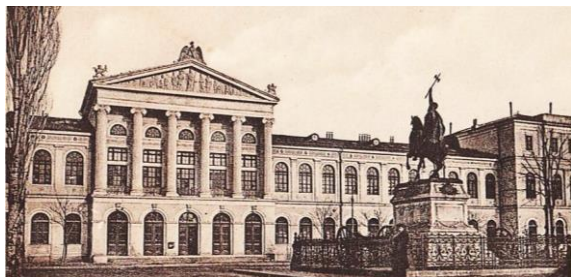
Petru’s mother and father sat nodding cheerlessly as if listening to a casual story about the misfortunes of distant friends with whom they had long ago lost contact. While Petru talked, his sister brought lunch and placed the large plates on the table, one at each of the 5 settings.

They must have made painstaking preparations for my visit. In the middle of

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the plate was a huge mound of mashed potatoes. The centre of each mound had been scooped out and filled with hot dripping. In the hot dripping a large mutton chop was submerged. It was delicious and I ate it with relish. Mutton was a staple in Scotland when I was growing up. Indeed I never heard of anybody eating *lamb* until I was in my teens, and even then, after tasting the insipid flesh, I wondered why anybody would bother! For those brought up on mutton, the aroma is distinctive and mouth-watering. To those less fortunate, it is merely an offensive smell.

I ate and listened; Petru talked; his parents nodded soulfully; his sister barely raised her eyes.

Petru had wanted me to understand before I judged. Now I understood.

I added *inhumanity, cruelty, malevolence* and *vindictiveness* to the list of atrocities I had compiled in my mind under the heading *Departamentul Securității Statului* commonly referred to by the shorter but totally intimidating name, the *Securitate*.

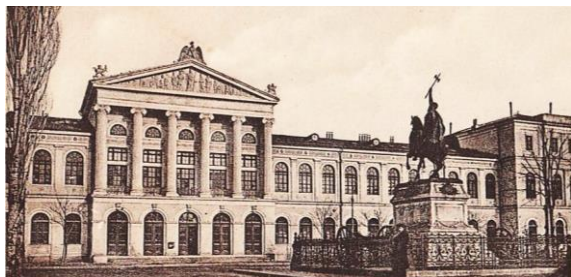


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## Scholarship candidates

Astrid had been the first of my best students I broached the subject of the scholarship to. She had turned her candidature down flat.

I approached the next two quite separately. I did not want any of the candidates to know who else I planned to nominate. I was heartened when both candidates two and three—a young man and a young woman—listened keenly to my explanation of what was involved. Each made his or her best effort to conceal their excitement. Each went home, discussed the matter with their parents, and then came back a day or so after I'd approached them and agreed that I could put their name forward to our Cultural Attaché.

I had asked all three candidates, quite separately, to treat the matter of their nomination in absolute confidence. Post-War Romanians were used to keeping secrets. Every single Romanian family appeared to have confidences that they did not want leaked—or could not afford to have leaked—outside the nuclear family unit. Children were coached in and learned by heart the *'authorised'* version of their family history for use in school and in all public institutions from the time they were tiny.

Now it was time, I decided, to talk to 'M' about the scholarship, and of course she would not learn the names of the other candidates either.

Astrid had established, in my mind, the Nicolae Grigorescu room in the Muzeul Național de Artă as the totally neutral, *de facto* location for talking about the scholarships and it was there that I had met students two and three. True to his word, Petru never followed me again or approached me for any reason. And so it was in front of the Grigorescu paintings that I told 'M' that the British Government would cover the entire cost involved in a Romanian student completing their undergraduate degree in a British university.

M's naturally happy face lit up with even greater jubilation than usual; she positively beamed. I reminded her that I must have her and D's permission before I could add her name to the short list. Although I didn't tell her whose names were on it, she must have had a fair idea since students were highly competitive and well knew

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their approximate ranking in the class. I reminded her that the successful student or students had to apply for and obtain, for themselves, their passport and visa necessary to exit Romania. These were purely Romanian matters in which the British Embassy played no part. 'M' immediately bounded off to recount all to 'D'.

The following day she was on tenterhooks throughout our 2-hour class and when it finished, we met once more in the art gallery taking the usual precautions to make sure neither of us had been followed.

'M' was so excited that I thought I had better warn her yet again that her nomination was just the first step of many.

"A. M.," my tone was serious intending to bring her back down to earth, "remember that a committee will make the final selection of the successful candidate or candidates. The committee's nomination of the successful candidate will mean only that the offer has been made. It's then up to the nominated student to undertake all the necessary paperwork and whatever other bureaucratic hurdles the Romanian Government requires for him or her to be given an exit visa."

I needn't have been so ponderous and didactic. As usual, 'M' was several steps ahead of me.

"D. and I talked about all of that last night. We fully understand." And as if to bring *me* back to reality, added, "All you have to do is to put the names forward. If I am selected, then D. and I will take care of all the rest."

So young and yet with such a complete and realistic grasp of the situation in her mind.

It was then I knew for certain, from the look in 'D's' face and her confident tone of voice that she was on a journey and was perfectly aware of the fact. For her, it might be a long and arduous one, but everything around her, everything except D.—the *Facultate*, Bucharest University, her native city, her friends, her cousin in California, our affair, the Socialist republic of Romania, her candidature for the scholarship—absolutely everything—were no more than milestones on that journey, milestones that signalling evidence of her progress. Some of these milestones would be welcomed when reached, some might mean more than others, some might be remembered and

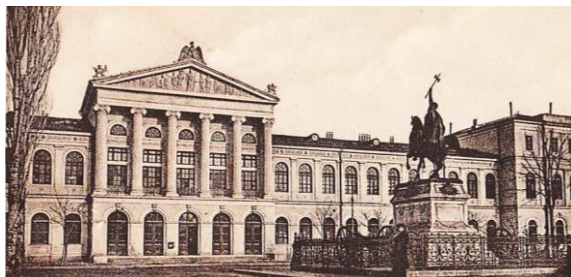
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missed, but all would be cheerfully acknowledged, passed and allowed to recede into the distance. 'D' was the one and only one that would not be waved "Goodbye!" on her pilgrimage. That insight came to me in a flash; I knew it to be true. And that truth liberated me.

*Of course* 'M' and 'D' had discussed it! *Of course* they knew far better than I did what might be involved in negotiating the shoals and reefs of the seas they sailed in! I had not a doubt in my mind that they were, together, eminently and ingeniously capable of navigating the bureaucracy in ways – whatever these ways might be, so that 'M' would end up with all the paperwork, stamped and approved; all that was necessary to allow her to leave the country. Like so many Romanians, 'M' and 'D' were not merely survivors keeping their heads above water, they were resourceful survivors who, by virtue of their own efforts, intelligence and canny enterprise would always thrive, progress and prosper irrespective of the obstacles in their path. Doubtless it would not be easy, but they would strive with such coolness, elegance and aplomb that they would make it *appear* effortless.

Romanians, in my experience, sought no applause for effort; they valued recognition for achievement. To my mind, 'M' and 'D' deserve respect for the victories they subsequently won and enjoyed and which I will mention later.

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## **Alexandru from Alexandria**

### **The People's University**

In addition to my required teaching at the university, I taught an adult education class in English literature as a volunteer. I found my teaching duties at the *Facultate* light, and during the week I had most evenings to myself. The evening class came about because Professor Ștefanescu-Drăganesti had told me about 'the people's university' and I felt I'd like to give something back to Romania for all the enjoyment I was getting from my stay in that country. My evening class at 'the people's university' met for two hours a week and consisted of six exhausted adults. Only five turned up to any given class and not all had done the weekly assigned reading so the classes tended to be rather informal. The students' mastery of English was not great and so I did most of the talking which seemed to suit them fine.

After the very first class, one of these adult students – a man in his early 40s – told me that he lived in Alexandria – a city almost 100 kilometres from Bucharest and had to travel by train to attend my class. He was, he told me, the manager of a factory and sometimes unforeseen circumstances would keep him from attending. However, he did have to visit Bucharest twice a month on business and had a couple of hours free on these afternoons.

"Would you be kind enough to meet me," he mentioned a well-known pastry and coffee shop, "once or twice a month to talk about the curriculum and make sure I do not fall behind?"

"Of course!" I was more than willing. And so he would call me to let me know when he was coming to Bucharest and we would meet at one of the small tables in that delicious shop smelling of roast coffee, freshly-baked pastries and icing sugar. We would go over the very undemanding class-work, have coffee and cake, and chat.

On one occasion, 'M' suggested coming over to my apartment the following day. I apologised and explained about Alexandru from Alexandria. I'd never mentioned him to her before because I intentionally kept separate and apart the

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various strands of my life in Bucharest. 'M' showed keen interest in the fact that I met this man every now and again.

"What time is your meeting with Alexandru tomorrow?"

"At two o'clock."

"Would you mind if I came into the coffee shop while you're there?"

"Why?" I thought it an odd request.

"I just want to see him."

I saw no harm in it, so I agreed. 'M' would enter the coffee shop about 20 minutes after two. She would pretend she did not know me and I would not acknowledge her. She would buy two profiterole and leave. I gave her the lei to purchase the profiterole as a present from me, to her and 'D'.

Romanians often made odd requests without offering any explanation. They were obsessed with security. Personally, I thought they exaggerated the capacity of human agents to be everywhere at all hours. Because I had time on my hands, I would sometimes take very long trolley-bus or tram rides just at the times I thought that any agents following me were likely to be getting ready to change shifts around the time of the evening meal. I laughed to think that an agent who had been assigned to observe me all day was forced, just as he was about to end his shift and go home for supper, to get on a tram-car and watch me ride for 45 minutes to the terminal, get off, wait for the next one and then ride for another 45 minutes all the way back. I imagined what his wife had to say when he rolled into the house exhausted, two hours late for his supper.

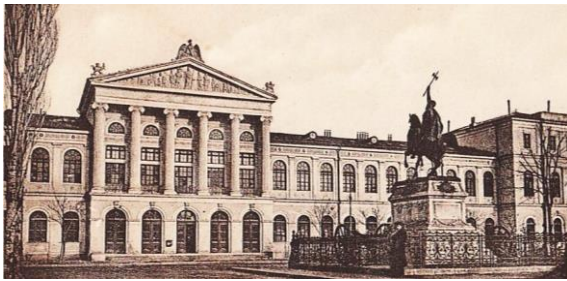
I was of the opinion that *Securitate* used simple fear to make the average Romanian believe that its agents and informers were ubiquitous, all-seeing and all-hearing. As I was wrong about so many things, I was wrong about the capabilities of the *Securitate*.

The following day I asked 'M' what she thought of Alexandru. She just smiled and shrugged and told me how much she and 'D' had enjoyed the profiterole from the coffee shop. The pastries from there were D's favourite. Romanians were adept at changing the direction of a conversation if it suited them.

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'M' was to meet Alexandru again, several weeks after I had completed my contract and left Romania for good. That meeting was a scheduled one-to-one interview in his office – not in a factory in Alexandria but right there in the centre of Bucharest and Alexandru was dressed in the uniform of a Major of *Securitate*.



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## **A busy autumn/winter semester**

### **The Moscow express to Sofia**

*“Ronald, would you be willing to travel to Sofia in Bulgaria once a month to offer two days of intensive classes at Sofia University?”*

Tony had called me to an emergency meeting in his office in the Embassy. The visiting British professor in Sofia University was indisposed – apparently he’d become ill and was in treatment. To save the bilateral exchange agreement between the UK and Bulgaria and buy time until a replacement could be found, Tony told me that *“it had been suggested”* I fill the gap.

*“I’ll do it!”* This was exactly the kind of exploit that appealed to me without reservation. What’s more, my teaching schedule in the *Facultate* made it possible.

*“The Moscow-Istanbul Express stops in both Bucharest and Sofia. It’s a 7 or 8-hour journey. We can’t give you a berth – you’ll have to sit up on the way there – but all your expenses will be paid and you’ll have the use of the British professor’s apartment in Sofia.”* I was beginning to learn that the British Government and the British Council, the Government’s cultural arm, tended to treat its own career officers well but its contract employees less so. It wasn’t until later in my career I gave the matter much thought; I was used to roughing it and sitting up all night seemed to be a small price for the privilege of taking on this adventure.

It was early October 1968. That meant I’d be making three visits to Sofia before the end of the year and perhaps more in the New Year if the British Government had difficulty finding a replacement.

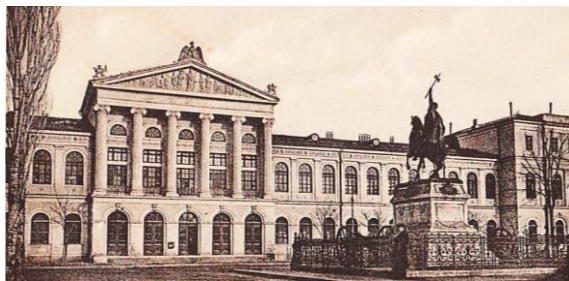
By the end of the emergency meeting all the details had been worked out to our satisfaction and both Tony and I were delighted; he, because the threat to the Bulgarian exchange agreement had been removed; me, because this promised to be a welcome new adventure.

When I went to board the Moscow-Istanbul Express at the *Gara de Nord* I was very excited. The station smelled of hot oil and diesel fumes; there was the opening

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and slamming of doors, the shouting of porters; luggage and goods were being loaded and unloaded and passengers, railway staff and uniformed and armed Militia were everywhere. I was escorted to my compartment by two Militia one of whom told me that that until the train left the city limits, my carriage door would be locked. They abruptly saluted and as abruptly left. Two hard bench seats faced each other upholstered in an ugly green plasticised material.

Once the train was underway and we'd left the *Gara de Nord* and the city of Bucharest behind, a uniformed railway employee unlocked my carriage door. I got up to stretch my legs and found uniformed officers at both ends of the corridor. As I walked towards one end I noticed that in each compartment there were several passengers who had boarded, like me, in Bucharest. It would appear that I was the only Westerner and had been intentionally segregated from the rest. That neither surprised nor bothered me. I was used to segregation and to being on my own. What I wanted to do at that moment was to pass from my carriage into the other carriages to get a glimpse of the passengers who were travelling all the way from Moscow to Istanbul but the officers stopped me. I could use the toilets at both ends of my carriage but I could not enter the carriages that made up the rest of the train.

"Is there a dining car?"

"The dining car is not available to you. An attendant will bring passengers in this carriage something to eat later."

I was disappointed. When I'd taken the Orient Express from Paris to Bucharest I'd been too inexperienced and had insufficient money to really take advantage of the trip. I'd hoped to remedy my earlier mistake now that I was a little more worldly and had enough Romanian Lei to enjoy a meal in the comfort of the dining car. But it was not to be, so I accepted the situation.

Before we crossed the Danube into Bulgaria, an attendant visited each compartment in our carriage and delivered a small package of food and a soft drink to each passenger. So much for a romantic dinner in the company of mysterious travellers from the capital of Russia!

The light in my compartment was too weak to read by so I stretched out on one

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of the benches and slept until we reached Sofia before dawn the following morning. At the station, I was met by a Bulgarian driver from the British Embassy in Sofia and driven to an apartment block. The surly concierge who looked after the block, asked to see my passport and when he was satisfied he escorted me to an apartment, opened the door and gave me the key.

The apartment had been assigned by the Bulgarian Government to the British professor I was replacing and was similar to my own in Bucharest but more modern. The British professor was obviously a more established person than I was. He had shelves of his own books and had decorated the walls with pictures and colourful posters. He had made himself very comfortable indeed and it made me conscious that I had made little attempt to decorate my apartment or put any personal stamp on it at all.

I slept for a couple of hours and was awakened by the telephone. A secretary from the British Embassy in Sofia was downstairs with a car ready to take me to the University. I'd be giving classes there for the rest of that day and all the following day.

The secretary was young, English and friendly. She thoughtfully suggested we stop for a coffee and something to eat on our way to the University since I'd had no breakfast. It had snowed overnight and the city was white, pristine and beautiful under a clear blue sky and a bright winter sun. There was little traffic but lots of smartly-uniformed traffic policemen. The boulevards were wide, the buildings large and magnificent, the pedestrians well-dressed in long dark coats with astrakhan collars and astrakhan hats as in Romania.

*"I'll show you one of the main sights."* And a minute later I was face-to-face with the largest and most beautiful Orthodox cathedral I'd ever seen.

*"The Alexander Nevsky Cathedral,"* she announced.

I was awe-struck by its sheer massiveness and its golden domes that reflected the sun as if to offer me my own personal welcome to the city. I loved Sofia already!

We had coffee and pastries in a very sophisticated coffee shop that had the pungent, sweet, delicious aroma of its principal products. Perhaps it was no more sophisticated than the coffee shop in Bucharest where I met *'Alexandru from Alexandria'*

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but because it was new to me, it seemed fresh, welcoming and very refined. Moreover it was busy. Its clientele appeared to be made up mainly of very good-looking young people in their early 20s obviously with time on their hands and clearly enjoying themselves.

They came indoors out of the snow with wide smiles and cheeks rosy from the cold, peeled off scarves and layers of dark clothing and greeted and laughed and talked with one other as if they hadn't a care in the world. I wondered if there were places like this in Bucharest where young people hung out together. If there were, I hadn't found them. But there again, I hadn't looked very hard. In Bucharest I was too aware that my presence embarrassed people; here in Sofia, I cared less.

*"Ready to meet your students?"* We picked the last delicious crumbs of pastry and icing-sugar from our plates, re-wrapped ourselves in coats, hats and scarves and drove to the University. She took me first to the Faculty Room but it was empty.

*"Not to worry, you'll meet them later,"* she said and walked me up stairs to a tutorial room similar to the one I taught in Bucharest. Students and faculty were rushing to and from class.

In the tutorial room, twenty-four pairs of eyes studied me intensely. Eighty per cent of them belonged to attractive young women, the balance to good looking young men. They looked slightly older and more mature than my students in Bucharest. They were, in fact, since they were in the fifth and final year of studies.

The secretary, with whom they appeared to be on familiar terms, introduced me and explained that I would be replacing their regular British professor for several months. She turned to me with a smile, *"I'll come back here for you at 12.30. We'll eat in the faculty dining room so you can meet the head of the English department and some of your colleagues."* Then she left with a casual wave that the students happily returned.

Together, my students and I spent the rest of the morning working out exactly how best I could help them for the two days a month that I would visit. The students were business-like and quite clear about what they wanted from me. First, they demanded lots of interaction in English so that they could practice with a native speaker – my Scots accent didn't bother them. Second, they wanted lots of correction

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and explanatory feedback from me and thirdly they wanted me to help them address issues that arose from the classes they received from their Bulgarian teachers, issues related to phonology, morphology, syntax, sentence structure, vocabulary, idioms, phrasal verbs.

I enjoyed this informal kind of participatory planning with willing undergraduates. I was delighted to see that these new Bulgarian students of mine were just as diligent and just as willing as the Romanian students I was so proud of back home in Bucharest. We worked so efficiently and effectively that before we broke for lunch, we had sketched out a plan for the rest of my stay and had a good idea of what to do when I visited again in November and December.

Just as my students were disappearing to the dining hall with bright, warm smiles on their faces, the secretary returned and escorted me outside into the campus now white with snow and bathed in warm sunlight.

The faculty dining room was in another building only a short walk away. It was a grand room indeed with swagged, red, velvet curtains and painted plaster frieze work that warmed the heart and reminded me of a 19<sup>th</sup> century painting. A separate table had been laid for us bright with white linen table-cloth and napkins, polished cutlery and sparkling glasses. Most members of the English department of Sophia University were already seated and they rose to greet us – the secretary first, she was clearly popular with them – and then me. All were very affable and the chairman thanked me for agreeing to come to the rescue in this emergency.

I had to leave lunch early to get back to my students. The chairman shook my hand as did each of the faculty members in turn. As I expected, I never saw any of them again. Most, however, remained talking to the secretary. She had told me that she'd meet me after class and drive me to my apartment at 4.30. I felt coddled.

My students and I did a solid afternoon's work with many a laugh shared, and when I left the building, the secretary was waiting for me at the main door. She dropped me off at my apartment building and said, "*Now you know your way about, I'll send a driver to take you to the University tomorrow morning and bring you back. He'll also take you to the train station to catch your train home to Bucharest.*" I appreciated her

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attention.

The following day my students and I again applied ourselves diligently to get through our work plan and we succeeded. That evening I was invited to a cocktail party being held by the Cultural Attaché at the American Embassy. The invitation was waiting for me behind the door of my apartment. I thought this was odd since I hadn't yet met the British Cultural Attaché but I didn't question it. There was a hand-written note on the invitation—"Professor Augerot will call at your apartment at 6.30 p.m. and bring you to the Embassy."

Just as I lay down to recover from the labours of the day there was a knock at the door.

A tall, lanky, partially-bearded guy with a friendly twisted grin thrust his hand out, "Jim Augerot! Welcome to Bulgaria, Ron!" Jim was one of these Americans who immediately made you feel embraced. He told me he particularly wanted to meet me because he and his family had spent a year as Visiting American Professor at Bucharest University a couple of years earlier.

We sat down and began talking about Romania and immediately discovered that we had a common passion for the country. After an hour I felt I'd known this man all my life. Jim was very different from the visiting American professors I knew in Romania. It was obvious that he had a better insight into that country and a better relationship with the people. Moreover, he was fluent in Romanian. I learned that he was a Slavic language specialist and spoke fluent Russian and Bulgarian. Romanian, a Romance language, had simply been added to his native English.

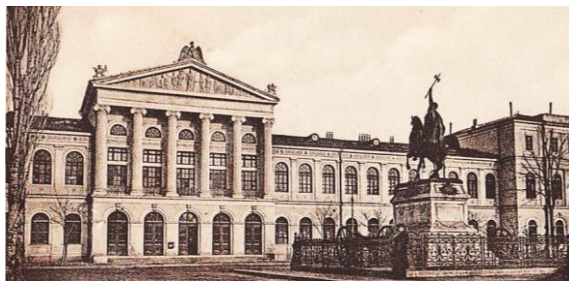
He was currently the Visiting American Professor at Sofia University on exchange from the University of Washington in Washington State on the Pacific Coast. He and his family lived in the same apartment building as I'd been allocated—apparently it was for the use of visiting professors and graduate students from abroad. He took me upstairs to meet his beautiful wife and charming and equally beautiful daughters aged about 7 and 9.

When their baby-sitter arrived, Jim and his wife put on their coats, kissed the little girls and we left together for the American Embassy.

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This party—as well as others I would attend—was held in the Embassy building itself. It was a large building and appeared to have reception rooms of different sizes to suit all kinds of occasions. American cocktail parties, in my experience, were always more lively than their British equivalents. Americans were less inhibited, more pro-active and made a point of introducing themselves to you and asking you questions to make you feel at home.

Jim and his wife were obviously a very popular couple and had lots of friends among the American diplomats and the visiting American graduate students. Jim saw to it that I was introduced to just about everybody. As a Brit among all these Americans, he made me feel like the guest of honour.

The Cultural Attaché, who looked to me more like a Mafia Don than a diplomat, engaged me in a lively conversation about my work in Bucharest as well as my work in Sofia. He appeared really interested and we must have spent a good 15 minutes in conversation.

“If we can be of any assistance to you in any way, call me!” He gave me his card, shook my hand and moved on to talk with others of his guests.

The following month came and brought my second trip to Sofia. The workplan and routine that my students and I had established the previous month paid off. We made considerable progress much to their and my satisfaction. As we broke for lunch, I was last to leave the room. As I did, a middle-aged, pleasant-looking woman demanded my attention.

“Professor Mackay, I have been waiting for you to finish your class. I am Radka Draganova. I am coordinator of English in a stream of technical schools in Sofia. I would like to ask for your advice.” It never ceased to amaze me how incredibly enthusiastic and dedicated English teachers could be and I always did my best to help them.

Madame Draganova was, she told me, trying to tailor her classes to the precise needs for which her students would eventually have to use their English. I’d become interested in English used for technical and professional purposes when I taught in the Anglo-Continental School in Bournemouth the previous summer, so I was

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immediately sensitive to her challenge.

We had a hurried lunch together and talked about the difficulties of designing and teaching classes to students whose use for English was primarily related to their work. Such students were often impatient of general courses that dealt with social matters and the trivia of the daily lives of imaginary characters. By the end of lunch I had agreed that I would find time to visit the technical schools she was responsible for, observe one or more of her classes to become familiar with the kind of students she was dealing with. I promised also to talk to her cadre of teachers in an effort to win them over from their general-purpose English orientation to a more pragmatic 'English for special purposes' approach.

Fortunately I was staying in Sofia longer on this Trip. Jim Augerot had persuaded me to stay over for a few days and spend the weekend at a villa with him and his family and some very close friends of theirs who worked for the State Department. Jim's friends were as young and as friendly and as welcoming as his own family.

Madame Draganova, when she picked me up to take me to one of her technical school, turned out to be a very dynamic and visionary teacher of English. For some time, she'd been grooming a cadre of very good teachers to buy into and develop her 'Technical Purposes' orientation to teaching English. This approach, she firmly believed, would both motivate the technically-oriented students and provide them with the capacity to use English to further their work skills. Before we parted, she asked me if there was any way that the British Embassy in Sofia might provide assistance of any kind at all—technical English dictionaries, technical reading material, the support of visitors—anything at all that might help her teachers and her students.

It never ceased to humble me how enthusiastic teachers like Radka could be about teaching and learning English, the language of a country they had never visited and that they seldom heard from the lips of native speakers. I remembered the words of the Head of Mission with whom I'd enjoyed the carbonized crêpes suzettes flambée in the Athénée Palace Hotel in Bucharest the previous year—

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*"We consider English teaching to be the sharp end of our trade initiative with the East European countries. We see you as breaking the ground, so to speak!"*

And so I promised Radka – she insisted on first names – that I would speak to the Cultural Attaché at the British Embassy and find out what help they might be willing to offer.

I'd never met the British Cultural Attaché in Sophia. I'd never met anybody else from the British Embassy for that matter, other than the secretary who had so kindly met me when I arrived for the first time. So, when I returned to Bucharest a few days later, I asked Tony Mann for help. I outlined the challenge facing Radka Draganova and the little help I'd been able to offer.

"Could you arrange for me to meet your counterpart in Sofia when I next visit?" Tony, as ever, was interested and very cooperative. He had no real counterpart in Sofia, but he promised to do his best.

The following month, Pearl was coming back to Romania for a brief visit. Because she was changing jobs – from Queens Gate Girls' School to the Medical School at London University – she had some free time. She had loved her first visit and we were both looking forward to this one. This time she would be visiting while I was still working but my classes at the *Facultate* were concentrated into the first three days of each week which gave us lots of time together. Moreover, I knew she'd be delighted to visit Bulgaria and that she would get on very well with my new-found American friends the Augerots.

So, on my next trip to Sofia, Pearl accompanied me. Again the British Consul had lent me her car and so we headed south-west towards Giurgiu to cross the Danube using the *Podul Prieteniei Giurgiu-Ruse* – Friendship Bridge – that linked Romania with Bulgaria. It was still winter and road conditions were not great. However, the sun was shining brightly when we left Bucharest and I'd already learned to drive comfortably in ice and snow so the journey didn't cause me or Pearl any concern despite the fact that we passed several articulated trucks that had jack-knifed on the icy roads.

As usual, there was relatively little traffic. We were the only car when we arrived at the border and so suffered no more than the ordinary delay involved in

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passport checks, obtaining tourist visas, changing the obligatory *per diem* sums from US dollars into Bulgarian *Levs*, and having the car thoroughly inspected. Inspections included the use of sniffer dogs and mirrors on wheels inserted under the chassis of the car to locate potential hidden bodies. The border guards dressed in heavy topcoats, huge felt boots over their leather uniform boots and handsome trapper-style sheepskin hats with the wool side to warm their heads and ears, rifle or machine-gun over their shoulder, eventually waved us into Bulgaria.

I'd told my students at Sofia University that Pearl was coming with me on my next rip and several of them had offered their services as guides when I was busy and their time permitted. That had surprised and pleased me.

At the appropriate hour, I presented myself at the British Embassy for my appointment with the Cultural Attaché. I was asked to wait in an imposing ante-room and sat there for a good 20 minutes. Finally the Attaché's secretary escorted me into his office. The Attaché was working but looked up as I entered, rose and shook my hand across his desk. Judging from his demeanour, my visit was not the highlight of his day.

"You asked to meet me?" I was taken aback. His tone suggested that he knew nothing of my request.

"Your counterpart at the Embassy in Bucharest made the appointment." I hoped to jog his memory. I failed. "To talk about assistance to the Technical Schools?"

"Ah!" He recollected, "Mr Mann of the..." he paused, "...the *British Council*." His message was subtle. It was telling me that Tony Mann was *only* an employee of the British Council, that Tony's appointment as a Cultural Attaché was a temporary one determined by convenience while he himself was a career officer in the British Diplomatic Service. I'd learned that certain members of the Diplomatic Service guarded their status jealously against those, such as myself who did not 'enjoy' that status. But they seemed to especially resent those from other services such as the military or the British Council whose diplomatic status was conferred temporarily to allow them to do a job that otherwise would be impossible.

I was 26 years old and the gentleman across the desk from me was in his 30s. I

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was earning £30 Sterling a month, over and above the local salary paid by the Romanian Government, and he must be earning 10 times that plus his accommodation, tax-free status, and innumerable 'perks'. Both our remunerations came from British taxpayers. I had agreed, voluntarily, to undertake additional tasks in Sofia once a month, on my own time, and for no additional payment, in order to help resolve a problem that probably fell under his jurisdiction.

I swallowed my annoyance and explained the background to the meeting I'd requested. I told him how I'd been approached by Madame Draganova; her work as English language coordinator in the technical schools; her enthusiastic and innovative ideas about teaching English for technical purposes; the need she felt to motivate her teachers; and the dearth of materials and training.

When I'd finished, the Cultural Attaché looked at me, bored, and asked, "So what do you want?"

My heart lightened. He might be a pretentious snob but at least he had got to the nub of the matter and seemed to be inviting my suggestions.

I came up with a list of suggestions.

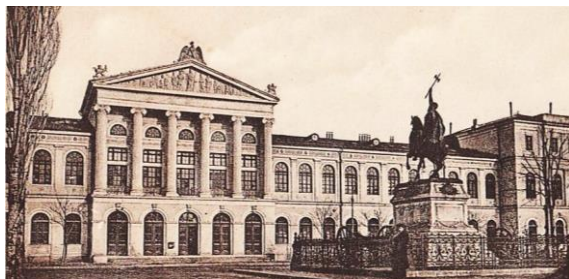
"You might donate dictionaries – especially technical dictionaries; magazines that have a technical slant; commercial brochures that advertise and explain technology. You might find a way to send Madame Draganova and some of her teachers to the UK on short intensive courses to receive training in how to teach technical English, design curricula and develop materials for that kind of specialised course." My suggestions kindled no enthusiasm in the Cultural Attaché. He had his hands clasped together and hadn't taken a single note. Thinking to be helpful, I added, "I could make a written list of recommendations under each of these headings, if you like."

He extracted himself unwillingly from behind his desk, went over to a small round coffee table under the window, picked up a glossy, illustrated magazine and tossed it to me. I caught it. *Country Life* with a studio portrait of a young woman on the cover and the promise inside of illustrated articles related to riding, hunting, shooting and fishing on rural estates throughout Great Britain.

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"I might be able to rustle up a pile of past issues of these," his tone was begrudging.

"Somehow I don't think these would be suitable." I stood up and dropped the Country Life on my chair. I knew exactly what I was going to do. "Thank you very much for agreeing to see me."

Visibly relieved, he escorted me to the door, passed me to his secretary and she walked me out into the cold sunshine and the snow.

That week Jim Augerot and his wife had engineered an invitation to a reception in the American Embassy for Pearl and me. There were lots of happy people, the noise of animated conversations, and liveried servants circulated discreetly with trays of drinks and *hors d'oeuvres*. Pearl was an excellent conversationalist and had been spirited off by someone interesting to meet someone even more interesting. She could hold her own.

The American Cultural Attaché who looked like a Mafia Don approached me, arms outspread.

"Raawn! Great to see you, Raawn! Glad you could make it!" He almost wrung my arm out of its socket. "Ah was just talkin' to your lovely mom, Pirl! Now I know where you got all your good points! You sure hit the jackpot with a mom like Pirl!"

"I need your help with something," I got right down to business.

He pulled me over to the side of the room where we could talk in privacy.

"Raawn, you know you just gotta tell me what it is an' you know if I can help you, I will!" His tone was serious.

I told him about Madame Radka Draganova's visit. He listened, interested. I told him about her invitation, that I meet her team of teachers, that I'd sat in on some of their classes and met the kind of students she taught. He asked me some pertinent questions and I answered as best I could. I gave him my analysis of what they needed. He nodded and then called over his aide.

"Escorts, please! Now!"

Two Marines arrived resplendent in full navy-blue and white, bearing side arms.

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He must have seen the surprised look on my face. "Regulations," he said, "You gotta be escorted anywhere in this building!" And we marched out of the reception room down a long elegant hall and stopped in front of a modern elevator, a Marine on either side of me. "You can choose whatever you want!" Choose what, I wondered, as all four of us got into the tiny elevator.

We exited into a large basement room stacked with books of all kinds, all new. Literature, language courses with recorded tapes, dictionaries, novels.

"Can't stay long, but Raawn—you just take what you want for Madame Draganova. Just tell her *Compliments of the American Embassy!*"

I spotted an opportunity here that could benefit both Madame Draganova and the Americans.

"What if I take just these for the moment," I said grabbing half-a-dozen dictionaries, "and ask her to make you a formal invitation to visit her technical schools? You could assess the situation directly and maybe invite her to select materials for herself."

He hesitated. "I don't want to step on British turf. You Brits can be—"

"I know," I interrupted him. "But don't worry, I've already spoken to our Cultural Attaché and he made it clear that he's unable to offer any help."

"Then it's a deal," he smiled and handed me his card. "Give this to Madame Draganova. Ask her to issue the invitation through Protocol. She'll understand. I'll see her right!"

Business done, the two of us with our Marine escorts returned to the merry reception. The Marines promised to have the dictionaries I had selected, boxed and waiting for me downstairs as I left.

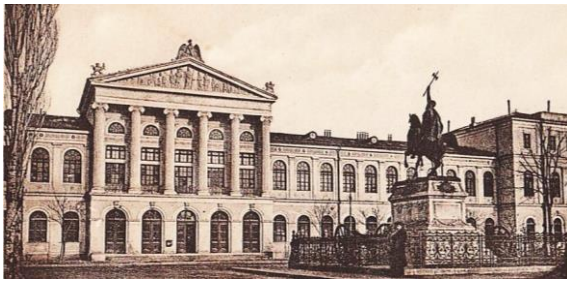
If, as the gentleman from the British Foreign office had told me in Bucharest, language was the front line of the battle for commercial trade, I was happy for the Americans to win it. They appeared to have what it took, the superior drive, the gumption, the willingness to grasp the initiative.

Pearl had a wonderful time in Sofia and we even managed a trip to the top of Vitosha Mountain—higher than Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in Scotland—for the

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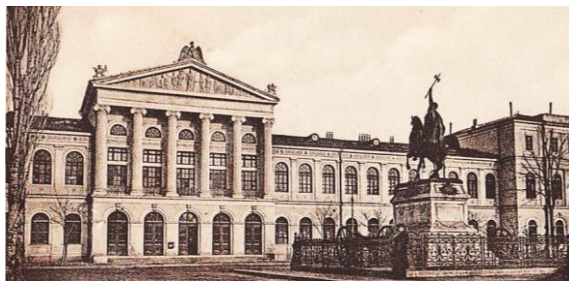
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spectacular view it gave of the whole of that elegant city down in the plain below. She, I, my students at Sofia University, Madame Draganova, Tony Mann in Bucharest and the American Cultural Attaché in Sofia had all gained considerable satisfaction and chalked up a triumph.



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## **A troop of tanks**

Howard Owens had been a good friend since we spent the year 1963/64 together in Madrid. He wrote from London saying he'd like to visit me in Romania in the spring of 1969. Howard was in his mid 20s. He was fair-haired, affable, very smart and had a strong sense of adventure. He worked as a bowler-hatted commercial lawyer in the City. Together, in the spring of 1964, we'd made many trips to the isolated, cherry-growing villages that clung to the steep slopes of the Gredos Mountains in Extremadura. I knew him to be a cool-headed, reliable and resourceful companion.

In addition to commercial law, Howard's skills included French, Spanish and Portuguese and when we'd had a reunion in London in the summer of '68, he was fascinated to learn that that Romanian was also Romance language – the only one to have developed east of Rome. He listened to some of my adventures in Romania and resolved to visit me before my contract expired. He was from the stockbroker belt region of Surrey, public-school-educated, loved isolated and exotic places and cultures and accepted every foreign language as a challenge.

"Romania will not disappoint you, Howard," I promised him confidently.

Few British people travelled behind the Iron Curtain and that alone captured the imagination. Even fewer had travelled widely in the more distant rural areas and the small towns and villages of that historic picturesque country sandwiched between The USSR and Bulgaria.

And so, Howard joined me for the 1969 spring vacation. We'd decided on a trip east to the Danube Delta, north to Moldavia and then south-west through Transylvania back to Bucharest – a counter-clockwise loop. I'd never visited the actual Danube Delta before, though I knew parts of Dobrogea from having visited drainage project sites with Ron Walker the Hymac engineer from Derby. I'd visited parts of Transylvania and Moldavia with Pearl the previous year, but these provinces were extensive and full of interest. We needn't duplicate the previous route and so the journey appealed equally strongly to me.

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Once again the generous British Consul lent me her Ford Anglia.

About a week before we left, I told 'M' about the trip Howard and I planned. A couple of days later she asked me if she and 'D' could accompany us. I explained to 'M' that we'd be driving in the Consul's car with CD plates that identified it as belonging to the British Embassy and that we'd be roughing it in some fairly isolated and out-of-the-way parts of the country.

She discussed it with 'D' and came back to me. They were adamant about coming with us. As always, I left the final decision in these matters to the Romanians themselves. They alone knew the risks and how best to mitigate them. 'M' and 'D' made interesting, intelligent companions and would no doubt have lots of historic observations to make and so, I reckoned, their presence would undoubtedly add to the interest of the trip.

We picked up 'M' and 'D' at the Gara de Nord—they had not wanted the car to appear in front of their home. Each had a small travel bag similar to Howard's and mine. I had insisted that we travel with the absolute minimum. I stowed their bags in the trunk. The women were settling into the back seat and 'D' was saying something that sounded important to 'M' in Hungarian.

Just as I turned the key in the ignition 'M' asked, "Before we start can you show us on the map the route you plan to take?"

Whenever I was lent a car by the British Consul—or one of the other diplomats—and planned a trip, I had to lodge an itinerary with the British guards at the Embassy and I'd done so for this journey. What's more, I had already explained the itinerary to A. M. Nevertheless, I opened the map and traced the planned route—a loop that took us east to the Danube Delta, north into Moldavia as far as Siret in northern Bucovina on the USSR border and then back in a south-westerly direction through southern Bucovina into Transylvania to Brasov, through the Prahova Valley and home to Bucharest.

When I'd finished tracing the route on the map with my finger, 'D' had another brief conversation in Hungarian with 'M' and 'M' asked, "Could we possibly make the trip in reverse?" Apparently 'D' wanted first to head north-west through the

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Prahova Valley to Transylvania, then north-east into Bucovina and on to Siret and finally back home through Moldavia to the Danube Delta and back across the plain to Bucharest.

Other than representing a departure from the itinerary I'd lodged with the Embassy, it made no difference to Howard or to me whether we undertook the loop counter-clockwise as planned or clockwise as 'D' wanted. I doubted if the change would matter to the Embassy since we were doing exactly the same journey but in reverse. What I knew was of primary importance to the Embassy guards were our departure and return dates. And so I agreed to D's request. We took the road across the plain towards Ploiești and its oil refineries.

As I drove, I reflected that what had just transpired was a fairly typical Romanian transaction. 'D' wanted to travel through Transylvania first. Her English and certainly her French were good enough for her to have asked for the route alteration herself. Both Howard and I spoke French. But she had chosen to make her request through a second party, A. M. in another language, Hungarian.

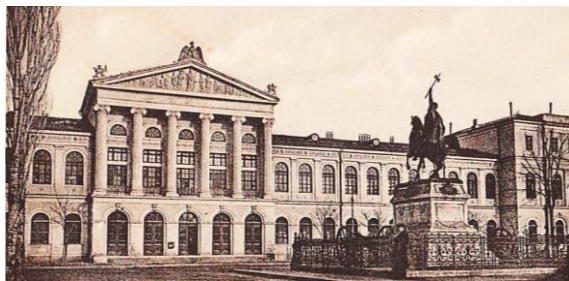
I'd observed that Romanians often made requests to a third party, me, through a second party. By doing so, if I denied their request, they didn't lose face. If I granted their request, they were relieved of having to express their gratitude directly to me for having granting the favour and therefore I had no right to demand a favour from them in return. It was one way, in a society in which individuals were hypersensitive to debts incurred and balances outstanding, to escape a debt in the first place, no matter however small. The use of a language unintelligible to me further distanced the person making the request from the person with the right to grant or deny it. I put this Byzantine behaviour down to the Byzantine history of the country.

We by-passed Ploiești with its huge, steaming oil refineries and stopped for lunch in the Prahova Valley so that Howard could enjoy the majesty of the Carpathian Mountains with their forests, valleys and peaks. 'M' and 'D' left us when we got out of the car and said that they'd meet us again when we were ready to leave. Predeal was a popular resort, many state enterprises had villas there assigned to them by the Communist Party for the use of their employees and I assumed that D, who worked

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for state radio and television, didn't want to risk any friends seeing her and her daughter with two Westerners.

Immediately after lunch we continued on and it was still early when we stopped in Brașov. We were uncertain whether to stay the night in Brașov or continue on. 'D' resolved the matter by suggesting we spend the night there. She and M., she explained, would stay with friends while Howard and I would be free to do as we pleased for the rest of the afternoon and evening. Brașov was an interesting city that deserved time to explore and so we left the women in the centre of the city promising to pick them up the following morning after breakfast at 9.30.

Howard and I found ourselves a hotel and because it was still early, we went to visit the fairy-tale-like Bran Castle with its turrets and spires and bright red steel gables.

Like me, Howard had read the novel about Count Dracula and his eerie castle in Transylvania. The author was Bram Stoker, an American writer who used to spend his holidays near Montrose in Scotland. Anyone visiting this part of the world would automatically assume that one of these towered and crenulated castles in the Carpathians – there were several – must have been Stoker's inspiration for Dracula's home. The fact was that the guides who had taken me round these various castles in the past and the one who was guiding Howard and I round Bran, knew nothing of Stoker's novel, of Count Dracula or of vampires. Stoker's inspiration actually came from Ecclesgreig Castle in Kincardineshire in Scotland close to where he spent his summers.

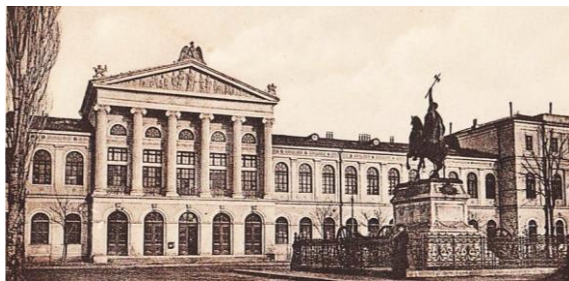
When I told him, Howard pulled my leg about this, accusing me of enticing him to Transylvania and Bran Castle just to boast about my native land!

The following morning 'M' and 'D' joined us in the square with the Black Church. They'd enjoyed an evening with friends. Now we were all ready to head for Bistrița, only 300 kilometres to the north. We planned to take it easy, stopping often to admire the sights. There was virtually no traffic at all which made driving a joy. Cars were generally owned by the State and used for State purposes; only a tiny fraction of Romanians owned a private car since the restriction on private ownership had been

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eased a year or two previously. The road took us through part of the Olt Valley and then undulating, forested country with villages that had been populated now by Romanians, now by Saxons, now by Hungarians and now by Romanians again – and even many Roma people – for hundreds of years.

It was a fresh, spring morning and the world was bathed in early sunshine as we approached Sighișoara. ‘D’ conversed with ‘M’ in Hungarian. “Another request”, I thought. And sure enough, ‘M’ asked if we might enter the town and drive through some of its quaint streets. Her father and mother, she explained, had known this small medieval town well and ‘D’ wanted to revive happy memories. The request made perfect sense, so we entered the medieval town of Sigișoara.

Guided by D, I drove very slowly from one narrow, cobbled, traffic-free street to another. The streets were lined by immaculate yellow, red and ochre houses and separated by picturesque, squares shaded by trees.

As we turned one corner ‘D’ gasped and asked us to stop the car. I did. She said something to ‘M’ in Hungarian and then to us in Romanian, “Please go back to the main square. ‘M’ and I will join you within the hour.” And the two women got out of the car and hurried off down a narrow side-street.

Howard and I parked in the fortified medieval centre of this small, beautifully preserved town and walked around looking at the buildings and the people going about their daily lives.

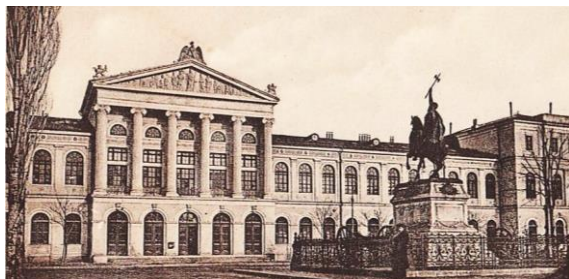
*“This could be Reigate in Surrey – where I come from!”* Howard was referring to the normality of everyday life in a small historical town. I was glad that Howard was seeing the normal life of Romania as well as those things that were different from the UK. Even in communist regime like that imposed on the country by the Romanian Communist Party and its apparatus of repression, I thought it was important to see that people still lived the kinds of lives that we lived in the UK albeit within very political different institutions.

Within 45 minutes, ‘M’ and ‘D’ returned in the company of two casually but well-dressed gentlemen in their early 60s. ‘D’ introduced them as old friends. I invited them to join us for coffee and a pastry. They agreed. The two gentlemen, one with a

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shock of pure white hair, the other with thinning dark hair scrutinised both Howard and I as only Romanians can scrutinise. I was used to it and had forewarned Howard to be prepared for it. He played along beautifully with his usual friendly smile on his face. They seemed satisfied with what they saw in us. They explained that there was a town festival about to start and perhaps we would like to watch it. 'M' and 'D' looked at us expectantly. We willingly agreed.

I suspected that 'D' had set up this meeting with her old friends before she left Bucharest and had presented the 'casual encounter' as a coincidence for Howard's and my benefit. From experience, I knew that this was how Romanians often did things. It saved offering explanations in advance. It prevented these explanations from being passed on to others even in casual conversation. Even after the fact, the mystery would remain; Romanians offered few retrospective explanations. In my experience, things seemed to just 'happen'. Sometimes the incident would 'evolve', as this one with the two gentlemen was evolving. Sometimes they ended as abruptly as they began. Most of the time, I was amused by these incidents and simply took them as a '*givens*' without having to understand them. At the same time I felt sorry that conditions in the country were such that Romanians found it imprudent to take me into their confidence.

Howard and I were on holiday, we had no really fixed itinerary. I wanted him to experience the Romania I was living in and this kind of event was very much part of Romanian life. I thought it wise to grasp whatever opportunity came our way and didn't dwell on whether we were being manipulated by 'D' or not. I knew that if we were, it was out of necessity; there was no malicious intent.

I have no recollection of the events we saw at the festival that morning in Sigișoara; I was too engrossed by what D. and the two gentlemen had to say – and they talked much more than I had expected.

They explained to Howard and I in very respectable English – D's turned out to be just as good – that the three of them had not met since before the Second World War. All three were friends originally from Timișoara – members of that city's Hungarian Jewish community. The two gentlemen had studied medicine and, after graduating, had set up practice in Sigișoara in the late 30s.

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When the War began, Romania came under increasing pressure to take sides. All the players wanted access to Romania's oilfields. King Carol II appeared to vacillate between France and Germany. Ion Antonescu, an officer in the Romanian Army, on the far-right and sympathetic to the fascist Iron Guards was more decisive. With political and military help, Antonescu wrested power from King Carol and allied Romania with Hitler. In the wake of that alliance, many Romanian and Hungarian Jews and Gypsies were sent to concentration camps.

Along with others, these two doctors had been transported to factories in Germany as slave labour. Freed after the War, they made their way back to Sighișora to find their wives and children. Their families had left Sighișora but they waited patiently in the town to see if at least some members would return. One traumatic day they learned that their families had been sent to concentration camps and died there. The hair of one of those gentleman turned white overnight. Both remained in Sighișoara trying to rebuild their lives. They had succeeded, they told us impassively, as well as might be expected.

It was always worth going along with what Romanians wanted to do even if they presented it as a spontaneous decision while I might suspect the contrary. By accepting, I gained some very valuable, even unique experiences.

We said goodbye to D's gentlemen friends and continued north. It was dark and very late by the time we reached Târgu Mureș. Throughout Romania, there was little in the way of street-lights but we found a hotel where the reception desk was still open. The women went in first, registered and retired to their room. Only then did Howard and I enter and take a room for ourselves.

Târgu Mureș turned out to be another well-preserved, medieval city with a turbulent history. It had been ransacked by the Mongols in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and then subjugated by the Turks and absorbed forcibly into the Ottoman Empire. After being liberated from the Turks it became a bone of contention between Hungary and Romania for centuries.

After driving north-east we stopped to admire the painted monasteries of Moldovița and Sucevița then continued on to spend the night in Rădăuți. The next

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day we drove to Siret in the far north. As had my mother and I in 1968, Howard wanted to 'look over into the Soviet Union' at the border crossing some miles north. 'M' and 'D' were less interested in viewing the USSR. They'd lived under the shadow of the Soviet Union, had suffered, had learned Russian as the obligatory second language and showed little curiosity. So we left the women at one of the first churches to have been built in Romania – the tiny stone Church of the Holy Trinity, promised to pick them up in an hour or so, and drove north from the village as close to the crossing-point into the Soviet Union as we dared without causing the border guards any alarm.

"Nothing's happening!" Howard was dissatisfied with the inactivity at the border. The armed guards were there, the barrier was firmly down and there was no movement of either people or vehicles.

"Is there a fence along the entire border?" He asked me, "or does it turn into a line of lookout towers with armed guards?"

"I'm not sure", I answered. "My guess is that the steel-mesh link-fence at the crossing point gives way to lookout towers and foot patrols. The border's very long; a fence would be too costly."

"Well, there's only one way to find out," Howard was determined.

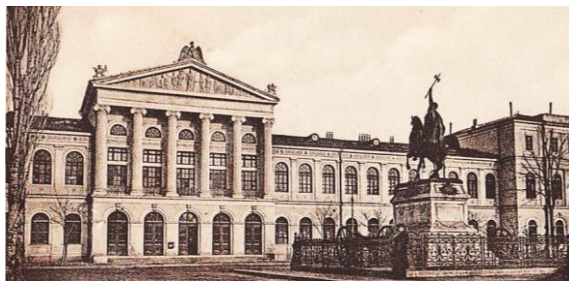
He wanted to find a road that ran parallel with the border and explore as far as we dare. But our hour had passed and so we had to drive back to Siret to pick up 'M' and 'D'. Howard told them what he wanted to do. I offered to leave them in the centre of the little town of Siret and return for them but they decided to come with us. They appeared, after all, to be as adventurous as we were!

And so we drove through Siret again towards the crossing point into the USSR and found a small country side-road that seemed to run parallel with the border and began following it. However the country road soon entered a wood and then after a few more kilometres the road deteriorated to a mere track. We could see nothing of what we wanted. I knew that if we could find a small hill or even a low rise without trees, we would probably be able to see the town of Chernivitsi in the Soviet Republic of the Ukraine. The previous year, close to the border as darkness set in, Pearl and I had seen a glow in the sky and one of the Romanian border guards had spoken to us.

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“The light is from the town of Chernivitsi over the border,” he’d said. He went on to tell us that Chernivitsi had once belonged to Romania, had been taken by force and given to the Ukraine but that one day he hoped Romania would pressure the USSR into returning it. I’d been sufficiently surprised by his outspokenness to ask a friend about Chernivitsi when we got back to Bucharest and this is what he had told me.

Centuries ago, Chernivitsi had been the major town within its own principality but was annexed by Poland. Later it became part of the Principality of Moldavia, then part of the Hapsburg Empire and then of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the Kingdom of Romania was formed when Moldavia and Wallachia united. Then, during the Second World War, northern Moldavia including Chernivitsi was taken by the Russian Army and given to the Ukraine. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941 – the famous *Operation Barbarossa* – the Romanian Army as Germany’s ally invaded Russia and retook Chernivitsi but the Soviets expelled the Romanian Army the following year and returned it to the Ukraine.

As we drove, I told Howard its perplexing history. It made him all the more keen to see it, even from a distance, and so we drove further and further down the track and deeper and deeper into the woods. Try as we might, we couldn’t find a vantage point from which we could look out across the forests into the USSR.

“Surely the land has to rise! There must be somewhere we can see over the tops of the trees!” Howard was becoming impatient. I was listening to the bumps in the track threatening the undercarriage of the car. There would be no replacement exhaust pipe to be found in Bucovina!

I swung the car round a bend in the track and the trees seemed to thin out.

“This looks more promising!”

Just as Howard uttered these words I caught sight some thirty yards ahead and to my left of a camouflage net draped over a bulky object. A large-calibre green cannon protruded from the net. In a flash, I was transported back to a combined military operation we Gordon Highlanders had participated in with a cavalry regiment of the British Army. We infantry soldiers were following immediately behind a squadron of

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16 tanks. The tanks reached a predetermined line then took up battle formation to give us covering fire. Our task was to advance on foot.

Once seen, never forgotten. When a tank must adopt a fighting position, the commander finds a ridgeline or even a slight incline, stops short of it and then orders the tank's tracks to spin in reverse. The spinning tracks swiftly gouge the soft earth and dig the body of the tank into the ground until only its cannon is above the horizon. This allows the tank to fire at will while presenting a very difficult target for the advancing enemy.

I drove a few more yards and then the entire picture presented itself. To the left of the track, only metres away from the car, stood a group of uniformed soldiers at ease. I could see the cannon of at least three tanks all poking through camouflage netting and pointing north. The position of these Romanian tanks – and there must be more – appeared to answer the question about what Romania might do if the Soviet Union invaded from the north. They would resist!

As a civilian directly faced with armed soldiers and motorised weapons it's seldom a good idea to run. Even as infantrymen, we'd been trained to stop, stand absolutely still, and swiftly take stock of the entire situation. I immediately stopped the car and took in absolutely everything I could.

This was, I am certain, the only time in the two years I spent in Romania when I thought faster than a Romanian. In a fraction of a second I had taken mental stock of our situation. *One, we've stumbled into at least a troop of Romanian tanks entrenched in fighting position with their guns facing into the Soviet Union. Two, we are 4 people in a place we should not be even close to. Three, two British passport holders in a British car with diplomatic plates; no immediate danger. Four, two vulnerable Romanian women with Romanian identification, in immediate potential danger.*

I spoke very rapidly to the women "Don't move! Don't get out of the car! Say nothing! Look straight ahead at Howard's back." To Howard, "Your passport!" He passed it to me. I got out of the car with a smile on my face, took only one step towards the soldiers and stopped

An astonished soldier, stripped to the waist, shaving in a mirror nailed to a tree

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dropped his razor in a basin and said something I didn't hear. One of the other soldiers handed him his battle-dress jacket. He struggled into it. Another soldier handed him his pistol. So he was the officer in the group! Good!

I addressed myself to him as he walked towards me, part of his face white with shaving soap, his battle-dress open and his pistol down by his side. He was a professional. I extended both my arms out from my body, one hand obviously empty, two passports in the other. The officer issued an order and a soldier handed him a towel. He paused to wipe soap off his face and advanced towards me. He was, I could see, at a loss for words. Our training sergeant in the Gordons had drilled into us an imperative, *"Seize the initiative! In a tricky situation, always seize the initiative."* I did.

*"Good day, Coronel. My friend and I are lost. We are tourists. From the British Embassy in Bucharest. We are lost. How can we reach Siret?"* He said nothing but took the two passports with his free hand. He tucked his pistol into his belt and opened first one passport and then the other.

*"You say you are from the British Embassy. You are driving a car with diplomatic plates. Why don't you have diplomatic visas?"*

'This officer must have had an even smarter training sergeant than I had!' I thought.

*"You are right, Sir! This car belongs to my good friend the British Consul it does not belong to me. I am the Visiting British Professor at Bucharest University. My friend and I are touring your beautiful country."*

*"Touring! Here!"*

*"I understand, Sir. I apologise. Can you please tell us the best way to leave?"*

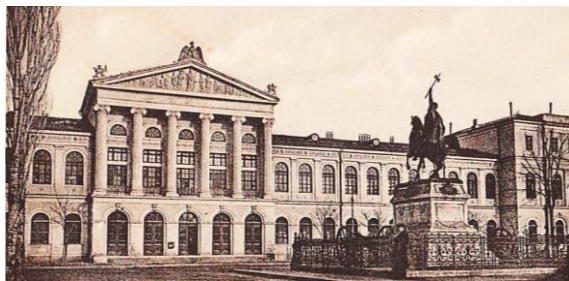
*"Do not leave! Wait right there! Do not move!"* By now the soldiers were armed and loosely grouped.

The officer walked a short distance with our passports to an official looking tent so camouflaged that I hadn't seen it. A tank regiment will normally be supported by a communications unit. It appeared that this officer was in complete charge. He appeared a few short minutes later and walked up to me. He'd buttoned his battle-dress and combed his hair. To my utter astonishment and profound relief, he handed

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me back our two passports.

*"You will turn your vehicle round right here. You will go back the way you came. When you reach Siret you will be met by the Miliția. You must follow their instructions."*

I nodded and thanked him warmly to show him—and to try to convince myself—that I was unafraid. We were not in the clear yet. The *Miliția* were the regular highway police but they came under the supervision of the *Securitate*. I got back in the car. Howard looked shaken but still had a smile on his face. 'M' and D, expressionless, stared obediently at the backs of the seats in front of them.

The officer called an order to one of his soldiers who beckoned me into making the 180 degree turn so that I didn't approach the tanks. Then, when I was back on the track and facing Siret, he waved me urgently on. I very slowly drove until the soldiers and the camouflage netting covering the tanks were out of sight. Then I drove slightly faster. Nobody in the car said a word.

Fifteen minutes later as we entered Siret, two *Milițieni* were waiting for us, their right hands raised. I stopped, and they approached. Neither I nor the women had the slightest idea what to expect. Would we be taken away for questioning? Arrested on suspicion of spying? I could feel that 'M', 'D', and even Howard, were as tense as I was.

The *Milițieni* indicated we should wind down all four windows. Unsmiling, they peered inside.

Then, to me, *"Get out! Open the trunk!"* I did. They tapped the trunk and the wheel wells and inspected the 4 small suitcases. All were unlocked making their task easy.

They gestured me back into the car. *"Drive south on this road for 5 kilometres. At the junction, take the road to the right marked Dornești. Do not stop! Do not change direction until you reach Dornești! The Milițieni there will give you instructions."* They waved us on.

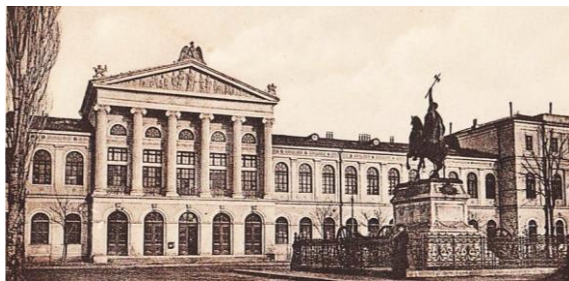
We breathed a collective sigh of relief, drove to the fork in the road and took the right branch marked Dornești.

As we approached the village two *Milițieni* met us, signalled us to stop and repeated the same procedure.

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*“Continue driving on this road for kilometres until you reach Rădăuți. Do not stop for any reason. The Milițieni in Rădăuți will give you instructions.”*

Two *Milițieni* officers were standing in the middle of the road at Rădăuți. We stopped. They counted the 4 occupants of the car, checked to see that there were no more and no fewer, checked the trunk and ordered us on.

*“You must continue in the direction of Bucharest.”*

*“Can we stop before we get to Bucharest?”* I wanted clarification. The trip was far from over.

*“So long as you continue in a southerly direction you may spend the night where you want. When you find a hotel, check in with the local Miliția.”*

As far as I was concerned – and Howard – the trip may not have been over but ‘M’ and ‘D’ were so shaken they asked if we could make it to Bucharest that night. It was over 500 kilometres to Bucharest and it would be dark in a few hours. I never drove in the dark because Romanian trucks and other vehicles had only high-beam headlights that could not be dipped. When they passed each other in the dark the standard protocol was to switch headlights off altogether! This practice terrified me so I stuck to daylight driving unless night driving simply couldn’t be avoided.

I explained this to the women and they understood. The shock they had suffered followed by the anxiety of not knowing what might have happened to them had any one of first the Army and then the Miliția asked to see their papers, was slowly beginning to wear off.

We spent two very interesting and enjoyable days in the ethnic Hungarian region of Țiuc. I gave ‘D’ the task of hunting down the embroidered cushion-covers that I wanted. Although she was very much an urban person with what I thought was some distaste for the very poor but spotless villages we passed though, D, with some considerable difficulty, was able to find me four beautiful cushion-covers that I still treasure.

A couple of days later Howard and I dropped ‘M’ and ‘D’ off at the Gara de Nord and then Howard and I returned the Consul’s car to the Embassy compound and parked it where Bob told me to. I handed him the keys.

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He gave us one of his enigmatic smiles, *"How did you two gentlemen enjoy your sightseeing trip?"*

*"Very well,"* I told him, *"we loved it! Romania's a fascinating country."*

*"Did you enjoy Predeal? Brasov? Poiana Brașov and Bran Castle?"*

*"We most certainly did!"*

*"And what about Sigișoara? Târgu Mureș? Bistrița?"*

*"Transylvania is fascinating."* Howard talked enthusiastically about the mountains and the forests, the peasant villages and the ancient medieval towns.

*"The painted monasteries? My wife and I want to see these before this tour's over!"*

Bob persisted.

*"They're beautiful. Don't miss them, Bob, your wife will love them!"*

*"And Siret?"*

*"Northern Bucovina's one of the loveliest parts of the country I've seen so far,"* I told him.

*"You must have really liked Siret – in and out several times. And twice to Dornești and Rădăuți."*

Bob looked at first Howard and then me, a smile on his lips. He was playing with us.

*"Curious how I know?"* He asked lightly.

*"I filed my itinerary before I left."* But both he and I knew I hadn't listed all of these places on the itinerary I had filed, and he knew we hadn't reached the Delta.

*"Did you keep to your itinerary?"* A rhetorical question.

Bob beckoned us into his office. He showed us the trip itinerary I'd filed with him before leaving. Then he opened a large, hard-bound, ledger and put his finger on one line after another – *place, date; place, date; place, date*. Howard and I looked from the ledger to each other and back to the ledger again.

*"Every time a diplomatic plate is seen by a Miliția officer anywhere in the country,"* Bob continued, *"the sighting—including the plate number, time and location is reported to the Securitate. If the plate is British, Securitate immediately call me here and give me the plate number. They ask me if the car's in authorised use and*

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who's driving it."

He paused. "I told them you were driving with some British friends and that you were on the route you filed with me." He winked at us, smiled and closed the ledger.

"OK, Jock," you and Mr Owens can go. The NCO dismissing the men.

Bob was a man after my own heart. He probably wished that his stay in Romania could have been as exciting as mine obviously was!

And Howard? Howard later told me that he dined out on his stories about our adventures in Romania for a very long time!



Mănăstirea Snagov

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## **More travels with Pearl**

### **Cap de Crap**

It's a fresh spring morning and Pearl and I are driving north-west across the Wallachian Plain. We left Bucharest half-an-hour ago. We're going to spend a couple of nights in Horezu Monastery – to be more accurate it's a convent – which I have visited several times before. First, however, I want Pearl to get a glimpse of Ploiești and then enjoy climbing slowly into the Argeș valley to reach the ancient town of Curtea de Argeș before turning west to the city of Râmnicu Vâlcea on the Olt Valley then backtracking south a few kilometres to Mihaiești and finally heading west on country roads to Băile Govora, Pietran and Cotești. It was spring and the countryside would be fresh and magnificently in bloom.

We dutifully drove round Ploiești whose oil fields were off-bounds to foreigners, not because I respected the ban on entering the city – I'd often driven through its centre more than once – but because we could appreciate the size and complexity of the oil refineries better from a distance. Without stopping, we remarked on the massive complexes with their holding tanks, pumps, distillation towers, heaters, refraction towers, condensers and massive steaming cooling towers all linked by miles of beautifully marshalled pipes and tubes that to the layman were a complete mystery.

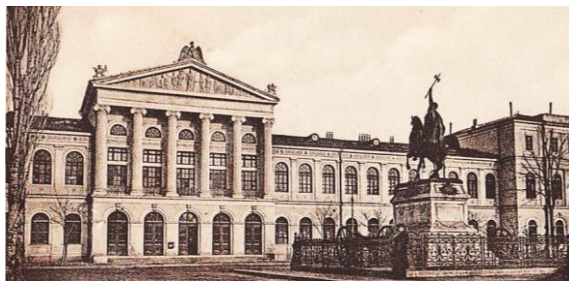
When I was little more than a year old, in August 1943, the Americans had bombed the refineries in Ploiești because they were in the hands of Germany and supplying a large proportion of the essential fuel to Axis forces. The Americans had lost over 50 bombers in that attempt and more than 500 airmen. Now, in 1969, the oil extracted and refined at Ploiești was Romania's major dollar earner.

After leaving Ploiești behind we began to ascend into the spring-fresh hills that flanked the Argeș Valley. As far as they eye could see, the lower hills were white with plum blossom. The peasant holdings were made up of tiny, neat wooden houses, each in its own lot and surrounded by vegetable and flower gardens bounded by picket

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fences. From the car Pearl and I could see stout women and sturdy men tending to their gardens and their orchards.

I knew from experience that had we been walking they would greet us warmly with curious eyes and offer us water or even a plate of home-made cheese and a glass of *țuică*. Also from experience I knew never to accept the offered refill of *țuică* – it was, like Scotch whisky, well over 40% alcohol by volume.

I reminded Pearl about the universal hospitality of peasants and country people and she suggested we stop. I promised that we would, but later, on the road between Curtea de Argeș and Râmnicu Vâlcea for lunch.

Curtea de Argeș in the southern portion of the Făgăraș Mountains had been the capital of Wallachia in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when the region now known as Romania was divided into principalities ruled by Voivodes – governors or princes whose positions were backed by military power. We wanted to visit the magnificent byzantine church in the town and to get the ‘feel’ for what the original capital of the Principality of Wallachia was like, but we found the road blocked. We were lucky enough to arrive in the town on a public holiday, so we parked the car and continued on foot. Men women and children in beautiful regional costumes were walking the streets and enjoying themselves. We joined them.

I asked where the best place to have lunch was and was directed to a narrow street on the edge of town. On one side of the road were several restaurants and on the other side we could see crates of chickens, geese, hens and what looked to us like un-weaned lambs. There were crowds of people around the crates – they appeared to be inspecting what they might have for dinner!

We went closer and saw that peasant entrepreneurs were selling the fowl, some specialising in one bird, others in another and we could even see tanks from which large live carp were being scooped out and handed to eager purchasers. A family would choose a hen or a duck or a goose and the vendor would wring its neck on the spot and hand it over. For the customer unwilling to clean and pluck, a group of women behind the vendor would prepare the bird within minutes for the customer for a few Lei.

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My cousin had been a hill shepherd on hill farms and estates in Scotland and both Pearl and I knew lambs and sheep well. We ate strongly-flavoured mutton in Scotland. Lambs, usually castrated male sheep just under a year old, were sent to markets in the south. The un-weaned lambs intrigued us – were customers taking them home to fatten up for a few months, we wondered?

But no! A customer would point to a lamb – they had their legs tied together at the hooves – and the vendor would slit the lamb's throat, bleed it into the gutter, and when the animal had bled out, would skin it and hand the tiny carcass over.

Having been brought up in the country and being familiar with farms and the slaughter of animals we, like the Romanians around us, accepted what we saw. Nevertheless, there was something that struck both Pearl and I as pathetic about seeing such tiny lambs killed, bled, cleaned and skinned. They barely had any flesh on them yet! But the peasant selling the lambs was doing a roaring trade.

We entered one of the restaurants and found a table. The waiter brought us menus and of course they were in Romanian. I began reading the Romanian aloud to Pearl and translating the names of the dishes.

"Cap de crap!" I read.

"What?" Pearl roared with laughter. "Can you repeat that?"

"Cap de crap!" I repeated.

When Pearl and now I stopped laughing, she asked me, "What on earth is 'cap de crap'?"

"I haven't got the slightest idea, but I can assure you it's not what you think it is!"

Pearl decided on the lamb just to see how such tiny animals were cooked and presented and also to taste something she'd never imagined eating before – unweaned lambs!

"Why don't you order the 'cap de crap' Ronald?" And Pearl went off into gales of laughter again. Always one to try something new, when the waiter arrived to take our order, that's what I asked for.

"O porție din cap de crap și o porție de stufat de miel, vă rog!" I managed to keep a

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straight face.

Pearl's lamb arrived first. It looked and smelled delicious, cooked in a vegetable stew of fresh vegetables with garlic. She let me taste some; it was exquisite.

Then the waiter returned motoring over to me rapidly holding a deep soup-plate high above his head in one hand. With a sweeping gesture he placed it on the table in front of me without spilling a single drop or even soiling the rim of the plate.

Pearl and I peered at it. Out of a red soup that offered an appetizing aroma rose, like a pyramid, a very large fish's head – eyes wide open, mouth gaping to show large pharyngeal teeth. Involuntarily we recoiled. Neither of us had been prepared for this nor knew that any fish might possess such large, human-like teeth. In Scotland we were used to the more modest head of a North Sea haddock or herring on our plate. We looked from the grinning carp's head to each other and then laughed uproariously attracting a lot of attention from amused diners at adjoining tables. For them, *carp head soup* was a seasonal delicacy!

Pearl and I shared each other's plates and thoroughly enjoyed both. The amusement the *cap de crap* afforded both us and the other diners in the restaurant, added extra flavour to the meal.

## **Horezu Convent**

Every time I approached the convent at Horezu the scene put me in mind of a Bruegel painting. High, ochre-coloured walls enclose an enormous courtyard. From outside the domes of a church and a bell-tower are visible above the walls. They need repairing in places. As we get closer, we can see that the entrance is in the wall furthest from the village and bell-tower is atop the arch and into the arch is set the great, wooden, double-gate.

Even before we stop, two nuns begin to swing both gates open. Through the gates we can now see the residents' apartments, two storeys high, that stretches the entire length of one wall. The residence is roofed in copper, moss-green with age, and protected by two matching towers. In the centre of the courtyard stands the 300-year

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old chapel.

We asked for permission from the Mother Superior to stay here the weekend and the now wide-open gates tell us that we are welcome. We park just inside the enormous courtyard and the doors are swung to behind us by two old nuns. Smiling and offering us words of welcome they lead us to meet Mother Superior Tomaida.

I know from previous visits that there are no more than a dozen nuns in the entire monastery and they are all old. When the Communists took over in 1947 the monastery was allowed to remain open but no novices could be admitted and so the residents steadily aged and their numbers just as steadily reduced.

Mother Superior Tomaida welcomed us and expressed her pleasure at meeting my mother. She told us that we would be escorted to our rooms on the second floor but that we were due for the evening meal in the communal dining room within a very short time. The sound wood-on-wood would tell us when to come down. Whereas Scottish churches used the steeple bell as a signal, Orthodox churches in Romania used a simpler method. The priest – or nun in this case – held what looked like a light, double-ended, wooden paddle in one hand and beat on the flanges of the paddle with a wooden drumstick held in the other to make a series of short, crisp raps. A priest or nun skilled in the use of the stick and the paddle could speed up the rhythm of their tapping to give an increased sense of urgency as the limit approached for whatever ritual, liturgy or in this case the evening meal, was being announced.

Pearl was charmed by the dining room. It was as old as the chapel and its walls were adorned with religious frescoes that any church would have been proud of.

We sat down together with all of the nuns – there were not more than a dozen – and were served a very simple meal of *ciorba de urzici* – nettle soup. Pearl and I were offered bread but the nuns took only the soup and so we did too. Mother Superior Tomaida did most of the talking on behalf of the nuns. She told us that the nettles had been collected that afternoon by two of the sisters. Today was a special fast day and the nettles were symbolic of abstinence.

We had eaten nettles in Scotland and found the soup delicious to the evident satisfaction of Mother Superior Tomaida and her convent of nuns. They received few

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visitors, had obviously talked about our visit among themselves and had been concerned that we were arriving on a fast day. Our empty plates relieved them of any concern.

She also told us that late tonight there would be a full mass celebrated in the chapel by a visiting priest. Would we like to attend? Both Pearl and I eagerly accepted the invitation. Mother Superior Tomaida told us to listen for the sound of the wooden clapper board.

We were both tired and so we opted to sleep until we were called for mass. When the clapper board sounded several hours later we were both dressed and ready. We made our way down the ornate stone stairs of the residential block, crossed the dark courtyard and entered the chapel. Although the chapel was fairly large, because it was lit by a no more than a few candles and because its pillars, walls and ceilings were entirely covered by frescoes depicting lessons from the bible for the illiterate, the impression was that we were in a small space.

A curved wall faced the *iconostasis*, a magnificent, carved and gilded screen of icons, and religious paintings that separated the rounded nave, where we and the nuns sat, from the sanctuary that contained the altar and the consecrated Eucharist, the host and the wine. In a Romanian Orthodox church the sanctuary is accessible only to the priest.

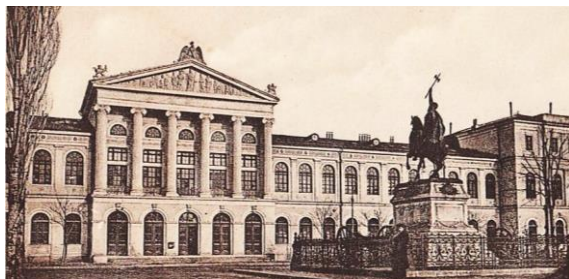
We sat in silence and watched. The nuns' shrouded, shadowy faces appeared cadaverous, ages-old in the semidarkness. Eyes and haloes of the Virgin and the Saints glinted from the darkness that surrounded us as the candle flames flickered. Then the ancient, magnificently-bearded priest lit enormous candles before the iconostasis and the icons sparkled in bright silver and deep, warm gold.

We watched an ancient, traditional, haunting rite conducted in Old Church Slavonic, a language that dates back well over a thousand years. The splendidly-robed priest was more active and vocal than we had expected. He energetically swung the gleaming, highly-ornamented censer by its chains to produce clouds of incense accompanied by bell-chimes he and intoned and sang the liturgy in a clear, melodious voice. The nuns chanted or sang simple responses as the ritual progressed and called

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for.

As Mother Superior Tomaida had requested at dinner, Pearl and I quietly withdrew before the priest offered the Blessed Sacrament.

We left the mystery and the colour, the tradition and the ritual of the chapel for a beautiful starry Southern Carpathian night. Without speaking, we breathed in the fresh mountain air that bore the aroma of herbs and blossom and grazing cattle. In silence we climbed the staircase to our austere, spotless rooms in the residence, deeply moved.

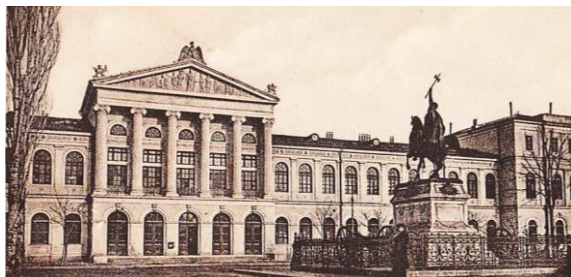


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## The Danube Delta

### Tulcea and more

For some reason the Danube Delta seems very different from other parts of Romania. Driving across the Dobrogean plain gives the Delta region a feeling of being distant, isolated, disconnected. Pearl and I are on our way north from Constanța to Tulcea in a Ford Anglia lent to us by the ever-generous British Consul in Bucharest.

Two days previously, we'd driven from Bucharest to Calaraș, taken the ferry across the Danube, and continued on to Constanța, Romania's principal port on the Black sea. We'd stayed in a private house whose address had been given to us by the Romanian tourist office in Constanța. Hotels were entirely impersonal and Pearl expressed the hope that state-authorised 'bed-and-breakfast' might give us more opportunity to have face-to-face contact Romanians.

Our hostess, Doamna Lupei, a woman of Pearl's age, turned out to be a pure delight. Her husband was employed as a mariner on the Danube and was gone regularly for days at time. She too, hoped that 'bed-and-breakfast' would allow her to meet people and pass the time pleasantly. What she had not expected was to play hostess to two Scots, one of whom spoke passable Romanian!

Pearl and Doamna Lupei immediately made friends although neither spoke the other's language. They communicated using their own language, their eloquent hands, a wide range of facial expressions that put me in mind of Charlie Chaplin's silent films, and a great deal of laughter.

After putting our bags in our rooms, we asked Doamna Lupei where we should go for an evening meal. To Pearl's and my delight, she offered to make us *mămăliga cu brânză* – polenta topped with a sliver of butter and some crumbly cheese. In her simple but spotless kitchen, she was demonstrating to us how to prepare the polenta when a thought suddenly occurred to her. She looked at me with concern in her eyes.

"I'm not sure that the Tourist Office would approve. I am probably doing a local restaurant out of business by feeding you!" She looked uncertain. The last thing

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that any Romanian could afford to do was to run afoul of the authorities.

“Don’t worry,” I calmed her fears, “I’ll go out and buy a bottle of Murfatlar wine and some pastries and bring them back. Then we will have done our duty by local businesses. I’ll even have a receipt to prove it.”

That satisfied her and so I left Pearl and Doamna Lupei chattering away to each other thirteen to the dozen as if they’d known each other all their lives.

The polenta and cheese couldn’t have tasted better; the Chardonnay complimented and added to the mild flavours of the dish. I had bought pastries and fruit for dessert as well as bread and sliced ham for the following day’s breakfast—just in case an informer for the Tourist Office was watching and expected a certain level of expenditure from me!

After dinner, we sat up with Doamna Lupei, with the windows open and the sounds of the busy port as background music. She showed us mementoes of journeys she had made up the Danube with her husband before they’d had children to keep her at home.

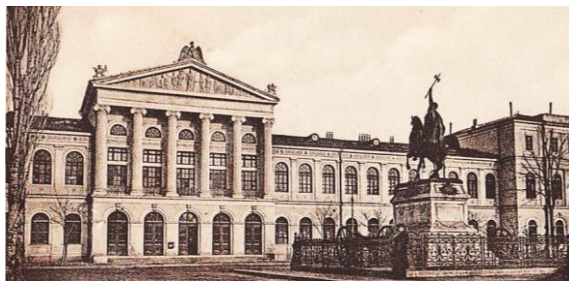
Our plan had been to drive to Doi Mai the next day and spend the night in the little ethnic Russian *Lipoveni* compound where Ron Walker and his girl-friend and I occasionally spent a weekend. Seeing Pearl and Doamna Lupei get on so well—Pearl loved listening and talking to new people—I suggested that we visit Doi Mai but return to Constanța for a second night. And that’s what we decided to do to the absolute delight of both Pearl and Doamna Lupei.

We drove down the semi-tropical coast of the Black Sea and visited all the little villages along the way—Eforie, Costinești, and Mangalia until we arrived at the tiniest of them all, Doi Mai. The family Ron Walker usually lodged with were delighted to see us and immediately suggested we stay the night but we excused ourselves politely claiming lack of time. I wanted my mother to see the tiny cabins where we slept when we visited and the women of the family were delighted so show them to us as well as display, with pride, their embroidered bedspreads and cushion covers. There only ever seemed to be women and blond children around in that compound; the men must all have been away fishing.

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They insisted we stay for lunch and allow them to bake fish for us. We were only too happy to accept. They cooked their fish whole, the way we were used to in Scotland, so that the flesh absorbed the flavour of the bones and the head. Pearl, I, and each member of the family was served our own individual, entire fish.

When we finished, we left only the bare bones on our plates, the skeleton still entire, but picked perfectly clean of flesh including the delicate pieces from the cheeks and the back of the head. We all looked at our perfectly tidy plates and then at one another and smiled. We recognised that we shared a culture common to natives of fishing communities around the world, a culture that taught us the right way to eat fish. This Lipoveni fishing family would, as would we Scots, have been sorely disappointed had we expected the fish to have been topped, tailed and filleted!

On the way back to Constanța we leisurely revisited the villages and the beaches on the coast and still had time to admire the statue of Ovid that stood in one of Constanța's public squares. Eight years after Christ died, the poet Ovid had been banished from Rome to Constanța – it was called Tomis then and was located in that part of the Roman Empire called Dacia. Ovid died there 10 years later without ever having been permitted to go home.

Little details like that were constantly reminding us how ancient part of the world Romania was and how fortunate we were to be in a position to explore it. Ovid's statue was not itself old – it had been sculpted and placed in the square only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but it reminded us that Romanians loved to proclaim their Roman heritage.

While we were examining Ovid's statue, Pearl grabbed my arm and pointed in excitement to two Turks each wearing his conical red fez with black tassels attached to the truncated top. One of them was wearing shoes with upturned points at the toes. I was able to tell Pearl that the Turks had colonised Dobrogea for close to 300 years from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> till the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and brought it under the dominion of the Ottoman Empire ruled from Constantinople.

Doamna Lupei welcomed us back into her home and again invited us to watch her making dinner. She stewed onions and carrots, added cooked rice and a little

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ground meat to make meat balls. Then she rolled the meat balls in pickled vine leaves that she told us she had collected herself the previous summer to make small, wrapped packets that she called '*sarmale*'. When they were carefully and tightly wrapped and sealed, she steamed and then served them smothered in plain, thick yogurt. We enjoyed these delicious *sarmale*—eating vine-leaf and all—with another bottle of local white wine and ended the meal with sweet pastries—all of which we had bought on our trip.

As we chatted after dinner, Pearl explained to Doamna Lupei, with many a bizarre gesture, that we had seen two Turks in traditional dress. Doamna Lupei mentioned that there were two mosques in Constanța, an older one which was closed and a newer one which was, she believed, still in use. She offered to walk with us the closer of the two. It was a clean, modern structure that might have been taken for an Orthodox church were it not for the distinctive minaret. It had been built before the First World War by the Romanian Government using public funds, as a gesture of goodwill towards the substantial Turkish minority in the city.

The following morning it was difficult to drag ourselves away from Doamna Lupei but this would be our last opportunity to visit the Danube Delta. And this is why we now found ourselves driving north through the fertile Dobrogea plain to Tulcea, fifty miles inland from the Black Sea but nevertheless one of Romania's important ports on the sparkling blue Danube.

It was still early when we reached the port. The road led us directly to the quays that stretched up and down the river, quays crammed with storage facilities and machinery for loading and unloading cargo. It gave Pearl and I a considerable thrill to look out across that wide river and realise that its waters began almost 3,000 kilometres to the west and flowed through Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and finally shared its enormous fan-like delta with the Ukraine in the USSR. A major European river that started in the Black Forest and ended in the Black Sea not that far south of Odessa. It was navigable for most of its length.

Tulcea wasn't our final destination. We were planning to reach Sulina at the

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furthest point east precisely where the Delta met the Black Sea. Sulina was the river's final port.

My friend and colleague Dino Sandulescu had told me an intriguing tale about Sulina. His father, Nicolae, had been born in Sulina in 1891 and had later moved to Bucharest where he married and became a banker.

Dino told me how he'd been taken to Sulina in about 1937 or 38 when he was barely 5 years old to meet his paternal grandparents. His grandfather was a senior official with the Danube River Commission whose headquarters were in Sulina, a bustling town of 5,000 or 6,000 people. His grandfather spoke Greek, French, English and Rumanian. However, Dino's grandmother spoke only Greek and Dino remembers having been coached in that language for some weeks before making the trip so that he would be able to greet and converse appropriately with her in her preferred language.

It struck me as a story that conjured up all the elements of romance—a multinational, multilingual family; an isolated corner of Europe but of such enormous commercial importance that it housed the headquarters of the Danube River Commission; a child's acquisition of Modern Greek in a matter of weeks in order to accommodate his grandmother; an arduous journey by train and boat to the immense reed-jammed waterways at the mouth of Europe's longest navigable waterway; Sulina itself, a mere 300 kilometres from Crimea where the ignominious *Charge of the Light Brigade* had been led by Lord Cardigan against the Russians at the Battle of Balaclava in 1854.

There wasn't a British boy or girl in my school days who couldn't recite at least one verse of Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"

Was there a man dismay'd?

Not tho' the soldier knew

Someone had blunder'd:

Theirs not to make reply,

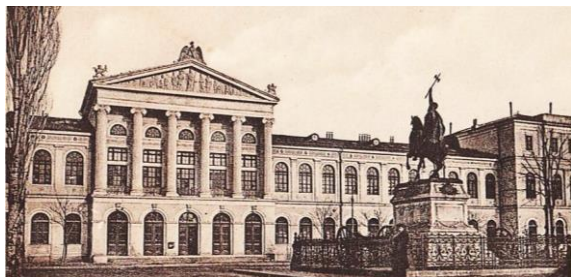
Theirs not to reason why,

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Theirs but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.

It was a Miss Chalmers who first recited that poem to us when we were no more than 7 years old. The dramatic reading rendered in her strong Scottish accent had us all spellbound.

When she finished reciting from memory – she impressed all 28 of us by not having even glanced at the book in front of her – she allowed us to absorb the images in silence for a few moments and then said in her concise Scottish way, “In that poem, boys and girls, Tennyson captures the nature of all that’s good and all that’s bad about Great Britain.”

She said no more, but forever after I would ponder on the things that I experienced and discovered about the nation I was born into and constantly seek to identify and then distinguish the good from the bad. To this day, I have found it no easy matter.

The opportunity to observe wild fowl was an additional, secondary motive to visit the Delta.

However, try as we might, we could not find the road to Sulina and so I accosted a wharf side crane-operator who had just climbed down from his cabin.

“You want to get to Sulina, Comrade?” He was smiling.

“That’s right,” I said, “but I can’t find the road.”

“Don’t you have a map, comrade?” He was still smiling.

“I do!” I asked Pearl to pass it to me and spread it out on the bonnet of the car. I put my finger on the thin blue line, what I imagined was the secondary road that joined Tulcea with Sulina. “There’s the road, but how do we reach it?”

“That’s not a road, Comrade!” He was now grinning. “That’s the Sulina branch of the Danube – it’s one of the three navigable channels for cargo boats to reach the Black Sea!”

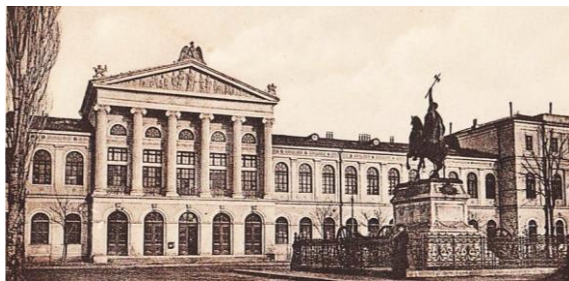
“The only way to get to Sulina is by boat?” I was taken aback.

He nodded and walked away, still smiling at my surprise at something he

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found so natural – that the only viable means of transport in the entire delta region was by boat.

Both Pearl and I were disappointed that we couldn't drive through the delta as we'd planned to and so we decided to try the next best thing – we took a narrow, secondary road that ran parallel to the most southerly of the three navigable channels – the St. George Branch – and decided to see how far we could get.

We reached a small village called Malcoci, just a few kilometres south-east of Tulcea. Malcoci was a collection of tiny, neat, wooden houses surrounded by picket fences, some painted most natural wood. It looked so attractive that we stopped on the outskirts, parked the car and walked back to look at the particularly beautiful flowers growing in one of the gardens. Then the cottage itself caught our attention. Its eaves sported decorative woodwork supports and out of each had been cut the shape of a fish. As we were admiring the careful carpentry work, the owner – an old woman – came out of the open front door and greeted us. I explained who we were – Westerners driving a car with diplomatic plates, just so she could decide whether she really wanted to talk to us or not. She did.

She opened the wooden gate, invited us into the garden and smiling, guided us around naming the flowers she was most proud of including tall stately hollyhock that were so dark in colour that they were almost black. Her husband was working in their vegetable garden tending and planting and she introduced us to him. He was from Sfântu Gheorghe, a tiny port at the mouth of the St George branch of the channel. We learned that had spent his working life on barges that transported grain downstream from the hinterland for exportation.

They invited us to see the inside of their home. It was similar in size to the small *but 'n ben* farm-workers' cottages in Scotland – two rooms and an outhouse – but how different from a Scottish cottage inside! It was light, airy and dry. One corner was taken up by a ceramic, wood-burning stove that had a broad extension with a mattress and bedding on top to provide a warm place for the owners to sleep. They didn't climb into bed between damp sheets in a cold room and shiver as we tended to do in Scotland.

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Ceramic stoves were ubiquitous in rural Romania. They were much more practical and far more efficient than open fire-places. They were built so that the stove's interior flues drew all the heat from the firebox through a maze of narrow internal tunnels. This meant that the surface of the stove never became so hot that it couldn't be touched. Every BTU of heat was absorbed into the interior fire-bricks and allowed to percolate comfortably through colourful hand-painted tiles into this room and that adjoining.

From the tiles of the stove to the bed-covers to the table and chairs and the walls there was colour everywhere. The bed-covers and the table-cloth were hand-embroidered; the simple table and chairs were hand-painted with patterns of flowers and of fish.

Pearl and I remembered seeing one of these ceramic stoves being built from scratch in Horezu Monastery while the craftsman explained the logic of the technology to us. The purpose behind the stove was to extract all of the heat through a labyrinth of flues built from refractory brick so that the heat would be enjoyed *inside* the room. So unlike the coal fire-places we had at home in Coupar Angus! Not only was the lion's share of the heat generated in Scottish fireplaces simply sucked up the chimney but matters were made worse by cold outside air being sucked in to replace the warm, causing distressing drafts. The misery caused by these drafts was never adequately offset by woollen slippers and layers of jerseys.

Equally intriguing was how the craftsman made and painted the tiles. He shaped them by hand, let them dry in the air and then used a cow's horn as a kind of outsize fountain-pen to 'draw' patterns employing what appeared to be rather drab tints and colours. Then he baked the tiles in a pottery oven and when they were removed, they turned out to bear intricate designs in many beautiful colours on shiny surfaces – the pigment had changed colour in the heat. The artisan used these tiled to clad the firebricks and so give dignity and beauty to the stove's finished exterior.

On one wall of this cottage hung, in an orderly fashion, Orthodox Icons of various different sizes. The largest was made from a single slab of wood that had warped and curved into an arc as the slab had dried. It was both dignified and brightly

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coloured. On a smaller icon, the Saint's head was encased in silver with thick, embossed relief lines radiating from it as if from the sun. There were several tiny icons, mostly made from wood but one was delicately encased in silver.

From time to time, in the isolated countryside, peasants would unselfconsciously show you their orchards or their geese or their gardens or even the interior of their houses – a world so different from Bucharest.

Given what the old man told us about the condition of the road ahead we decided to backtrack to Tulcea and drive west spend the night in Brăila – a much larger port than Tulcea.

### **Cargo cult: all I really want is...**

On our way to Brăila, I reversed the car off the road into a field entrance. A farmer was cultivating a field a safe half-a-kilometre away. The sun was setting in the west and we both got out of the car to admire the orange ball sinking over the flat landscape. I opened the trunk of the car, removed my camera and wondered if I dare photograph directly into the setting sun. My camera was primitive and it was taking me a long time to fund the right exposure. Suddenly Pearl warned me that the tractor-driver had abandoned his cultivating and he and his tractor were now making a bee-line straight towards us.

I had to think fast. There was no reason why a farmer should object to us being parked at the field entry. A *Securitate* officer might wonder why we were taking photographs but a farmer, even from a collective, should not interfere with us. I closed the trunk of the car and Pearl got in the passenger side. As I was about to get in the driver's side, the farmer brought his tractor to a halt some 200 yards away, jumped off and came running over waving his arms.

*"Nu lăsați! Vă rugăm să nu lăsați!"* – "Don't leave, please!"

I couldn't imagine what he might want and then it dawned on me – he probably wanted his photograph taken. That would have been an unthinkable request in a city or a town but country people were less inhibited.

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“*Bună ziua. Pot lua o fotografie de tine pe tractor?*” I forestalled him by politely asking if I could take a photograph of him on his tractor. He looked at me in a puzzled, hurt way as if I were purposely evading a more important duty.

“Vreau nimic mai mult decât o bicicletă cu lumini dinam” – All I want is a bicycle with a dynamo!

I thought I hadn't heard correctly and asked him to repeat what he'd said.

“Vreau nimic mai mult decât o bicicletă cu lumini dinam.” – All I want is a bicycle with a dynamo!”

I looked at him in total puzzlement. It was as if I had come into a film in the middle of a wacky conversation.

“A bicycle?”

“Cu lumini dinam!” He insisted. “With a dynamo!”

Still thinking I had misunderstood I asked, “*You have a bicycle with a dynamo?*” My mind raced and I wondered if he was telling me that his bicycle had broken down or his dynamo wasn't working and, because it was getting dark, he wanted us to offer him a lift back to the collective farm.

He shook his head and looked at me belligerently, “*You're from the West!*” It was a statement accompanied by a meaningful glance at the car so that I could not deny the fact. I agreed that I was.

Very slowly and very distinctly he repeated, “*Tovarishe, vreau nimic mai mult decât o bicicletă cu lumini dinam!*” – “Comrade, all I want is a bicycle with a dynamo – nothing else!”

It slowly dawned on me that this peasant was serious.

In Romanian, the assertion that “*Westerners have everything; probably two of everything,*” was based on no evidence but widely believed. Even apparently sophisticated acquaintances in Bucharest would ingratiate themselves by offering me an unwanted gift in order to put themselves in a position to make a request of me. At different times I'd been dumped with a huge rubber plant, a 10-gallon demijohn of sweet white wine and a box of old books. Once I'd 'accepted' the gift I was then expected to return their 'generosity' with some favour they desperately needed. My

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inability to comply with such requests could bring accusations of being unappreciative and disobliging.

This farmer was going one step further. He was counting on getting his bicycle with lights driven by a dynamo for nothing – and what’s more, he wanted it *now*! He seemed to be under the impression that Westerners ran some sort of *cargo cult* that allowed them to deliver whatever was asked for *on request*.

I shook my head. “Îmi pare rău că nu am!” – “I’m sorry, I don’t have one.”

Had my mastery of the Romanian conditional been better I would have liked to have explained to him: “When I was a student in Scotland, I would like to have had one of these myself. But all I could afford was a battery-flashlight that attached to my front bracket and a red flashlight behind – the minimum required by law. A bicycle with a dynamo was far beyond my reach and if I were to tell you the truth, it is still out of my reach financially.” But I didn’t possess such mastery and even if I doubt that he would have believed me! *All Westerners were affluent! Everybody knew that!*

As if assuming that it was the aggressive tone he’d used to make the request that was preventing me from producing the bicycle complete with dynamo-driven lights, he repeated his request but this time in a plaintive voice, “*Tovarășe, numai o bicicletă cu un dyamo, asta este tot ce vreau!*” – “Comrade, just a bicycle with a dynamo – that’s all I’m asking for.” He gestured towards the boot of the car. It was a small Ford Anglia. Only a child’s bike would have fitted in the boot.

I opened the boot. He bent down and moved the two small suitcases to see if they were hiding his coveted bicycle. Bitter disappointment on his face, he stood up and gestured towards the interior of the car. Then I opened the rear door and he peered at the empty back seat for a long time. Pearl stepped out of the passenger seat and he searched in the foot well.

“Îmi pare foarte rău, tovarășe.” – “I’m really sorry, comrade.” Like a performing magician, I showed him that my hands were empty. I shook his unwilling hand, got in the car and we bumped back onto the road. I could see the lone, dejected figure standing there in his black căciulă looking – and no doubt feeling – feeling totally deceived that the first – and probably only Westerner that had been his good

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fortune to meet – had been unable to present him with his heart's desire. I've often wondered if that disappointing experience embittered him for life, against the West.



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## Siebenbürgen

### Kronstadt

Harald Mesch and I had become friends and we saw each other regularly in Bucharest throughout the fall, winter and spring of 1968-69. While reading and preparing lectures for his students at the *Facultate*, he would make a list of anything he was uncertain about. One of the courses he gave was Modern American poetry, those poets who were composing during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century including Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, E. E. Cummings and T. S. Eliot. Harald was fascinated by their idiosyncratic use of unexpected, even invented words for stylistic effect. Often, I was unable to answer all his questions; I was far less familiar with these poets than he was. I'd studied T. S. Eliot as an *English* poet, however, and we had arguments about which country had the greater right to claim him.

For my own interest, I'd read the American beat poets, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Gary Snyder and Lawrence Ferlinghetti and was able to explain to Harald a little of where these writers came from ideologically – something not at all easy to understand for a young man brought up in Communist Romania. Harald spoke relatively openly to me in the Faculty Common Room in and also freely visited me in my apartment.

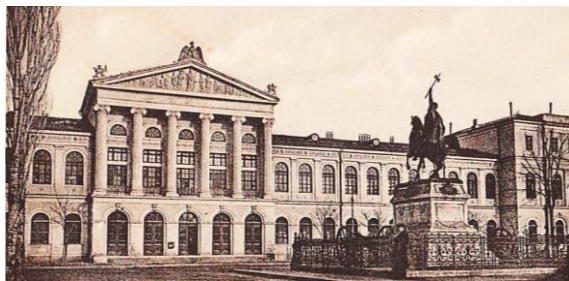
As I did with all Romanians, I let him make his own decisions on these matters. Not long after I arrived in Romania, I came to the conclusion that only Romanians themselves were able to fully understand their environment and determine what risks they ran and how they would deal with them. It made sense for me not to initiate friendships but if a Romanian demonstrated that he or she wanted to associate with me or be my friend, I had to assume that they knew exactly what they were doing and were willing to take responsibility for their actions.

Since the Communist Party came to power in 1947 Romanians had developed a keen sense of what could or might not get them into trouble with the secret institutions of the State and they subtly taught their children these essential survival

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skills even before they taught them to read and write. Being constantly on the watch, constantly suspicious of one another must have played havoc with personal relationships of all kinds. This saddened me but was entirely beyond my control. All I could do, I decided, as a neophyte in matters of what might or might not constitute a danger for a person who showed the slightest inclination to befriend me, was to discreetly demonstrate my openness. By doing so the other party was free to take another tiny step towards me; and so on it went until they reached the level of relationship that they felt comfortable with. Such relationships might only reach the smile and the exchange of a few words in the Faculty Common Room or might blossom into a deeper friendship.

There were those of my colleagues whom I suspected would love to have become more familiar with me but for reasons of their own, reasons that were quite impossible for me to even begin to imagine, they kept their distance.

One excellent example was Professor Mureșanu. He was a professor in his mid 30s who always gave the impression of having difficulty keeping his enormous energy under control. If we were in the common room when I entered, he would lurch forward with an enthusiastic smile on his face but then draw back just before greeting me as if remembering some prohibition. He was not the only professor in whom I noticed this behaviour but his was the most obvious. It was embarrassing for both of us but the only option for me was to respect the retreat not to encourage the advance.

One day after I'd finished delivering my classes I crossed Bulevardul Magheru to catch a trolley-bus back to my apartment. I joined the large but loose group of people waiting for the same bus. Romanians never 'queued' or 'lined up', they milled about and then fought each other tooth and nail to board.

Mureșanu happened to be in the same group and our eyes met. His face lit up and he lurched forward grasped my hand and pumped it as if we were long-lost friends. "Professor Mackay!" He spoke loudly, "Such a pleasure!" And then as suddenly as he'd greeted me he disengaged and pulled back, enormously embarrassed as if suddenly aware of his recklessness. My greatest contribution, I could see, would be to end his embarrassment and so, with a "*Pina mai curind!*" – "See

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**Ronald Mackay**

**A Scotsman Abroad:**



**A Book of Memoirs 1967-1969.**

Spicuiuri din istoria Catedrei de Engleză a Universității București.

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you soon!" I left the bus stop and began to walk in the direction of my home.

A few minutes later, the trolley bus passed me. I was between stops and could see Professor Mureșanu sitting next to the window. His body was slumped and he looked miserable. Although our eyes met, neither of us exchanged any sign of recognition. Years later, I heard that he had defected and gone to the southern United States to become a cowboy or a rancher. I truly hope that Mureșanu never again was forced to reign in his enthusiasm for life.

Harald Mesch had relatives in West Germany with whom he was in regular contact and from whom he received gifts from time to time. One of these gifts was an eye-catching winter coat that had the appearance, texture and colour of a European brown bear. It drew attention to him wherever he went but he seemed not to notice.

Bucharest was not his home; he was from a region he called *Siebenbürgen*, the Seven Cities. It had been given the name *Siebenbürgen*, he told me, after the seven towns that Saxon settlers had built in the early Middle Ages – Bistritz (Bistrița), Kronstadt (Brașov), Clausenburg (Cluj), Mediasch (Mediaș), Muehlbach (Sebeș), Hermannstadt (Sibiu) and Schäßburg (Sigișoara). Only when I naively commented that it must be close to Transylvania did he tell me that *Siebenbürgen* was the original name for what was now known in Romania as Transylvania. As a Scot I could identify with his proud nationalism.

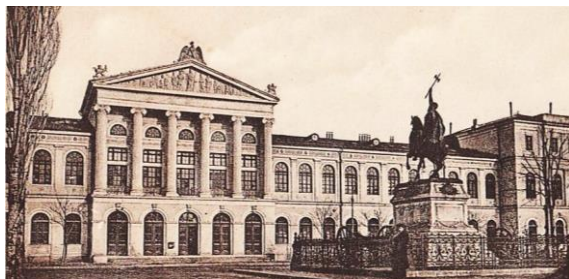
When I told Harald that I loved the Carpathians and showed I knew some of the mountainous areas fairly well, he invited me to spend a weekend with him in Brașov – which he always referred to as Kronstadt. He told me that he'd been born in Hermannstadt (Sibiu) but brought up in Kronstadt by his maternal grandmother, his *Oma*, after his mother had died when he was an infant during the Second World War. We spent most of the weekend with his grandmother although I slept in separate accommodation rented through the State tourist office.

It was clear that they had a very great affection and respect for each other and that his '*Oma*' was very proud of the teaching position he held in Bucharest University. They spoke to each other in *Sächsisch*, an early German dialect that was current in the region.

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*Oma* must have been warned well in advance that a Scottish friend was coming to visit because every meal was designed to introduce me to local Saxon cuisine mostly made from scratch at home. She made sauerkraut and we ate it cooked in beer and eaten with pieces of smoked ham; we drank her clear, pale, straw-coloured, home-made elderflower wine and ate her *lebkuchen*. For the very first time I ate *spec*. It had been fried and looked, on its plate in front of me, for all the world like a very thick and very solid slice of pig fat with the orange skin well-shaved of hair but still clinging obstinately to it.

“*Saxon bacon!*” Harald announced proudly.

“*Bacon?*” I wondered and examined it. On very close inspection I could just make out a very thin, very narrow streak of red bacon through the middle of the fat. Judging by the way *Oma* and Harald enjoyed theirs, with chunks of dark rye bread, *spec* was a great delicacy and to show them my appreciation, I too ate mine with gusto. In those days we’d never heard of cholesterol and I possessed teeth capable of reducing anything to a point at which it could be safely swallowed. I told them, between vigorous movements of my jaws, how delicious it was. *Oma* asked if I wanted to see where it came from. Hoping for an excursion to a farm, I said *Yes!* She led me to the kitchen window and pointed to a neighbouring house, to the rear balcony on the second floor. I followed her finger and then looked back to *Oma*, puzzled. She laughed and said something in *Sächsisch*.

“She says you have to look very closely!” Harald translated, smiling.

I looked very closely and sure enough, in a large steel cage was an enormous pig lying down in straw.

“These neighbours are *Oma’s* friends. They produce a fat pig every six months or so. She helps them out on the day of slaughter. The pig is bled and butchered. Certain cuts are pickled, others are dried and the hams are smoked. *Oma* shares in the all benefits.

We had a discussion about pig production and came to the conclusion that whereas the goal was maximum fat in Siebenbürgen, it was maximum flesh in Scotland where there would have been no market whatsoever for *spec* unless to make

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candles.

We also had a discussion about raising farm animals in town as opposed to on the farm. *Oma* pointed out that so many Saxons had moved to town from small farms in the country that they brought their traditions of self-sufficiency with them. From her window, she pointed out cages with hens, geese and rabbits on the neighbouring balconies. Because the entire community benefited from the availability of food they were used to and valued as well as receiving manure for their vegetable gardens, they were willing to put up with a few, familiar, farmyard sounds.

Harald also invited me to Hermannstadt to spend Hogmanay – the last night of 1968. Liesl, his wife was ill and at home with her parents, in the care of her father, a local doctor. Judging by the look on his face as he told me this, I was not expected to pursue the matter. And so I spent New Year's Eve in the company of Harald's father and a group of his father's friends. That night I learned a great deal about Harald, his family, and about the Saxon population of Siebenbürgen.

From time immemorial, the politics of both Western and Eastern Europe and in particular of what we call Romania today, have been very complicated. For centuries the region was fought over and subjugated by Mongols, Tartars, Romans, Magyars, Slavs and Turks. It was ruled at times by war lords and at times by Emperors. Some of the polities that we are familiar with today emerged relatively late – only a couple of hundred years ago and even since then they have been in continual flux. Some of them disappeared entirely, like the Czech Republic, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Ruthenia, Slovakia, Serbia and Slovenia. Some of them – but not all – have reappeared. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the integrity of many of these more fragile countries depended for their territorial survival on agreements with superior powers like Germany and Russia, Britain and France.

In 1938, the Allied powers accommodated Hitler's invasion and annexation that part of Czechoslovakia known as the Sudetenland, until 1918 part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1940, the Soviet Union, unimpeded and unscathed, invaded and annexed parts of northern Romania. In 1941, Germany invaded the USSR and Romania saw an opportunity to do likewise. Romania wanted its northern territories

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back from the USSR; Germany would support Romania's invasion because it needed Romanian oil. For those and other reasons as well, the *Conducător*—the Prime Minister—of Romania who had removed King Carol II in 1940, signed an alliance with Germany and attempted to take its territories back from the Soviets by force. But the attempt was unsuccessful and Romania was forced to sign a peace treaty with the USSR in 1944. As a result, many ethnic Germans fled Romania for Germany to avoid being imprisoned or enslaved as enemy collaborators by the Soviets. Many of the young men served in the German army. Their numbers included Harald's father and his friends. When the war ended in 1945, large numbers of these Saxons who had served Germany nevertheless returned to Transylvania to search for their families. Harald's father found that his wife had died. That same week he and hundreds of other Saxons were rounded up by Soviet—and Romanian—troops and transported north into the USSR where they were used as slave-labour to rebuild destroyed cities or to construct new ones. When Harald's father was released and returned to Hermannstadt in 1951, he tried to resume a normal life. It had not been easy since he had lost his wife and his son was being brought up by his grandmother in another city, Kronstadt. Kronstadt or Brașov in Romanian, had had its name obligatorily changed to *Orașul Stalin* (Stalin City). If little else was clear, at least I could understand why Saxons preferred to use the name they'd always known it by—Kronstadt.

Over tiny glasses of *țuica*, I learned all this and more from Harald's father and his friends. The strong-smelling *țuica* helped lubricate the communication which was conducted in my limited Romanian—I was dealing with matters I'd never heard expressed before and lacked much of the vocabulary to understand—and their even more limited English. When I showed surprise that they spoke any English at all, they explained.

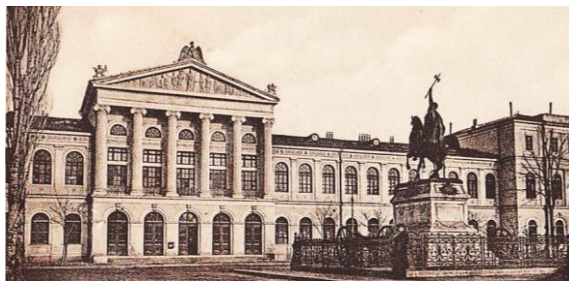
*"After the War ended we became prisoners of the American Army for 4 months. In that time we learned a lot of English. When we came home we were shipped off to Russia. We were in Soviet camps for 6 years but we didn't learn a single word of Russian!"*

They looked proud of their linguistic achievements, laughed uproariously, clapped one another on the back, and poured another round of *țuica*.

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Born as the middle child in our family in June 1942, I was brought up in my grandmother's house on the edge of a small farming village in central Scotland. My earliest memories are of a bewildering world that I struggled but never quite managed to understand. It was an ever changing theatre of men in khaki uniforms ears glued to wet-battery radios (electricity didn't exist in most rural Scottish homes then) that had to be constantly tuned; of incomprehensible absences and arrivals followed by partings and further absences. Regiments of the defeated Polish Army were billeted in our village and we heard as much Polish spoken by the three officers in our house as we did English; daily, my sister and I would sit on the wall and watch truckloads of soldiers pass our gate singing "*Marsz, marsz, Dąbrowski*". As a consequence of my personal childhood memories of the disorientation and utter confusion that accompanied war, I was better able to understand Harald. I felt that I could appreciate what forces—hurts, disappointments, comforts and joys—might have gone in to forming the careful, private, sensitive man he had become.

However, for Harald, there was more—much more—than the effects of a childhood disoriented by the turbulence of international war. Liesl, his wife, was dying of a rare form of leukaemia. She and Harald lived with her mother and father in their home in Hermannstadt. There, they cared for her. Week after week, Harald travelled from Hermannstadt to Bucharest by train to give his classes and fulfil his professorial duties. Every weekend he returned to Hermannstadt, often passing through Kronstadt to greet his *Oma*. When Liesl was altogether debilitated by her treatments, Harald might spend an extra day at his *Oma's* house. There, he would work very hard so that he could spend more free time with Liesl when her suffering was less.

Now I also understood why Harald's relatives in West Germany had thought to send him a Volkswagen Beetle—it made it all the more possible for him to cope with the trying responsibilities in his life. At times, perhaps all the time, his life was painful but he never displayed the pain. Nobody would have ever guessed the nature of the demands made on him.

For the days and nights he was in Bucharest each week, Harald had shown me

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where he lived – in a large room in an apartment. The room was divided up into tiny sections by sheets hung as curtains. In each section was a single bed. Beside Harald's bed was a tiny travel attaché-case table with books on it. The case and the books went with him every week. Two clean shirts hung from hangers on the wall. I was the only colleague in the *Facultate* who knew the details of Harald's personal circumstances. Neither his fellow-professors nor the students he taught at the *Facultate* had any idea of how wearisome his life was and the almost super-human efforts he had to make each and every day.

### **Harald's wife Liesl and his in-laws**

Now, in the spring of 1969, Harald was inviting Pearl and I to Hermannstadt to meet Liesl and her parents. Before we left, he told us that he and Liesl had agreed that he should tell us what to expect. Objectively and succinctly he said that Liesl's condition was not going to improve. She was as well now as she would ever be. Her father had already made plans to take her to West Germany. There she would live just a little longer than if she remained in Hermannstadt. She wanted us to treat her as if she were perfectly well.

Pearl and I had no words to respond but we understood. In our culture we faced mortality in a similar way.

Pearl, Harald and I left Bucharest for Hermannstadt in Harald's newly-arrived VW Beetle. I drove since Harald hadn't yet obtained his license. We arrived early in the afternoon, exactly the hour that Liesl and her parents were expecting us. Their apartment was in an older building that offered a view of the Făgăraș Mountains. Accommodation was less scarce in the provinces than in Bucharest.

At the door, we were welcomed by Harald's mother- and father-in-law, an educated, professional couple in their mid 50s. Although they were smiling the weight of their daughter's illness was evident in their faces. They welcomed Harald first; there was obviously great affection there. Pearl, their own age and a short-term visitor to their country, was given a very special welcome.

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Liesl was waiting for us in the comfortable sitting-room-cum-study; a tall young woman, my age, slim and elegant. She had been resting on one of the divans facing the window. She and Harald embraced. Then she turned her smile on Pearl and then on me. Her graciousness couldn't quite hide the fatigue in her eyes. She had been alternately reading and painting in water colours that afternoon and showed us her work.

*"Mogoșoaia!"* Pearl immediately recognised the sense of stillness of the palace garden. *"That's one of the smaller lakes. You've captured the atmosphere beautifully!"*

Pearl's eager remark was the perfect start to a delightful if necessarily subdued afternoon. Liesl showed us her portfolio of water colours and Pearl enthused about the beauty of *Siebenbürgen* and places that she had visited with me. Pearl was also very good at telling amusing anecdotes about our journeys and kept us entertained and the mood light-hearted.

When we took our leave to go to the bed-and-breakfast that Harald had arranged for us through the State tourism office, Liesl presented Pearl with the painting of the lake at Mogoșoaia. Forever after, wherever Pearl lived, the water colour went with her and was always given pride of place on her wall. She had been deeply moved by Liesl's circumstances and respected and admired the dignified way in which the family handled them. For the rest of her life, she felt profoundly for the gentle Liesl, her parents and for the sensitive, uncomplaining Harald.

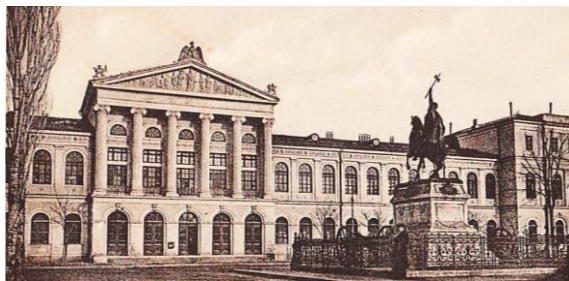
### **Shepherds watching over their flocks**

We drove back from Hermannstadt south through the Olt Valley with the green, forested Carpathians on either side of us. There was, as usual, little or no traffic on the roads. We were in no hurry and were silently engaged in our own thoughts and enjoying the lush, early summer countryside as it gave way from mountain to plain. A few miles south of Râmnicu Vâlcea, we saw a vast flock of sheep spread out on both sides of the road ahead of us blocking our progress. Pearl and I were used to sheep on Scottish roads. There are no fences in the highlands and drivers are required

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to be alert – sheep have priority over vehicles in the Highlands. However, a flock this size, Pearl had never before had the good fortune to witness. I'd worked on hill sheep farms in Scotland and well knew how to estimate the size of flocks. There must have been six thousand sheep in the flock that blocked our way.

On my travels in Romania, I'd encountered and been fascinated by vast flocks of sheep before. Occasionally in life I'd see something in the flesh that previously I'd understood only in the abstract. The first time I saw a Romanian flock the word 'transhumance' leapt into my mind. It was a word that we'd learned in our geography class when we were 14 or 15. We were studying the economic geography of Switzerland with Doc. Brown, the geography master, and he'd told us that Swiss farmers practised 'vertical transhumance'; when spring came, they took their cows from valley pastures up into the mountains so that the animals could feed on the nutritious, seasonal Alpine pastures. "Vertical transhumance," he'd written on the blackboard along with two opposing arrows. "Up in spring and back down in the autumn!"

In Romania when the spring came and the grass began to flush in the warm sunshine, the shepherds traditionally led their flocks from lower, winter pastures to fresh summer pastures on higher, rougher land.

Romanian shepherds and their dogs handled flocks in an entirely different way from their peers in Scotland. In Scotland, the sheepdogs did most of the work – indeed sheepdogs were so important that the Scottish writer James Hogg wrote:

*"Without the shepherd's dog, the whole of the open mountainous land in Scotland would not be worth a sixpence."*

The most common sheep dog in Scotland was the small, energetic and highly intelligent Border collie. Collies were directed by their shepherds and drove the sheep before them. Dogs that drove sheep on hill farms were called 'wearers'. If a group of sheep showed too much independence and failed to be driven by the *wearers*, other especially trained collies called 'hunters' were sent out to *hunt* them back into the main flock. While *wearers* occasionally barked to keep the sheep in the main flock on their

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toes and together, *hunters* were silent and relied on their speed and their sudden appearance ahead of the stray sheep to force them back to the flock. Had a *hunter* barked, it might panic the handful of wayward sheep into running further away in several directions making them impossible to retrieve.

In Romania shepherds walked ahead of their flocks, leading them in the manner of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he *leadeth* me beside the still waters.”

Their large, slow, patient, gentle dogs walked each with its master. At night, however, they turned into ferocious guards threatening any animal that might prey on ‘their’ sheep. They could hold their own against wolves and bears.

I’d long wanted Pearl to see a Romanian shepherd face to face. They always looked to me as if they had just walked out of the pages of a beautifully-illustrated, medieval history book. Now, right here, she had the opportunity to meet several. We’d stopped the car and were content to let the thousands of sheep mill by us in peace.

Harald and I greeted the closest shepherd and engaged him in conversation so that Pearl would have time to appreciate his appearance in detail. He wore a tall, conical *căciula* of white sheepskin on his head. From his shoulders to the bottom of his legs hung a cloak made of several full, unshorn sheepskins sown together. He wore it over his shoulders and open in front. It was his night protection from the cold. He wore a shirt that a very long time ago had been white, a black waistcoat over it and a pair of rough woollen home-spun trousers. On his feet he wore shoes that appeared home-made— each was a curved piece of very thick leather with a high curved point in front like Ali Baba. They were fastened with thick leather thongs tied criss-cross fashion over the upper part of his feet and part way up his trouser legs. He carried a thick walking stick and a worn leather bag across his body.

The smell coming off the sheepskins was overpowering – wet wool and lanolin. It was probably a good thing that the sheepskin coat smelled so strongly because the condition of the shepherd himself and of his clothes beneath the cloak, suggested that

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he hadn't washed in weeks. He would have a bouquet all of his own. His pleasant, weather-beaten face bore a week's' growth of beard. He smiled at us to show just here a tooth and there a tooth. He was probably only in his 40s.

While his fellow-shepherds and their dogs continued to lead the enormous tide of sheep onwards to pastures new, he was more than delighted to answer our questions about his work, his sheep, the distance that they had come – *several days* – the distance that they had to go – *several more days* – and show us his cloak, his bag, his stick and his sandals. Pearl kept her distance and well up-wind of him. Eventually, he waved us a cheery “*La revedere!*” – “*Until the next time!*” and strode through his flock to take up the lead position, out in front with his fellows.

### **Passings**

Liesl died in West Germany a few months later. On compassionate grounds, Harald was granted both passport and exit visa to leave Romania. He remained in West Germany. The Saxons of Romania are considered to be ‘*Auslandsdeutsche*’ – *German nationals living abroad* – by the German Government who grants them all the rights of German citizens upon their arrival in Germany. He became the research assistant to a well-respected German professor of American Literature. He wrote and successfully defended his doctoral dissertation, and is, today, a distinguished scholar and university professor.

### **The organ recital**

During the winter of '68/'69 Harald invited me to an organ recital in one of the Protestant churches on the main boulevard. The invitation came with strict instructions. I had to arrive alone. Enter by a side door when nobody else was entering and climb the spiral staircase to the gallery. A celebrated Saxon organist was to give a recital. When I took my place in the gallery, the church was already almost full. Everybody was quiet; there was no talking.

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Then a single light lit the sanctuary and a gentleman announced that the organist was offering this recital to admirers of his music, on the eve of a tour he had been invited to give in West Germany.

The organist, a youngish man from what I could see from my seat at the very back of the gallery, sat at the organ and played for about 40 minutes to a totally silent crowd. The only light was over the organ manuals and his sheets of music.

He finished, stood up, turned, and faced those present. The applause was loud and long. He bowed long and low and disappeared into the darkness. We were allowed out, by the same side door, individually or in pairs. It took a long time. As I waited for my turn, I could see that many of the others – mainly older couples, were wiping their eyes.

As I surreptitiously watched them and others, and reflected on the spectacle, the sound and the elaborate precautions, I suddenly realised that I had witnessed that musician's last recital in Romania. A few days later Harald told me that his defection had been reported.

It seemed to me that the minorities in Romania were given greater freedom to defect than ethnic Romanians. It seemed that the contact that ethnic Hungarians, Germans, Jews and other minorities had with relatives abroad was tolerated by the *Securitate*. On the other hand, ethnic Romanians who received a letter from abroad might be called in for questioning, their allegiance suspect. One more puzzle to be stored away in my Western brain, unanswerable and unanswered.

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## Ivan Deneș

### Meeting Ivan

“Ivan Deneș, a close friend of D’s, would like to get to know you. He was released from prison a few years ago. He’s an ethnic Hungarian, a Jew and a member of the Writers’ Union. ‘D’ wants to know if you would be willing to meet him.” D’s concise sketch suggested that meeting Ivan Deneș would be an interesting experience. ‘D’ had, it seemed, only interesting friends and little patience with trivialities.

“I’d be delighted!” And so a meeting was arranged.

I suggested that ‘M’ and I meet him at any place he suggested. “That’s impossible,” ‘M’ told me. “D has contact with Ivan through her work but it’s inadvisable for me to associate with Ivan.” I thought I sort of understood.

‘M’ duly informed me that I should sit at one of the tables in the restaurant in Herăstrău Park. The outside tables had been removed for the winter but the heated, interior part was still open. She told me when I should arrive, and that I should remain there for 30 minutes reading *Scînteia* the Romanian Communist Party newspaper. If Ivan had not approached me within that time I should leave and another meeting might be arranged.

When meeting a Romanian, I took precautions. I caught a trolley-bus in the opposite direction to my destination, alighted after a few stops, took another bus in a different direction and then walked to the tram stop that would take me to where I was going. Then I got off a stop or two before the terminus, walked back another two stops, waited for the next tram, and rode it all the way to the terminus.

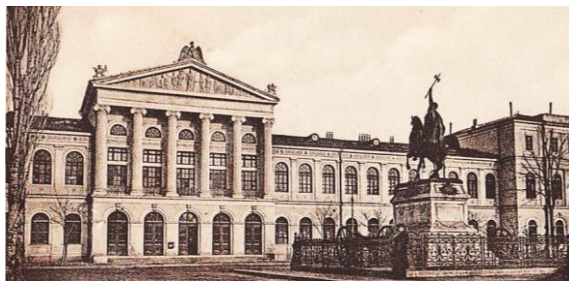
The sky was dark and the ground was rutted with slush that had partly melted and refrozen so I had to pick my way carefully from the tram terminus to the park gates and thence to the restaurant. The pond was partially frozen and the air smelled of more snow to come.

Once seated at the green, utilitarian, tubular steel tables I began to feel the warmth of the central heating. The room smelled of hot plum brandy, beer and

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fermented cabbage. There were two male customers already seated at separate tables. Neither of them had been on the bus or trams with me. I took a table as far from either of them as I could and ordered what I always ordered in Herăstrău – “*O sticlă de bere, o porție din murături și o porție de brânză.*” – My favourite! “A beer, a plate of pickles and a plate of cheese.” I poured half of the bottle of beer into my glass, opened *Scînteia* and crunched my way through the enormous, salty, crisp dill pickles. I looked out of the window from time to time.

Occasionally couples, hand-in-hand, would walk past on the snowy paths. One couple tested the ice on the pond and almost got their feet wet. A small gentleman in a dark overcoat, wine-coloured scarf and black karakul căciula walked round the pond and took the path past the restaurant several times. Then he opened the door, closed it carefully to conserve the heat and sat down at my table. We smiled and shook hands as if we were old acquaintances filling in a winter’s day; there was no need to introduce ourselves.

I guessed that Ivan was about 40 – some 15 years my senior – about my size, slim, dark hair brushed straight back from his forehead. He had bright, penetrating eyes that seemed forever in motion and a wry smile as if he had already figured out why what you were about to say was mistaken. He reminded me of a jackdaw, eyes unblinking, forever on the lookout for a geegaw, any curiosity that might amuse or be of use to it. I found Ivan more entertaining and more engaging than any jackdaw.

I asked him no questions, nevertheless he told me a little about himself. Like D, he was from Timișoara. After the Second World War he’d studied philosophy first in Hungarian at Cluj University and later, in Romanian at Bucharest University. He’d joined the Communist Party and become a journalist, dramatist and novelist. And he told me his story.

One night in 1958 he’d been drinking in the bar of the Athénée Palace with a group of Romanian friends. A delegation of British people who were staying in the hotel had entered and was told that the bar was now closed. Most members of the delegation, tired, drifted off to their rooms but one man sat down without a drink. Ivan’s friends were about to leave and so he invited the British man to share what was

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left of the bottle on his table. They talked for a couple of hours.

The visitor was a Member of Parliament. Following the invasion to suppress the Hungarian Uprising in 1956, the Soviets had been under pressure to demonstrate that they were not the bullies the Western press painted them to be. To prove their benevolence, they withdrew their occupying troops from Romania where they had been stationed since the end of the War. Relieved to be rid of Soviet troops, Romania had immediately begun to follow a more independent foreign policy and had invited a delegation of British MPs to visit Bucharest to encourage 'mutual understanding' and trade. At the same time as adopting its own foreign policy, Romania felt it had to assure the Soviets everything was still under the tight control of the Communist Party. To prove this, Romania adopted even tighter measures of internal security.

Punishments including the death penalty were enforced for crimes against the State. Such crimes applied to Romanians having any contact with 'foreigners'.

The Soviets risked nothing by withdrawing their troops from Romania. Romania had no borders with the West. Moreover, the Soviets had a network of spies who monitored every word published in Romania's press to detect any hint that Romania might be wandering from the fold. So the apparently neighbourly act of Soviet troop withdrawal was offset by the brutal internal precautions taken to protect the authority of the Romanian Communist Party.

Shortly after the British MP returned to the UK, he sent a postcard to Ivan with the words, "*Thank you for your help!*" The postcard was used as evidence that Ivan had acted in a way that threatened the security of the State. He was arrested, accused, tried, found guilty, and sentenced to 20 years hard labour. He spent 6 years in various prisons including Gherla where thousands of political prisoners were held in underground cells. He'd been freed, he told me, just a few years earlier. Now he worked freelance for any Romanian newspaper that would accept his work, and wrote novels.

Ivan and I began to meet regularly. He was lively and interesting and seldom asked me for anything. I enjoyed his company and was flattered that such a worldly and well-educated man should, apparently, enjoy mine.

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## **'C' and the Writers' Union**

My hiking trips didn't interest Ivan. My contacts with the Cultural Attachés in both the British and American Embassies did. Through the Writers' Union, he knew all about the receptions that were held regularly for visiting British and American intellectuals. He seemed envious of fellow-Romanians who were able to these functions.

"Would you like an invitation, Ivan?" I asked, "I could suggest your name to our Cultural Attaché."

"I'm already invited to most of these functions," he told me, "Invitations come to the Writers' Union."

"So if you're invited and you're a member of the Writers' Union, why don't you attend?"

He took a mouthful of beer, "Invitations from embassies are sent to the Protocol Department of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They are delivered to the 'base' at the Writers' Union. Those trusted Party members who control the 'base' select those who will get his or her invitation in time and those whose invitations will be delivered after the event is over."

"But, if you know that you've been invited, why don't you just turn up anyway?"

"If I attended without having received the invitation through the 'base', it would be used against me. I could be expelled from the Writers' Union and then would be unable to publish anything at all." I was beginning to see that the system was even more labyrinthine that I had imagined.

After these events—many of which I was invited to—Ivan was avid to hear what the guest of honour had to say and was particularly interested in which of his colleagues from the Writers' Union had been present. From what he had told me, they were those most favoured by the Communist Party.

After one such event I commented that, "*Only Zaharia Stancu was there.*" Ivan smiled his wry smile. Stancu, a poet, had been appointed President of the Writers'

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Union a year or two earlier. Then I added as an afterthought, "*Of course 'C' was there as well.*" 'C' had been imprisoned several times and several times expelled from the Union but had recently been reinstated. There was seldom a cultural function organized by Tony Mann to which 'C' did not turn up whether he had been invited or not.

"Why do you say *'of course'?*" Ivan was interested.

"He turns up to every function. You must know that." I paused without saying '*Securitate*'.

Ivan gave another wry smile. "'C'? *Securitate?* That's what you think?"

"It's what—" I halted abruptly. I never shared with Ivan or anybody else anything that I was told by the diplomats in the Embassy. I'd been on the verge of breaking my own rule.

"So that's what your British diplomats think!" I kept silent.

"I'll tell you what," Ivan was full of surprises, "next time you're at a function and 'C' is there, watch him. Be subtle. And don't leave before he does!"

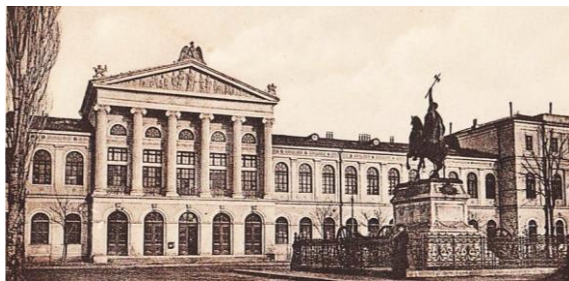
The following week I was at a reception in Tony Mann's home for a visiting academic from the University of East Anglia. 'C' was there along with 30 or 40 other guests. One or two of them from the Writers' Union. I circulated widely at these parties trying to be as sociable as possible in return for the Manns' many kindnesses. Their apartment was old and large and guests wandered at will throughout three spacious rooms. Small table lamps and the occasional standard lamp provided discreet pools of light that encouraged groups and conversation. Waiters circulated with trays of drinks and *hors d'oeuvres* and guests could help themselves to a cigarette from one or other of the elegant silver boxes on the coffee tables. There was an anteroom off the largest of these reception rooms — a space darker and less popular except by those who wanted privacy to pursue a serious conversation.

As the party was drawing to a close after 11 p.m., I was alone. Sheila approached me and took my hands, "*Darling, it's lovely to see you stay so late! You must be enjoying yourself!*" I kissed her on both cheeks. To my credit, I'd quite overcome my embarrassment at the bussing and the squeals of '*Daaling*' in my first year. I'd quickly

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come to realise that those from the southern extremities of the British Isles were far more expansive than we repressed Scots from the north. We talked pleasantly then she glided off to bid departing guests goodnight.

I was sure that 'C' was still present but I'd lost track of him while talking to Sheila so I went in discreet search of him. He wasn't in the largest room and so I continued towards the dark anteroom at the far end. Nobody – only two or three pools of subdued light and great expanses of darkness. I let my eyes adjust. Had I somehow missed 'C'? I was tired and walked to a corner where there was almost no light to rub my eyes and think. Then, out of the corner of my eye I saw 'C's crooked form against the light of the larger reception room. He was alone. He peered into the darkness of the anteroom, appeared satisfied that it was empty and walked towards a coffee table. Tony himself had told me that 'C' was Securitate and had the First Secretary. What I was seeing seemed to confirm this. He crouched down and reached for the large silver cigarette box. So this was the 'dead letter box'! Someone, I imagined, had left a message for him there and I was about to witness him retrieve it or perhaps leave something himself. In a flash, all kinds of scenarios passed through my mind. Tony was an MI6 agent. He'd 'turned' 'C' and was now exploiting him as a 'source'. My mind raced but I kept my eyes on Călinescu.

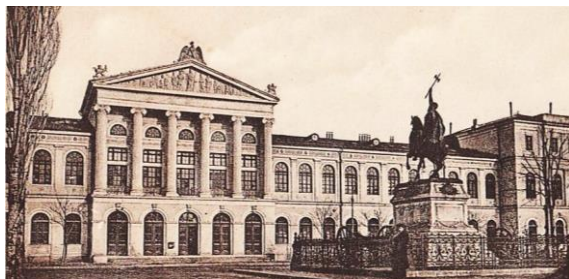
After another furtive glance around, 'C' opened the cigarette box. But instead of withdrawing an envelope or a slip of paper, or depositing a roll of microfilm, he grabbed one handful after another of Tony's cigarettes and stuffed them into his jacket pockets. My senses switched instantaneously from acute suspense to amusement and I had to stop myself from laughing. 'C' came to the diplomatic functions to satisfy his longing for western tobacco! I remained absolutely motionless. 'C' patted his pockets to disguise the bulges, buttoned his jacket and left the room. Moments later I heard his gentlemanly voice thanking the hosts for a '*most stimulating evening*'.

I left a few moments later similarly thanking Tony and Sheila. I was relieved that the amiable Tony was not, after all, an MI6 agent using the role of Cultural Attaché as cover for his clandestine purposes. Sheila, the congenial and adorable Sheila, deserved a good-natured British Council officer and not a duplicitous

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undercover agent!

A couple of days later Ivan and I met. "Did you go to the function?" He asked.

"I did."

"And 'C'? Was he there?"

"He was."

"You kept an eye on him?"

"I did."

"Do you still think he's *Securitate*?"

"I knew he's a petty-thief!"

"Exactly! He attends to indulge his penchant for Scotch whisky and restock his supply of Western cigarettes."

"But how does 'C' dare to attend parties he's not even invited to?" I was puzzled.

Ivan gave me his wry smile. "The Party has already done its worst to 'C'. He reckons that he has absolutely nothing to lose. Now you can allay the fears of your diplomats."

I wondered. The Party, the *Securitate*, the *System* could surely always find something to take away, something whose withdrawal would serve to cause suffering or humiliation to body or spirit even to a man who'd suffered like 'C'. Were there those who truly had nothing more to lose? Ivan was a philosopher, a creative writer, he'd been a political prisoner in Gherla; I should have asked him but did not.

### **The editor of the Times Literary Supplement**

Ivan did make one direct request of me. When I told him that the Editor of the Times Literary Supplement was coming to visit Bucharest he asked, "Can you arrange for me to meet him?"

"I'll guarantee you an invitation to the reception and to whatever presentation he's going to offer." I said.

"The invitation will not be passed on to me!"



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“Then what do you suggest?” I asked.

“Can you offer to take him somewhere interesting – like Herăstrău Park – early on the Sunday morning when nobody is about? Then I could meet you both at the restaurant there.” My mind was working. “Just for an hour!”

“Ivan,” I said, “I can try to arrange that but I will have to tell our Cultural Attaché exactly what I plan to do with Mr Crook and who he will meet.” I couldn’t pretend one thing to Tony or to Mr Crook and do something else. If Tony agreed to ask Mr Crook to accompany me on an excursion, both would have to know exactly what and who was going to be involved.

Ivan saw my point and agreed. And so I made my pitch to Tony. “I have a very good friend, a novelist, his name is Ivan Deneș. He’s a very well-read, well-educated journalist and writer, a member of the Writer’s Union and he would dearly love to have an hour’s conversation with Arthur Crook when he visits Bucharest.”

“Could he be *Securitate*?”

“I feel absolutely certain he’s not, Tony!”

So Tony was sympathetic, confirmed that no arrangements had been made for Mr Crook that Sunday before lunch and asked me to make up a precise plan with date, times and the names of those involved. He would, he promised, present the proposal to Arthur Crook as soon as he arrived.

Mr Crook approved the plan. He rose early, he said, and would be pleased to have company on Sunday morning. I picked him up from the Athénée Palace and we rode the empty tram car all the way to the terminus. We arrived very early and I was able to show him the State publishing house before entering the park.

Although it was early spring, it was warm and we were able to choose a table outside. I ordered the usual – beer, pickled gherkins and cheese – and we talked while we waited. Mr Crook asked me about my work, the classes I taught, my students, and if I enjoyed Bucharest and Romania in general.

I’d noticed Ivan pass around the lake a couple of times. He would, of course, make the first move. He would not sit down until he was satisfied that it was safe for him to do so.

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Just as Mr Crook wondered if my friend had been delayed, Ivan approached our table. He was wearing a dark suit and a white shirt open at the neck. We all shook hands and I ordered a third beer for Ivan. Ivan immediately launched into a wide-ranging but profound literary discussion. I had nothing to say and enjoyed listening to their scholarly exchanges. They encompassed all of European literature, it seemed to me. They were listening carefully to each other and building and expanding on the themes that evolved.

After no more than 15 or 20 minutes, Ivan abruptly stood, shook both our hands and left. I explained to Mr Crook that he had probably spotted a *Securitate* agent or an informer. Romanians were apt to act in unpredictable ways and they could usually be attributed to their permanent feelings of insecurity. I told Mr Crook that I thought much of it was paranoia. He pointed out that that was how totalitarian regimes functioned—by promoting fear in the minds of their citizens so that they were permanently looking over their shoulders. We made light of it and I told him how I had refused to cooperate by policing myself when I arrived and now travelled as freely as I liked. He seemed to approve.

I took him back to his hotel so that he could get ready for a formal lunch. I was disappointed at how poorly the meeting had gone both for Ivan and for Tony.

The following day, Ivan asked to meet. “What went wrong?” I asked. “After all these preparations you must feel very disappointed. *Securitate*?”

“No,” Ivan was offhand. “I chose to end the meeting.”

“You chose to end the meeting?” I was incredulous. “Ivan, do you know what it cost me to set that meeting up for you?”

“Ron,” Ivan gave me one of his wry smiles. “Domnul Crook has read European literature mostly in English translation. I don’t have time for those who haven’t read the Western canon in the original.”

I was taken aback. Ivan excused himself—Romanians always had something to do—and left. I thought about his comment as I walked home. It was true, many Romanians—and all of the educated ones I had met—were multilingual. Monolingualism, even bilingualism was considered to be a symptom of poor

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education or lack of effort – or both. I could see things from Ivan’s point of view. He was an educated European who spoke four languages and could read in two or three more; had suffered during the war; had studied philosophy at two good universities no doubt at great sacrifice; had spent 6 years in prison where, he told me, he had been brutally treated. In prison he had thought and discussed. Since being freed, he had written pieces for major Romanian newspapers, written novels; had been active in the theatre; read literature whenever he could get hold of it. Ivan refused to understand how a person who had probably never experienced a privation could limit his reading to a single language.

I understood Ivan and so didn’t hold his impatience with the Editor of the Times Literary Supplement against him. When Tony suggested that Ivan had been scared off by an agent of the Securitate, I nodded and said, “I expect so.”

Many years later when I was delivering a summer course to university teachers in Israel, I was reminded of Ivan’s words. Each evening for two weeks, I ate dinner alone in the hotel where I was lodged. One evening I went down to the dining room and the *maître d’hôtel* met me at the door with the apology, “*Dr Mackay, I’m very sorry but there’s a reception here this evening and I must ask you to share a table.*”

“That’s fine,” I said, “I’ll be glad to have company for a change.”

“Thank you. Then tell me, please, what languages you speak and I will find you appropriate dinner companions!”

Multilingualism, not mere bilingualism was assumed!

## **Belu**

Ivan invited me to his home. He had recently remarried and he and his wife – a Romanian considerably younger than himself – and their baby, had been allotted an apartment in a new development recently built on the outskirts of the city. I took a trolley-bus to its terminus and walked in mud through a building site to one of three apartment buildings of mammoth proportions. Ivan’s smiling wife met me at the door, “Ivan is in his study.” She led me to the end of the hall and Ivan let me into what was

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clearly a study-cum-bedroom. Beds were divans that without the covers, served as settees.

Never having been able to sit comfortably on a bed, I chose an upright chair at the side of Ivan's desk. I'd no sooner sat down than the doorbell rang again and I heard Ivan's wife admit another guest. I could hear footsteps approaching and wondered if I should find an excuse to leave. The door opened and in walked an alert, fit, watchful man in his late 60s. I could see by the way Ivan and he greeted each other that they were good friends.

The gentleman turned to me and extended his hand, "Belu." I took it, "Ron."

Belu immediately made himself comfortable on the divan and began asking me questions about British politics that I was unable to answer competently. Belu assumed that my handicap was Romanian and so he switched to English for my sake. He soon realised that my limitations were both linguistic intellectual—I simply didn't have the grasp of political science that he had. So Ivan responded or Belu answered his own questions and they moved comfortably between Romanian, German and occasionally French— and for my benefit, summarised in English.

Seeing Belu and Ivan sit there in total comfort—Ivan too had stretched out on the second divan—and discussing political issues of now Western Europe now Eastern Europe, two very different points occurred to me. The first was that both of these men must have spent a long time in prison to sit so comfortably and so animatedly conversing in that semi-reclining position. The second was that here in this small, utilitarian apartment on the muddy outskirts of Bucharest, one very modest apartment of perhaps thousands more in the development of gigantic blocks being constructed, these two men were holding an informed, profound and intense conversation that would have been a credit to a salon in London, Paris or Berlin. These men had been and may well still be communists, with little of material value to their names, but they could have taken their place as peers with any group of intellectuals in any western capital and conducted themselves impeccably. The intellectual resources of so many of the people I met in Romania awed me.

Although I was impressed by their conversation that ranged with ease over

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political philosophy, economics and sociology, I was distinctly aware that much of it passed over my head. I simply did not have the breadth or depth of knowledge to follow it in detail.

Ivan's wife brought in small cakes and Turkish coffee and I left soon after. As I expected, Belu did not leave with me. It was one thing agreeing to meet me – most certainly by design – in Ivan's apartment but travelling with me on public transport, perhaps even being seen with me, was out.

A few days later, 'M' said that Ivan had spoken to 'D' about my visit and the conversation with Belu. 'M' was clearly impressed that I had met Belu and told me that both he and Ivan had been close friends of her father and her mother before, during and after the war.

"Was Belu in prison with Ivan?" I asked.

'M' told me that Belu was a Romanian Jew from Iași. He had been in political trouble all his life mostly because of his fervent communism. He'd been imprisoned in his youth under King Carol II for spying for the Soviets and again after the War when he was expelled from the communist party for criticising Stalin when Gheorghiu-Dej's was General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party. She thought that he and Ivan met in the notorious Gherla prison.

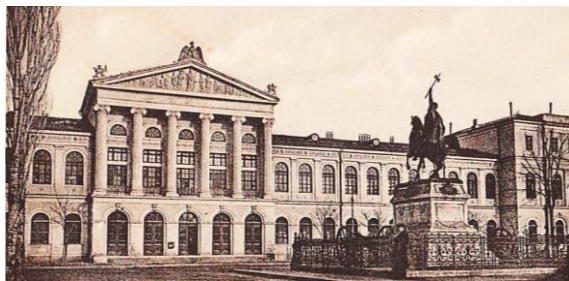
"Belu was recently pardoned by Nicolae Ceaușescu. Now he is fighting with all his might to regain his membership in the Romanian Communist Party." 'M' merely smiled at my astonishment. Romanian minds were more used to balancing mutually exclusive ideas than mine was. In the Scotland I was brought up in things were either black or white; In Romania, many and diverse shades of grey dominated the landscape.

So often in Romania, I was overawed by some of the people I met and talked to as peers, the lives they had lived, the lives they were still living. Belu Zilber; Ivan Deneș; more revelations, creating even greater bewilderment were, to come.

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### **More about Ivan**

After completing my contract as visiting professor at Bucharest University, I heard that Ivan had left Romania around 1970 and settled in West Germany. At the time, I was teaching the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. I planned to visit him in Berlin and also Harald Mesch who had also left Romania for West Germany. For some reason the visit never happened and I lost touch with both Ivan and Harald.

My Internet research tells me that the man I knew as Ivan Deneș was born Iván Alexandru Deneș in Hungarian Timișoara. He became an informer for the Romanian security network in 1948 and continued to work as an informer and as a spy for the rest of his life. In Romania he used various aliases 'Aurel Bantaș', 'Alecú Sîrbu' and 'Alexander Sîrbu'. He was sent by Romanian security to Israel as a spy with the code-name 'GX-36', changed to 'Peter Pintilie', 'Kraus' and 'Konrad' in Germany where he worked for the publishing house Axel Springer.

He infiltrated Radio Free Europe but was exposed by other employees who had shared prison cells with him in Romania and was fired from his position. He returned to work for Axel Springer, somehow managed to continue to make broadcasts for Radio Free Europe using the pseudonym Ion Daniel, and founded his own news agency, 'Ost-West-Presseagentur'.

Ivan continued to visit Romania and, in 1989, was, apparently, nominated for the prestigious 'Tudor Vladimirescu' award by Aristotel Stamatoiu, Deputy Interior Ministry of Romania and Director of the Central Foreign Intelligence Directorate of State Security.

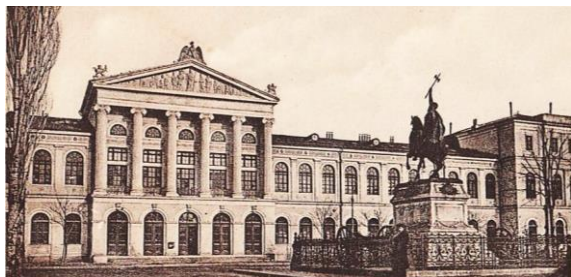
Thrice married and thrice divorced, Ivan died an alcoholic in 2011, in Berlin at the age of 83.

There is a telling quote from 18<sup>th</sup> century Romanian nationalist Tudor Vladimirescu that bears some thinking about in the case of Ivan Deneș: *'There is no law that would prevent a man from meeting evil with evil.'* Just as that sentence allows for multiple and ever-continuous, simultaneous interpretations, so does the character and life of Ivan. Ivan was a man in whose mental make-up and daily life there appear to

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have been such unpredictable sequences of changes that it is quite impossible to fathom who and what he really was.

One Internet site describes Ivan Deneș as '*A filthy informer*'. Perhaps he was.

I remember Ivan as one of the most interesting people I have ever met and whose company I have most enjoyed. I believe we were friends who liked, appreciated and respected each other. I'll never know who he really was.

DORIȚI

Să încercați emoția unei plecări ?  
Să trăiți în atmosfera aerogării ?  
Să aveți sentimentul unei călătorii  
neprevăzute cu avionul ?

Petreceți la

**BAR AVION**

(Șos. Kiseleff nr. 32, vizavi de  
Pavilionul Expoziției — B)

Vă stau la dispoziție bogate și se-  
lecționate sortimente de :

- Coniacuri și lichioruri fine,  
mastică, rom, vermut, gin și ji-  
gări — specialități străine
- Cafea — filtru, mazagran, si-  
tronadă, Pepsi-Cola
- Prăjituri, înghețate și alte spe-  
cialități de cofetărie.

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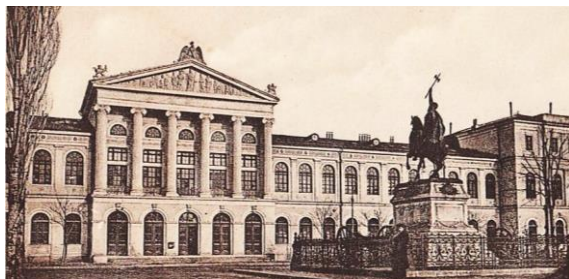
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## **Duck-hunt on Lake Snagov**

### **An invitation**

From time to time Sică Stevoiu – I had met him and his wife Anica at their private villa in Sianai while I was skiing – would call me at my apartment on the corner of Bălcescu and Mărășești.

He would ask how I was and what I was up to. I always found something relatively interesting to tell him. My rule was to talk about my travels in Romania and never touch on my relationships with others. After a brief conversation he would invariably say, "*Ron – trebuie să avem o cafea împreună!*" – "Why don't we meet up for a coffee?"

"*Bine!*" I would reply, "*Let's do it!*" And so we would arrange a time and a place but when the day came, only his wife Anica would turn up. "*Sică's working.*" or "*Sică's busy.*" or "*Sică was called away at the last moment.*" Undeterred, Anica and I would settle ourselves down at a glass-topped table in the pastry-shop that smelled of Turkish coffee, caramelized sugar and freshly-baked *prăjituri*, and talk. I never felt deprived of Sică's company.

Anica, older than I, roused a confusion of feelings in me. I was enraptured. She was immaculately groomed and elegantly dressed in classic, tailored suits whose cut, colour and texture complimented her natural appeal. She was good-looking, dark-haired, and her bearing spoke of comfortable confidence while her open face held no trace of arrogance. Anica looked directly into my eyes when I spoke with what appeared to be genuine curiosity and interest; she would touch my sleeve or my arm from time to time when making a point. A strand of hair had a way of falling over her face that made me want to gently brush it back into place, but I never dared.

We talked about everything without the conversation ever turning personal or entering difficult political waters. Although I was only in my mid-twenties, I'd worked my way through university at a variety of unusual jobs and lived in several countries and so had tales to tell and she would listen intently as if there were nowhere

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she'd rather be than in my company. When my faulty Romanian ran into difficulties, she would immediately provide just the right word and eagerly smile and nod for me to go on. We both knew exactly where the boundaries were and were both smart enough to respect them.

I felt immensely grateful and hugely flattered to be, for even an hour, with such a womanly companion. I was neither a coffee drinker nor a lover of *prăjituri*—pâtisserie—but talking with Anica, I could match her coffee for coffee and pastry for pastry. I walked home from these rendezvous two feet off the ground.

On one of these occasions she told me that Sică had invited me to a party in their home. At dawn the morning following the party, he would take me and some of the other male guests on a duck-shoot. I should come dressed informally and prepared to stay over

I have never cared much for parties. I did, out of a feeling of duty, attend quite a few Embassy parties in Bucharest and I very much appreciated that they tended to finish early or, if one lasted, I was always able to escape without drawing attention to myself. The idea of going to a party where only Romanian would be spoken, only Romanians would be in attendance, and from which I couldn't escape because of a dawn hunting excursion—an all-male one at that—did not appeal. As I opened my mouth to express my regrets, she put her hand on my arm and I could feel her warmth and my eyes were drawn to a white moustache of icing sugar on her upper lip.

A dotting eye exercises little judgement. I heard myself saying, "*Muțumesc Anica. Aș fi fericit să accepta.*"—"I would love to accept, Anica!"

I'd handled, fired and cleaned all British infantry weapons but my familiarity with sporting shotguns was limited. I'd helped gamekeepers in hunting lodges in various Angus Glens clean the guests' guns at the end of the day's grouse shoot but I'd never fired one. I had no doubt that I could. What bothered me, although I didn't say this to Anica, was the idea of a bunch of men handling loaded guns after an alcohol-fuelled party and a night without sleep. All I said was, "I'm not very good at late nights."

"Don't worry," Anica reassured me, "we have lots of space at home. You can

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sleep if you want before you go off with Sică and his friends to Snagov." I knew of *Lacul Snagov*. I'd heard that Ceaușescu and members of the Central Committee spent time on a private estate there but had never myself visited the village or seen the lake.

Before we parted that afternoon, Anica gave me their home address and instructed me, "*Dress for a hunting expedition. Romanian, not Western clothes. Take a taxi to within only two blocks of our house.*" She gave me the name of the intersection so I could instruct the taxi-driver where to drop me off. "*Walk the rest of the way. Be prepared to identify yourself.*" I was in Romania, bizarre instructions were commonplace.

The evening of the party arrived. I found a taxi and gave the driver the street intersection where I would alight. The driver looked at me. "*You're sure this is where you want to go?*" I confirmed that was precisely where I wanted to go. We drove to a part of Bucharest I had never before visited. Only the hint of roofs of large houses could be seen behind the high walls. The streets were empty except for an unusually high number of uniformed *Miliței*. The taxi driver dropped me on at the intersection. I began to walk the two blocks to Sică and Anica's home.

I hadn't covered thirty yards before I was stopped by a very businesslike *Miliței*.

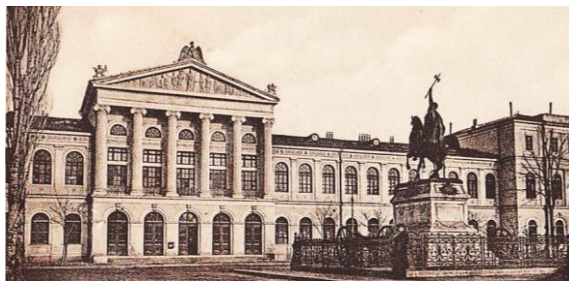
"*Tovarishe, identificare, vă rog!*" – "Comrade, your ID please!" I showed him my Bucharest University I.D. He must have been warned to expect me because he spoke into a two-way radio and then escorted me a couple of blocks to a solid wooden gate in a high wall. Two plain-clothes *Securitate* offers asked me again for my ID and then allowed to me pass beyond the gate.

I found myself in an attractive courtyard with gardens on both sides that I couldn't see well in the dark. A few yards ahead of me, the door of the main house stood open in welcome and warm light spilled out into the night. Yet two more plain clothes *Securitate* officers checked my ID once more and then I was allowed to enter into a wide, brightly-lit hallway. Photographs lined the panelled walls and ahead of me, in a large reception room, I could see lots of people, men and women, all my senior – Sică and Anica's age, and older. Sică detached himself from a group he was talking to and came forward to welcome me.

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“*Bine ați venit la noi!*” he made his welcome sound as if I were doing him and Anica a favour by showing up. For a few moments he talked to me alone and then introduced me to a group of friends – men and women. The men, he told me, would be hunting with us at dawn.

I felt entirely out of my depth. Despite having been in Romania for eighteen months or so my Romanian was limited. Dudu Popescu was the only person I spoke to in Romanian on a regular basis. Everybody I came into contact with professionally insisted on speaking only English to me. I could function perfectly adequately in simple everyday situations with shopkeepers, peasants at the market, the *Miliței*, I could ask my way, request items I wanted to purchase, buy train tickets, order meals and register myself into villas or hotels. I could even hold conversations with fellow-hikers who were willing to speak to me in Romanian at the isolated hostels I slept in up in the Carpathian Mountains.

Here, however, in this party of what appeared to be very privileged and indulged people, I felt at a distinct disadvantage. None appeared at all concerned that I was from the UK but their conversation was difficult to follow because they all knew each other and were talking about common experiences I didn't share. There seemed to be no topic in their conversation that I could follow with ease.

I tried to look comfortable and wandered round the reception room alone examining the photographs on the walls, aware that I was being observed discreetly by the *Securitate* officers. To my enormous relief, Anica appeared and unselfconsciously tilted her cheek allowing me to offer a kiss.

“*You're all alone and you haven't got anything to drink!*” She led me to a table laden with *hors d'oeuvres*, found me a drink, drew me to the side of the room and showed a willingness to spend time with me. Sică joined us.

“I saw you examining the photographs.” He said. I told him I found them interesting.

“They're of Anica's father.” Together, they escorted me round the room explaining the framed photographs.

Many were from immediately after the War when series of demonstrations by

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communist sympathisers helped bring the Romanian Communist Party to power. *Here was Anica's father leading a protest at the railway workshops; here he was encouraging striking workers; here he was showing the way forward for the Party.*

In these photographs, her father was a youngish, well-dressed young man. He carried a walking stick. By now we were close to the entrance hall and Sică asked the two *Securitate* officers to move aside. There on the wall, in a glass case, was the walking stick we had just seen Anica's father holding in the last photograph. It was a handsome, wooden cane with an elaborate hand-grip. Walking sticks had been common among older men when I was a boy and my grandfather had owned a similar one.

Sică opened the case, removed the cane, and while holding the handle, offered the stock to me. As my hand gripped the stock, Sică tugged the handle. I was left with a light hollow wooden case but now Sică had a metre-long, metal blade to protect himself with.

"A sword-stick!" Sică explained. "He was always at risk. He needed this to defend himself."

Sică replaced the blade in the hollow wooden stock, returned the cane to its glass case and drifted off. Anica continued to tell me about her father. Like many Romanians after the War he either already was or had become a communist. He became a leader. He knew Petru Grosa the first post-War Prime Minister of Romania who had paved the way for the Communist Party to acquire a strong grip on the country. He had held several positions of trust and, when he had died just a few years previously, he held the position of director of one of the several branches of the Department of State Security for the People's Republic of Romania. His memory, she told me, was honoured and revered.

"This was his and my mother's home." Anica gestured broadly. "Now it's Sică's and mine." I guessed there was more to the story than that but it would have been imprudent to ask questions.

I was so exhausted by all that I'd done and heard since I arrived and the people that I had met that I asked Anica if I could rest. She had a *Securitate* officer escort me

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to a suite of my own.

“You will be wakened an hour before dawn,” he told me. I fell asleep in my ‘hunting’ clothes.

At some time in the middle of the night I was roused and we climbed into a convoy of Russian limousines to head, Sică told me, to a lodge in an estate on the shores of Snagov Lake. I had slept well and drunk little and so was in good shape, unlike many of the other hunters. Sică and I had the back seat of a large black Chaika all to ourselves. He looked the worse for wear but seemed to be used to it.

“Don’t say a single word in when we get to the lodge,” he warned me. “It’s best if you don’t speak at all in front of the staff there.”

Twenty or more tired men struggled out of the limousines and entered the main hall of a magnificent timber-built hunting lodge near the village of Snagov. The walls were decorated with the heads of antlered deer and tusked boar, many varieties of duck and even birds of prey. Several black bears stood upright appropriately illuminated, mouths open to show their ferocious teeth and several bearskins were scattered on the polished wooden floor. A band of smartly-dressed waiters served us breakfast which we ate standing.

Once we’d eaten, the waiters brought bottles of refrigerated *țuica*—plum brandy—on trays with tiny glasses and filled one for everybody and even a second for those who wanted it. I drank my single glass thankfully, the morning was chilly and this, I knew, would help to stave off the cold.

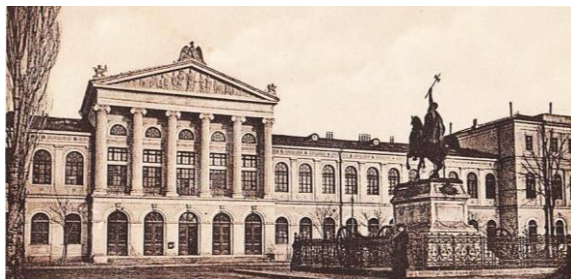
Sică approached me. “You are with me in my boat, Ron,” he told me. “I’ll put you in the bow, it’s the best position to fire from. There will be two more guns amidships and I’ll be in the stern.”

My military training had given me a very healthy respect for all weapons and especially for firearms. I had no idea how experienced Sică or any of the others might be with shotguns. The ‘hunters’ appeared to have all the right clothes. Appropriate clothing, I knew, is sometimes confused, in the mind of the amateur, with technical proficiency. I wasn’t willing to take any chances with individuals unfamiliar with arcs of fire.

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"I'm sure you're a better shot than I am, Sică," I said, "Why don't you take the bow and I'll take the stern." I believed that I was less likely to blow somebody's head off than was he or one of his chums.

"Fine," he said, "I can always swap with you if you don't get much opportunity from the stern."

Uniformed game-keepers were now distributing shot-guns. They presented the guns correctly, with barrels broken open and stock-first so that the recipient could see that the chambers were empty. I was handed a beautiful, Czechoslovak, double-barrelled gun. The keeper who would be in our boat went over it with me. It was almost identical to the guns I'd carried, taken apart, cleaned and reassembled for guests on hill estates in Glen Prosen, Glen Lethnot and Glen Esk.

The head keeper told us that the employee in each boat would carry the cartridges and would hand these out only when the boats were in position and the flights of ducks began arriving. He showed us how to carry the guns to the boats. I saw him remind some of the guests, including Sică, to return the gun to the cradle position when they casually slung them onto their shoulders. I was happy to see that the keepers were expert but nevertheless glad that I'd had the presence of mind to take the stern position.

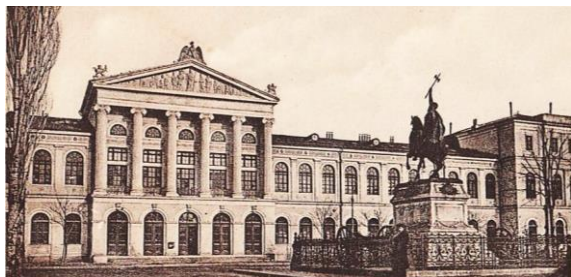
Before we left the dock, lots were drawn for positions around the shore of the lake. Then each group boarded its boat, each with a gamekeeper, and we quietly motored off to our allotted positions. It was still pitch black. We cut the engine and floated in reeds when we reached the side of the lake farthest from the hunting lodge. The air smelled sweet and fresh and the only sound was the lapping of little waves against the side of the boat, roosters announcing dawn, and the occasional far-off bark from a farm dog. I've always enjoyed waiting for daybreak, watching the sky gradually lighten in the east, hearing the countryside wake up. Sică and the other two guests crouched down below the gunwales to keep out of the wind and tried to make up for their lack of sleep.

As the eastern horizon began to turn pale yellow, we could hear ducks flying in to the western part of the lake but none came our way. We heard no shots fired.

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Sică and the other hunters in our boat sat up, loaded their guns and held them at the ready. The keeper reminded them of their arcs of fire. There was an explosion of distant shots from several different points on the lake. Duck were arriving but none close to us. Sică and his guests were becoming irritable. After another 15 impatient minutes we heard wing beats overhead and all the guns in the boat, except mine, went off at once. They hit nothing but all were excited by their 'near misses'.

This was repeated several times with the same results and we moved to a new location. It was now almost fully light and the keeper said we had probably no more than 10 minutes of opportunity left. Sică insisted on changing places with me – he desperately wanted me to get a bird – and so I moved to the bow and he to the stern. He ordered our keeper to motor slowly through the sedge.

Suddenly a pair of birds appeared out of the reeds about 20 yards in front of us. I raised my gun and slipped the safety off. When I saw that they weren't ducks but great-crested grebes I assumed they were a protected species, put the safety back on, and lowered the gun.

"Get them, Ron!" hissed Sică. When I paid no attention and he saw the birds were moving away from us out of range. He had the keeper open the throttle and lunge the boat forward. Now the grebes were well within range but I still didn't raise my gun.

Sică urged me, "Trage! Trage le!" – "Fire!"

"Rate nu sunt!" I whispered. "These are not ducks!"

"Nu contează," Sică was beside himself, "I don't care what they are – just kill them!"

I refused and he sulked all the way back to the landing where we disembarked in front of the hunting lodge. Few of the other boats had had much success but we were the only boat with absolutely nothing to show for our dawn hunt.

Our keeper told us to leave the guns in the boat and I heard other keepers issue the same instruction to their passengers. They clearly didn't trust their guests to remember the safety rules. I am certain that I saw the keepers exchange the same looks that Scottish gamekeepers exchanged as their guests loaded their bags into the Estate

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Land Rovers to be driven to the train station to catch the overnight sleeper to London.

*"Thank the Lord we're done with these damn toffs for another year! Now our lives can return to normal!"*

After that party and hunting trip I enjoyed coffee and *prăjituri* with Anica only two more times. The very last time, I relished her hand on my arm, the wisp of hair over her face, her white sugar moustache and the crumbs on her lips.

*"I'm leaving in 10 days' time!"*

*"We are going to miss you!"* Those amber eyes.

It pleased me to imagine she used the royal *"we"*.



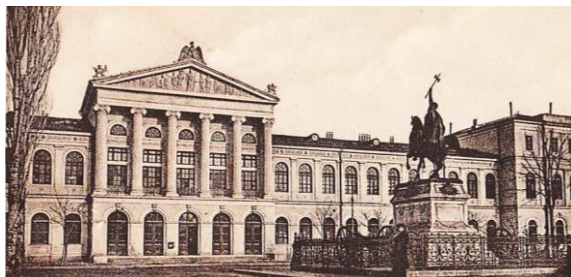
Lacul Snagov

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## **Tibi Stoian**

### **Tibi**

The simplest way for any Romanian who wanted to contact me was to wait for me to leave the Facultate on Pitar Moș after I'd finished teaching. I was a creature of habit. I entered the *Facultate* fifteen minutes before my classes began and left the building five or at most ten minutes after my classes ended. Because my presence caused embarrassment in the Faculty Common Room, I tended to use it as little as possible and I had given up using the *Casa Universitarilor* – the University Faculty Club on Strada Dionisie Lupu just a few minutes' walk away – for the same reason. I would invariably find myself alone at a table for four; colleagues could enter the dining room, look around and leave. My table was simply '*out of bounds*' and since I found such performance as embarrassing as they did, I decided I was doing us all a favour by giving the Club a wide berth.

For these reasons, my habits were predictable. I almost invariably turned right out of the main door of the Facultate onto Pitar Moș then right onto Strada Rosetti and then left again onto the main boulevard – Magheru. If I were walking home, which was most of the time, I stayed on the same side of the road all the way back to my apartment building about a mile to the south. If, for some reason I decided to take public transport, I had to cross the main boulevard and catch one of many trolley-buses or '*concertina-buses*' – that served my purpose. It was in Bucharest that I first saw a '*concertina-bus*' – a regular bus that drew a second rigid section which was linked to the bus by an articulated joint and enclosed by black, folding bellows that allowed the extra-long unit to make even 90 turns with ease. So for the price of a single driver, the *concertina-bus* could carry almost double the passengers of an ordinary bus.

My movements were highly predictable. Anybody wanting to contact me only needed to know my teaching schedule and they could find me with ease and then follow me until they felt it prudent to introduce themselves. And that's what Tibi did.

As soon as he turned to me in the street I recognized him. I'd seen him twice

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before on Magheru Boulevard, once the previous week and once the previous day. He was about my age or a couple of years older, 6' tall and had a shock of blond hair which was not very common in Romania. I thought he might be Securitate but on neither occasion had he followed me. Now he was standing in front of me and blocking my path just as I was about to cross Bulevardul Carol 1 at Piața Universitate.

"Professor Ronald Mackay?" He had a friendly, confident smile on his face. Romanians often used both given and surname when addressing me and to my initial confusion students often introduced themselves by their surname first and then their first name.

"Yes!"

"Tiberius Stoian! My friends call me Tibi!" His English was absolutely perfect. I shook his offered hand.

I was used by now to sizing Romanians up very swiftly and decided that he was unlikely to be a *Securitate* agent although he might be an informer. He was young, intelligent by the looks of him, dashing, and his face suggested he had a sense of humour as well as the obvious confidence that allowed him to stop me on the busy street and speak to me in English.

"Is this an inconvenient time?"

"It's lunch time," I said, "I have nothing to do, would you like to have lunch with me?" He'd made the first move by introducing himself to me and also the second by speaking to me in English and so I felt that the invitation was not inappropriate – he could accept it or reject it.

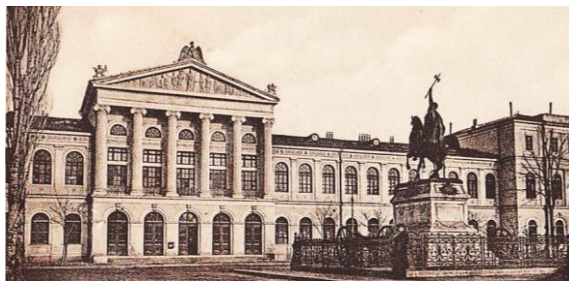
"Thank you, I would love to!" I wouldn't have to eat alone.

And so we crossed Magheru and then crossed Bulevardul Regina Elizabeta and walked together to a relatively quiet restaurant where I occasionally lunched, invariably alone. I welcomed his company. He was easy to speak to and very forthcoming. He told me that he was a graduate of the faculty I worked in at Bucharest University and had initially worked for 'Radio Romania' – he gave it the English pronunciation – but now worked as an English teacher. I filed that information away as 'odd'. Positions in State radio and television were offered only to the best graduates;

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school teaching was for the less successful. One of his parents was from Transylvania and the other was from Bucharest. That helped me explain his looks. His father was most likely ethnic Romanian from Bucharest, hence his Romanian given name and surname; his mother was most likely a Saxon or a Hungarian, hence his appearance.

He asked me if I knew of any opportunities for internships with the BBC in London. I told him that I didn't. I knew there was a bilateral cultural agreement between the UK and Romania but I only knew that part of it involving the annual exchange of a professor, the position that I held. I knew a little about the new agreement that allowed one or two students to complete their undergraduate degree at a British university.

"I could find out for you," I offered.

He said he would appreciate my doing so, asked me how long it would take and I told him a week at most.

"I will meet you in a week, if you agree," he offered, and so we met in the same restaurant the following week.

I learned from Tony Mann that there was no provision for broadcasters to do internships with the BBC in London. Tony also commented that it was odd that Tibi had worked for Radio Romania and now was working as a mere teacher. I told him that Tibi and I were going to meet again and that I felt, given his openness, he would solve the mystery of his employment.

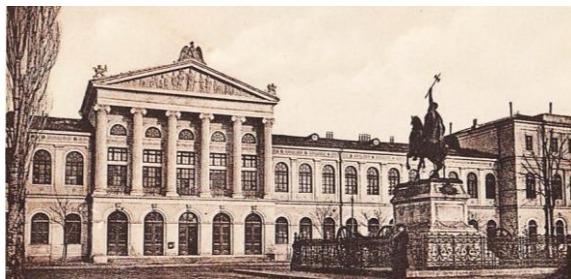
Tibi shrugged when I told him that there was no internship with the BBC on offer. He went on to tell me more about his background and his family – I had been right about his ethnicity – his father was Romanian and his mother Hungarian. I found him good company and when he asked for my telephone number I gave it to him. It was a university apartment and a university telephone, if he felt comfortable calling me that was up to him.

The following week he called and suggested we meet in Cișmiugu Gardens. It was a beautiful late spring day, the flowers were in bloom and the trees were green and fresh. We walked through the park until he found a very isolated bench he wanted to sit on.

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“I am going to defect,” he told me boldly. “I am going to defect in London. I want to work for the BBC.”

I was taken aback at his candour but said nothing.

Just at that moment, a huge black bumble bee floated towards us and hovered over a lavender plant only feet from where we sat. Tibi looked at me with wide eyes and put his finger to his lips.

“Securitate is everywhere!” We both burst out laughing. His excellent sense of humour dissolved the tension.

Tibi told me that he’d excelled in his English studies in the *Facultate*, had loved his work with Radio Romania but that *Securitate* had ‘borrowed’ him from State radio and installed him in a school where they trained officers who undertook missions abroad for which fluent English was essential.

If I’d been taken aback by his earlier candour about his intention to defect, I was dumbfounded by his admission that he trained spies. I continued to let him talk.

His intention to defect was firm, despite the excellent salary and superior privileges he enjoyed. However, his plans were still to be worked out in detail.

“Will you give me your address in the UK?” I’d told him my contract would soon be up and I would be leaving shortly. I said I would give him an address where he could contact me—my mother’s address in London—but that I would be in Edinburgh studying for a postgraduate degree for the latter half of ‘68 and the first half of ‘69. I would be unable to help him in any material way.

“I don’t need any material help,” he reassured me, “I just want somebody I know in the UK when I defect.” I could relate to that.

I heard nothing from or about Tibi from that day in May 1969 until more than two-and-a-half years later.

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## What plans?

### Pulling up stakes

*“What plans do you have for ‘M’ when you leave Romania, Ronald?”* Pearl was paying a third and final visit to Bucharest. Soon, my contract would end and I’d return to the UK. I’d accepted a place to study for a postgraduate degree at Edinburgh University.

Although both ‘M’ and I knew that we would part, we hadn’t explicitly formulated an answer to Pearl’s question. Our paths had crossed but neither of us truly believed that the coming together was other than temporary.

‘D’s and my worlds might share a little in common by virtue of having coincided at this particular time in this particular part of Eastern Europe. Each knew our relationship to be a phenomenon of the palpable present. Neither felt the yearning for it to endure into an uncertain future.

As a bright, healthy, worldly, good-natured and ambitious 19-year-old whose reality was post-War communist Romania, ‘M’ focused and thrived on the present. She was her own heroine in her own drama; I happened to be the current supporting actor. There had been others and undoubtedly there would be more central characters in the months and years to come. ‘M’ had never said as much but her anecdotes, her observations and behaviour, led me unmistakably to this understanding.

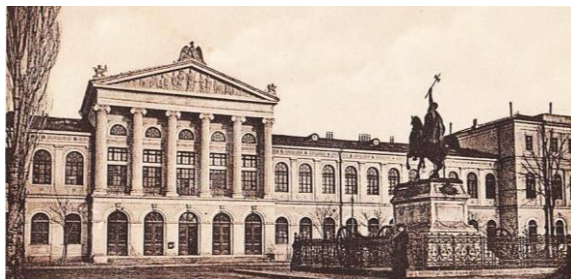
D’s every encounter was an intense adventure: with her high-school sweetheart; with the notorious *Lothario* in her group of teenage friends to whom she had surrendered, of her own free will, her virginity; the summer-long fling with her Californian cousin; with Western musicians she was occasionally contracted to chaperone on behalf of State Radio and Television; with me. ‘M’ told me this even if not in so many words.

Not only women students in my classes but those in other classes in the *Facultate* constantly cast me flirtatious glances. ‘M’ had commented on this many times, not, as I had first imagined, out of jealousy but out of personal satisfaction. So

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many women would have welcomed my attention – at least the attention of *the visiting professor* – and yet it was she, ‘M’, who was the elected. That knowledge gave her a heightened sense of herself and of her power as a woman. It gratified, confirmed and validated her *amour-propre*; she outdid, outshone and eclipsed her peers and her rivals.

This truth was forcibly driven home to me one day when ‘M’ asked, “What do you think of Romanian girls?”

“I think they’re very beautiful and very romantic. They flirt daringly.”

“Do you flirt back?”

“No.” I had found that my life was simpler if I enjoyed the looks cast at me without encouraging escalation.

“And I’m your only girl-friend?”

“Yes.” I was a little troubled by the question. Might ‘M’ imagine I was a philanderer?

And then she hit me with a heartfelt pronouncement that dumfounded me, “With all the opportunities you have, you should be cheating on me all the time!” Out of embarrassment, I laughed, but for many days after, I pondered that remark.

I came to the conclusion that my loyal behaviour lacked the drama and the challenge that ‘M’ sought from life. As a dynamic and vigorous woman she would have preferred the cut and thrust of competitive combat over the duteous respect I offered her. It was then that I fully appreciated that ‘M’ played the lead role in her personal narrative. Those who played the supporting roles could be important but were interchangeable if they failed to live up to the performance she expected of them. If the production changed and they no longer suited they would be replaced. ‘M’ was at that stage in her young and intellectually-privileged life where she was trying out new roles for herself. She possessed, not without justification, the supreme confidence that she could play any part with outstanding success. ‘M’ possessed impressive talents.

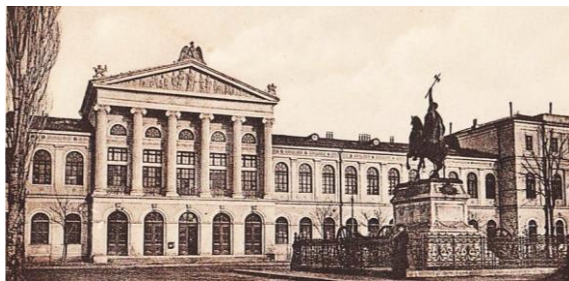
I groped for the words to explain this to Pearl. She waited until my efforts floundered to a halt.

“No future plans? That’s not what ‘D’ thinks.” She looked at me quite seriously.

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*“D’ gives me the impression that she would like to see you and ‘M’ marry.”*

Now that Pearl had made that explicit, I was faced with something that I’d been unconsciously sidestepping for some time – ‘D’s agenda. ‘M’ might live in the present and play the leading lady in her daily narrative but ‘D’ was playing a different role – that of watchful and protective mother. ‘D’ had descended into present-day life in the People’s Republic of Romania from a more elevated and very different past; she was surviving adequately thanks to her skills and her acumen. But like thousands of Romanians who had known better days, ‘D’ nursed ambitions for her daughter. ‘D’ had every intention of seeing these ambitions fulfilled whatever the sacrifice, whatever the effort, whatever the cost. At least her daughter – and perhaps in the long-run she herself – might return to a more satisfactory, a more promising, less punishing world.

Pearl, likewise, was protecting the interests of *her* off-spring. She would not stand by and see one of her brood used as an unwitting pawn in a private game of chess. Pearl needn’t have worried. It had become clear to me that I must be sufficiently explicit with ‘M’ that the end of my contract also signified the end of our relationship so that the unmistakable message would reach and register with ‘D’.

I had no fears that I could make explicit to ‘M’ what had been to date an unstated understanding without inspiring any overly dramatic reaction – and I was right. ‘M’ smiled her glowing smile as if to say, *‘Why must we unnecessarily repeat ourselves?’* and took the opportunity to ask me if I would give her my second-hand, portable typewriter as a parting gift.

My portable typewriter was the one and only possession I had of any value. It might have been worth, perhaps £20 or £25. ‘M’ carried it home with her disguised in a shopping bag. If typewriters were not banned outright they were not something you wanted to draw others’ attention to. Now I had nothing more valuable than my 35 mm camera, the clothes I stood up in and those hanging in my wardrobe.

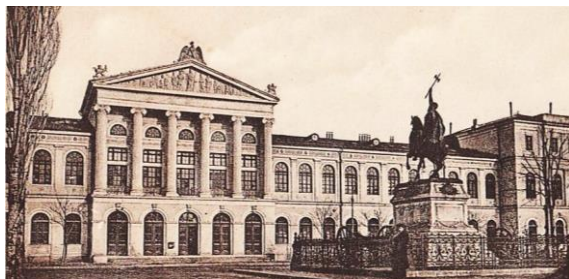
Two days later, she brought the typewriter back. “Can you have some of the keys modified to provide Romanian diacritics?”

If I needed any confirmation that I had made the right decision, this was it. ‘M’

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and 'D' were two to my one, and so it always would be.

I duly gave the typewriter to Ron Walker the Hymac engineer the next time he was driving back to the UK via Vienna. He arranged the exchange of keys that 'M' or more likely 'D' had requested, brought the machine back to Bucharest and I duly delivered it to 'M'. The modifications cost me 15% of my annual Sterling income. I was planning to go back to university in the UK in October 1969 and take an advanced degree. I needed every penny I could save. The only possible use my typewriter could have for 'D' would be as an item to barter in exchange for some service of extraordinary value.

### **I'm flying... I'm flying away**

I left Bucharest in early July 1969. By leaving early, I forfeited two months' salary—both in the Romanian Lei I received from the University—which was insignificant because not convertible into hard currency—and the monthly £30 deposited by the British Government into my UK bank account—my only revenue in Sterling. My Romanian colleagues, even friends at the Embassy, thought I could do better.

*"Spend 2 months reading and relaxing on a beach on the Black Sea Coast. You'll still be paid!"*

But idle beaches held no attraction for me. I'd been offered a three-month contract at the Anglo-Continental School of English in Bournemouth at £200 a month. I needed that money to help pay for my graduate studies. It wouldn't be enough but it would be a start. I'd find a way.

### **British living standards**

Most, if not all Romanians assumed that everybody in the West was well-off. The truth was that we were better off in terms of political freedoms but we, in the Scotland I knew, were not significantly better off in material terms. It was impossible,

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of course, to explain this convincingly to a Romanian listener. A Romanian thought you were merely trying to save them the embarrassment of acknowledging their own privation.

As a summer teacher in Bournemouth, my standard of living would take a drop from what I was used to in Bucharest. I would return to the digs I'd had the previous year—a single bed-sitting-room in a lodging-house where the owners resided in the basement and rented out the other five bedrooms individually. While each of us would have our own bedroom, we would share the kitchen and a single bathroom. In pursuit of any entertainment that cost money other than the bus fare, I would be able to go out for entertainment once a week—to the cinema or a bar for a pint or two, to a dance, or for an Indian meal. I would meticulously look after my own clothes, wash them myself in a commercial laundrette once a week, press my trousers and iron the shirts myself. I would do my own shopping so that I could have breakfast before I left in the morning; prepare a sandwich to take to work for lunch, and make my own dinner when I came home in the evening. As a lover of the spoken word, I'd allow myself the luxury of a small transistor radio so as to be able to listen to the BBC, but I'd have no TV. There would be the communal pay-phone installed in the lodging-house; few if any long-distance calls; no luxuries and no vacation. I would husband away all that I could of my monthly £200 in order to save for a year's study during which I would have live even more frugally.

That was how the majority of prudent young people my age—in their mid 20s—lived if they expected to save some money each month. That was how we conducted our normal, everyday lives. We got on with it, enjoyed it, and expected no more until we were established in a career, had saved substantially, and were, perhaps, thinking of getting married.

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## How to say goodbye?

Tony and Sheila Mann offered to host a cocktail party in their home before I left to say 'Goodbye' principally to my colleagues at the *Facultate*.

"I appreciate the gesture, Tony," I told him, "but it's hardly necessary. I've exchanged no more than 'Buna ziua!' with most of them. I can say goodbye to my friends myself."

"Protocol, Ron!" He reminded me of correct procedure. And so we held the cocktail party.

As Tony implied, it was more to fulfil a political ritual, acknowledge an administrative milestone in the bilateral cultural agreement, than to share feelings over a personal parting of ways. We accomplished the former with the cocktail party.

It turned out to be, as I predicted, a formal 'Who's Who?' of the faculty power-brokers few of whom appeared to contribute in any significant way to the scholarship of the department or its academic leadership. Madame Cartianu and the alert Professor Chițoran appeared—two faculty members I rarely saw and who, in two years, had never exchanged a word of substance with me. Their positions, however, entitled them.

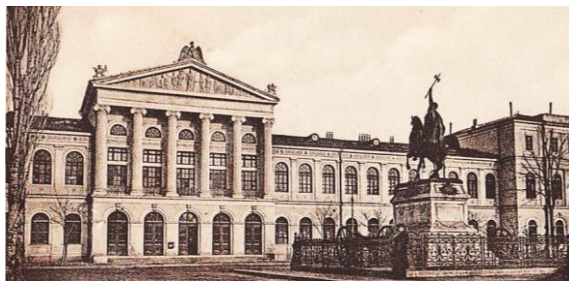
Several of the others I had particularly asked to be invited, the timid and the powerless, failed to make an appearance, to my disappointment. The more confident, Professors Levițchi and Duțescu were there as themselves, the ever amiable and polite senior scholars who contributed greatly to the reputation of the department. Later the following year in Edinburgh, I was fortunate to be in a position to host them and their wives for dinner. They were making a British Council-sponsored trip to the UK. I invited them to dine at the Café Royal, a famous bar and restaurant built in the 1860s where they enjoyed traditional Scottish *haggis and neeps*, the very best I could do for them after all the delicious meals I had eaten in Romania.

My friend Dino Sandulescu was present—always cutting through red tape and inane small-talk, always getting to the essence of whatever topic was being discussed, always well-informed and able to further the substance of any conversation even if he

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left many an incomplete thought hovering in the air. My friend Harald Mesch was there, quiet, confident, alert. And, I was happy to see, Ion Preda. I always had a liking for Ion Preda; perhaps it was his apparent sincerity, perhaps because he introduced me to raw chilli peppers.

To my surprise, Professor Slama-Cazacu was there with her silent husband Boris. I had encountered them only twice before and then for only a minute or two.

The first time was when, at Tony Mann's request, I was arranging the book presentation to the English Department. Ion Preda told me that the approval of Professor Slama-Cazacu and her husband Professor Boris Cazacu was necessary. I was surprised because I somehow imagined that Ion possessed the authority and I had never before heard of or met the Cazacus. Ion arranged a meeting but warned me that they could only give me a moment of their time. As we mounted the staircase we met the Cazacus coming down and so the interview was granted there, on the staircase, leading up to the first floor classrooms. The Cazacu's took up their position two steps above Ion and I so that to look at their faces we had to crane our necks upwards like subjects paying homage to an empress and her consort. We were now blocking half the width of the staircase and students negotiated, with difficulty, their way to their class around the obstacle we were creating. Professor Slama-Cazacu gave me the x-ray treatment and a formal smile. Her consort didn't open his mouth. Ion did the talking. Imperial approval must have been given, because the presentation went ahead.

When I reached my tutorial room a few minutes later, my students, who had all seen me with Professor Preda and the Cazacus were full of questions. They wanted to know what dealings I had with persons of such elevated rank as the Cazacus. I had no idea who they were and when I asked, my students were not forthcoming so I didn't probe.

I met them once more, very briefly, at a party in the American Embassy. Bill Nemser from the Centre for Applied Linguistics in Washington was visiting. The American Cultural Attaché introduced me to him and we talked about Applied Linguistics at Edinburgh University and the differences in approach to the field taken

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by the Americans and the British. The Slama-Cazacus approached and Bill Nemser tried to include them in our conversation.

“I’m talking to your colleague Ron about how differently the Brits and the Americans approach applied linguistics.” The Slama-Cazacus looked at me without any recognition whatsoever and immediately turned the conversation to matters of interest to her. The Cazacus had their own personal agenda to pursue and I respected that. Overlooking the unaccustomed breach of courtesy, I went in search of more congenial company.

Tony and Sheila Mann and their young daughter Sarah who had just finished the semester at her boarding school in England, judged the cocktail party marking my imminent departure a great success and I was glad. Tony had been my reliable point of professional support during these two fascinating years and I greatly appreciated and benefited from his and Sheila’s friendship.



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## **End of Year Two**

### **British living standards**

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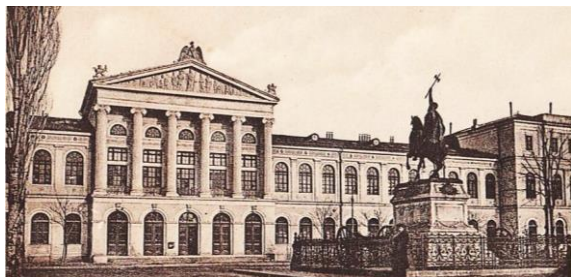
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## Goodbye

I left the *Facultate* on Pitar Moș without any fanfare. With those who happened to be in the Faculty Common Room the day I taught my last class, I exchanged warm handshakes. Those few friends I had made in the country, including Dino Sandulescu and Harald Mesch, cautioned me, “*Don’t write!*” A letter from the West meant awkward questions that could have unfortunate repercussions.

## TAROM’s BAC One-Elevens

I flew on one of the British BAC One-Elevens that TAROM, the Romanian state airline, had recently purchased from the UK. A few weeks before, I’d had dinner at the British Consul’s apartment with the two British pilots who were teaching the Romanian pilots to fly the new aircraft. They greatly amused the guests by acting out the challenges that these pilots, used to flying the slow Soviet Ilyushin turbo-prop aircraft, encountered as they strove to master the fast BAC jets.

The difference in relative cruising speeds of the two aircraft was such that aircrew flying a jet had to complete their tasks in a fraction of the time enjoyed by those flying turbo-props. TAROM had selected its oldest and most politically-reliable pilots to be trained for the new jet flights to Europe. The State didn’t want younger, more ambitious pilots defecting in London. Older pilots had wives of long-standing, children and grandchildren who were guaranteed – or *almost* guaranteed – to bring them back. These older pilots were used to flying slower aircraft. They were set in their ways and liked to relax and smoke a cigarette between the obligatory series of tasks from take-off to landing. They lacked the relative alertness and agility needed to complete essential tasks swiftly. These tasks included identifying their aircraft and its destination with the various Air Traffic officers in the many control points in the many countries they would pass over on the flight from Bucharest to London.

To our amusement, the British pilots mimicked – and no doubt exaggerated – the relaxed and languid behaviour of the older Romanian pilots that, early on in their

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training, made it impossible for them to execute even the most routine but absolutely essential procedures on time. They would complete the first in a series of procedures, breathe a sigh of relief, light up a cigarette but before they'd taken their second puff would be receiving an urgent call from Hungarian air traffic control to identify themselves of face being shot down – ID, heading, origin, destination, airspeed, etc. They'd make a mad scramble to gather that information from the various dials they had to monitor, report it calmly and clearly and at the same time scramble to recover the lit cigarette they'd dropped on the floor in fright. That done, they'd breathe a sigh of relief and no sooner light up their second cigarette when an Austrian officer made the same demand and the same threat – and so it went on until they were taken into the efficient embrace of the controllers at Heathrow.

### **Take off**

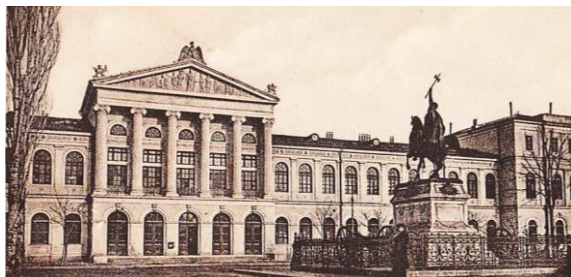
We rose above the clouds, above Bucharest. I looked down at the city spread below me; the city where I'd spent the better part of two important yours in my life. The aircraft settled down on an easterly heading towards Hungary. The plain to the south stretched towards the Danube and the border with Bulgaria; to the north were the green, Carpathians where I'd spent so many enjoyable weekends in all seasons and in all weathers walking their forested valleys, breathing their mountain air. I was leaving friends, a lover, probably forever. I was leaving a way of life that I was unlikely to experience ever again. I reflected on the wonderful experiences, on the frightening ones and on the shocking; on the good things I'd seen and the bad. My mind and my heart were in turmoil. It wasn't easy to assimilate the diversity I'd lived; no simple matter to sort out the good from the bad, segregate the healthy from the injurious, winnow the wholesome from the pernicious.

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## **Summer '69**

I began teaching once more, for the summer, at the Anglo Continental School of English in Bournemouth, trying desperately to save for my year of postgraduate studies at Edinburgh University's Department of Applied Linguistics. It was going to be a parsimonious year given the pitiful remuneration in Pounds Sterling I'd received for the previous two years. Nevertheless, I was determined to do it and knew that I somehow would.

### **Petty France**

One day when I returned to my boarding house on Branksome Chine, after classes, I found a brown OHMS envelope propped up on the hall table. The letter told me to report to a Government office in Petty France, London, for an official '*debriefing*' after my service in Romania. The day and a time were specified. My day-return travel and lunch expenses would be reimbursed.

I duly asked the school principal for the day off.

"Of course," he said, "official Government business." I got on well with him and had the impression he liked having a temporary teacher who had taught at a university. I must remind you, Ron," he sounded regretful, "that we'll have to dock your pay to pay for a replacement to cover your classes."

The summons gave me no option but attend. I took the early train to Waterloo to leave myself plenty of time to find my way from the railway station by Underground to Petty France. In fact I arrived so early in London that I decided to cover the couple of miles on foot. I wanted to cross the Thames on foot.

The words of William Wordsworth's *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* and T.S. Eliot's *The Burial of the Dead* mingled in my head as I walked with dozens of commuters across the river in early morning sunlight.

"This City now doth, like a garment, wear

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The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;  
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

.....

The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;  
And all that mighty heart is lying still!"

*And*

.....

"A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
I had not thought death had undone so many."

I thought of my daily mile walk from my apartment along Bălcescu Boulevard, past Calea Lipscani, across the very modest bridge over the River Dâmbovita, past the glittering cupolas of the Orthodox churches, into Magheru, the heart of the city – at least the university heart – and onto the quieter side-streets, Rosetti and Pitar Moș. I was suspended between two worlds and hadn't yet found a bridge to link them.

Perhaps I was barely present in either.

The number I'd been told to report to on Petty France didn't declare itself or the business within; an unremarkable corner. However, as soon as I entered the small hall and attempted to walk up the two or three steps to the door, my way was barred.

"Can I help you, Sir?" A relaxed but no-nonsense concierge. Bob and Tom who guarded the Embassy came to mind.

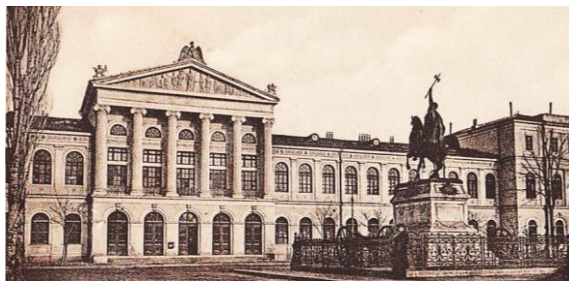
I showed him the letter as I'd been instructed to. He took it out of my hand and went back into his cubby-hole booth, consulted a ledger, found what he was looking for, and turned into a human being.

"Please come this way, Mr Mackay." He led me up the stairs, through the double doors and delivered me to a perceptive secretary. She eyed, overly-critically to

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my mind, my very much ill-matched, pre-Carnaby-Street clothes lacking in elegance or style and led me to an ante-room.

“The Committee is in deliberation,” she announced with a sobriety that her tender years failed to match. “The chairman will call for you when they’re ready,” she pointed to a second door within the ante-room. Then she left, closing the first door behind her with a finality that made me feel claustrophobic.

Her critical assessment made me feel self-conscious about my clothes—the dated, over-worked suit I’d worn to classes in the Facultate, polished black ex-army shoes that knew the Prahova Valley. The cut of my shirt collar was outmoded and my square-ended, narrow tie was definitely out of date. I hadn’t yet learned the lesson that there are only two kinds of ties worth my while wearing—my Morgan FP tie and that of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Gordon Highlanders.

As the secretary predicted, the second door in the ante-room opened and a well-suited gentleman addressed me, “I chair the committee, Mr. Mackay, thank you so much for coming!” *Did I have a say in the matter?* I wondered.

Seated round a long table that stretched well into the darker half of the poorly-lit room was a surprisingly large number of people—14 or 15. As far as I could see, they were all men, all formally dressed, all looking at me. The chairman introduced me to two of the men on his left and one on his right mumbling something about the British-Romanian Cultural Agreement. The other gentleman apparently did not exist.

The room was entirely hushed and I wondered if I they expected me to break the silence.

“The committee would like you to begin by talking in general terms about your two years as the British lecturer to Bucharest University in phonetics.”

“Does the committee want my impressions about my work or about my life in general?” I asked for clarification.

“The broad impressions of what your life in general would be a good place to start.”

“Well,” I began and halted. How could I summarise two years of paradox? Two years of contradictions I hadn’t come to terms with yet myself? I strove to sort out the

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jumble of conflicting memories that poured into my mind. Since arriving back, I hadn't been able to talk intelligently to anybody about these past two years. Their preconceptions distorted their questions and my answers. I decided to begin on a positive note.

"Well, these past two years have been the two most interesting years of my life so far."

"In Bucharest? Behind the Iron Curtain?" The sardonic voice came from a dark recess. The tone knocked me off-balance. His words seemed to imply that Romania could not enjoy the normal laws of nature – sunrise and sunset; spring, summer, autumn, winter; birdsong, fresh air, glorious cloud patterns in the sky.

"In Bucharest, Romania," I confirmed, trying to ground myself. "That is where I spent the last two years."

"Tell us what you found so interesting, Mr Mackay."

Where to start? The end when I had begun to learn a little? The beginning when I was totally naive? *In medias res – in the very heart of the action?* The train journey came to mind. My arrival at the Gara de Nord. Tony's secretary driving me to my apartment, opening the door, an apartment all to myself. So welcome, so unlike crowded basements in Aberdeen or my current bed-sit in Bournemouth. I groped for a starting point, a hand-grasp that might allow me to begin and then settle into a stride.

"I had a very comfortable an apartment all to myself." I remembered the warmth in winter. "It was centrally-heated." I'd never lived in my own, centrally-heated apartment before.

Silence.

"You had a centrally heated apartment all to yourself." The sardonic voice from the shadows.

"Now," I talked into the darkness, "in Bournemouth, I have a bed-sitting room in a boarding house."

The committee members regarded me in silence. *I should have rehearsed something for them!* They were expecting something organized, ordered, insightful. The

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formal letter had given me no clue. *What was a 'debriefing'?*

"Bournemouth." A milder voice brought relief. "Poole?"

"I visit Poole harbour at least once a week."

"Sailing for the summer?" Again from the shadows.

"I'm spending the summer working, Sir."

"Working?" The word, coming out of the darkness without the /r/ conjured up something odd, something unfamiliar. The questioning intonation sounded as if work were something eccentric whereas *sailing* would have been more conventional, more reasonable.

"As a teacher of English. To foreign students."

"Not sailing?" *What was it that the speaker was not getting?* I asked myself. Miss Chalmers, my Primary 4 teacher at the Morgan Academy twenty years earlier questioned in a similar way, invariably to lead you into a cunning trap that snapped its sharp iron jaws shut on you with startling ferocity.

"Working, Sir." I was conscious of my Scottish pronunciation of the word '*wurking*'. "I'm starting a graduate course in Edinburgh in October. I need to save to pay for that." Finances were uppermost on my mind. "I earned very little in Bucharest." I added.

Silence. In polite company, I remembered too late—and no doubt in in Government debriefings—it's unbecoming to mention money. Nevertheless, minimum reward in Pounds Sterling was part of my 'general impressions'.

"Travel is its own reward, don't you think?" The rhetorical question.

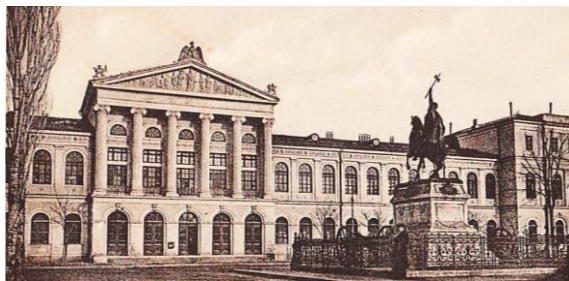
The last time I had heard that phrase was from the professor of moral philosophy at King's College, Aberdeen. He was from the Aberdeenshire village of Torry and pronounced his /r/s as in French.

"*Travel is its own reward!*" He paused dramatically. "*The only thing we have to fear is fear itself!*" Another dramatic pause. "*It is noble and proper to die for one's country! You can't take it with you! – These platitudes are used as authority to convince, to persuade,*" he continued. "*They are examples of banal nonsense uttered by the hopelessly muddled, untutored mind. They offer neither proof nor evidence; they merely confuse.*" Another

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dramatic pause during which he made eye contact with the rows of terrified students. *"The purpose of my course is not to turn you into philosophers, but to teach you how to recognize emotional language so that you will not be manipulated into accepting clichés or slogans, proverbs or platitudes as valid assertions."*

I should have let the sardonic comment from the darkness go but I remembered my moral philosophy professor and decided to answer as if it had been a sincere question.

*"I don't think Sir John would agree with you, Sir!"*

"Sir John?" The interrogatory rising tone.

"Sir John Chadwick, Sir, our serving Ambassador to Romania."

The speaker harrumphed, "Surely there's a difference! Chadwick's a member of Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service."

There's a perverse streak in most Scots, and once more I spoke instead of holding my tongue.

"A difference?" I was adopting the shadowy speaker's tactic. It annoyed me to be told that the exotic surroundings I'd enjoyed for the previous two years should satisfy me as fair compensation.

Then it struck me that I was allowing myself to be distracted, intentionally or unintentionally, by a red-herring. The relative salaries of a diplomat and a contract university teacher were not the point of this exchange. The original point the voice from the darkness had made was the assertion that the sights and sounds that accrue from travel in a foreign land represent sufficient and fair compensation for one's labour.

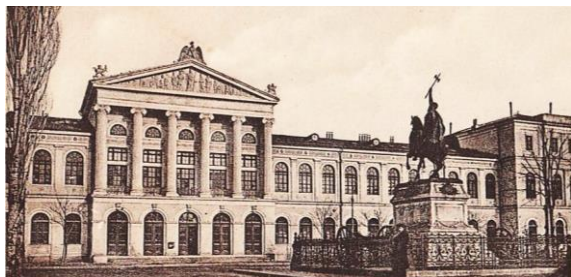
"Travel is its own reward?" I repeated the phrase as if it were a question. "Is it really? Or is that merely an aphorism that fails to stand up to thoughtful analysis?"

There was a long silence. Had I been able to, I would have withdrawn the remark and talked about the worst excesses of the Romanian communist regime which was, I was beginning to realise, what the committee wanted to hear. But it was too late. Words uttered can never be withdrawn. The chairman turned to me with a stony look.

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*"Thank you very much, Mr. Mackay. The committee, and I, would like to thank you for allowing us to prey on your valuable time."* He stood up abruptly, led me out of the room and delivered me directly to the concierge at the front door. I was out on the street with nothing more to do than return to Waterloo to see if there was an earlier train that get me back to Bournemouth.

All the way back as we sped through the lush countryside of the English south, I blamed myself. I was used to thinking of life in terms of cause and effect. I'd gained nothing by pursuing my own agenda instead of adjusting myself to theirs. I had poisoned my own well.

My grandmother's advice had always been, 'Haud yer wheesht an' keep a calm sooch!' – Hold your tongue and keep control of yourself! I'd failed to follow her advice.

But then I began to see the encounter differently and felt a little better about it.

### **'M' arrives in the UK**

One evening in early September the lodging-house pay-phone rang. A fellow boarder answered then called, *"Ron – it's for you!"* I took the handset from him. He mouthed to me. *"A woman! Nice voice!"*

*"I'm in London!"* 'M' was ecstatic. I'd given her the boarding-house number before I left so she could contact me if she were fortunate enough to be awarded one of the scholarships to complete her degree in the UK.

*"London!"*

*"I won the scholarship! I have my passport! I got my exit papers! I'm here!"* The phone vibrated.

*"Congratulations!"* I was sincerely happy for 'M' and knew that she would succeed and prove that the selection committee couldn't have made a better choice.

*"I want to come to see you this weekend."*

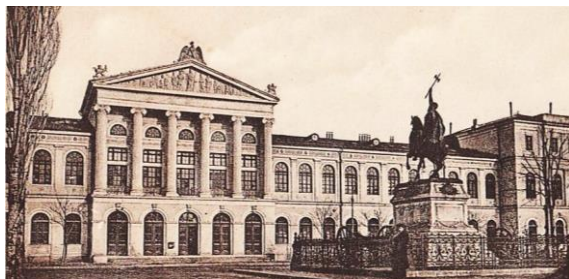
*"As a friend?"*

*"As we agreed. Friends."*

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I met 'M' at Bournemouth railway station early on that warm, southern Saturday morning. She was literally bubbling with joy. We dropped her tiny bag off in my room and I took the opportunity to show her the sleeping arrangements – she had the single bed and I had cushions and a blanket on the floor.

We took the bus to the terminus and explored the *chines* on foot. *Chines*, in Dorset, are the natural, steep ravines with grasses, wildflowers and trees, through which cinder paths lead visitors from the road down to the sandy beaches and the sea. We had lunch in the sun in the beautiful little English seaport of Poole and watched sailors beat single-handedly against the strong wind that always blew from the west, into Poole Harbour. 'M' was delighted with everything and as excited as I have ever in my life seen any human being. I knew exactly how she felt and was happy for her sake.

The British Council had made all the necessary arrangements for her to attend Edinburgh University where she would complete a first degree in English literature with German as her 'second' language. I smiled now at the British assumption that you had a *first* language and might master a *second*. 'M' mastered five! The British taxpayer would cover her costs according to the terms of the bilateral cultural exchange agreement. She would have her fees and all attendant university expenses paid; she would have her accommodation and meals covered; a book allowance, an allowance for writing materials and paper, a clothes allowance and a 'personal' allowance. There was not a single expense but it was covered. I buried my envy. I had to pay everything for myself, absolutely everything, and had not yet saved nearly enough.

Quite independently, we had opted for Edinburgh University. I would study in the postgraduate Applied Linguistics programme. What appealed to me about the Edinburgh course was that it advertised its mission as to train appropriately experienced graduate students in the resolution of educational problems rooted directly or indirectly in an inadequate or an inappropriate command of language. I was beginning to see myself first and foremost as a 'problem solver', as someone with the resources to address the questions and concerns of others, to examine and assess

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these concerns, and to offer practicable and principled solutions to overcome them.

### **Alexandru from Alexandria – Here we are again!**

'M' told me about the challenges she faced after having been informed by the British Embassy that she had been named as a scholarship winner. The scholarship could only be awarded once the Romanian Government granted her the necessary permissions and documents to leave the country. 'D', she told me, had pulled out all the stops and called in all favours due.

After successfully making it through various formalities and receiving her passport, 'M's final hurdle was to gain the coveted exit visa. To obtain that, she must be interviewed by *Securitate*. She'd been given an appointment and had waited nervously in an ante-room. Finally she was called into the *Securitate* official's office. There, seated behind an impressive desk over which presided the omniscient portrait of Ceaușescu with his weak chin and twisted grimace, sat none other than Alexandru from Alexandria.

Alexander was dressed resplendently in the uniform of a Major of *Securitate*. Among other questions, she was asked about Ronald Mackay the British Exchange Lecturer in Phonetics at Bucharest University.

"What do you know of Professor Mackay's counter-revolutionary mission in Romania as a British undercover operative?"

She knew nothing, of course. *Indeed, what was there to know?*

'M' passed the interview, was granted her exit visa and took the first flight the British Embassy could find her a seat on, from Otopeni to Heathrow.

Her first destination in London had been a Jewish philanthropic group who helped refugees from Eastern Europe. That organization had helped in several ways – with immediate accommodation and food, clothes, and a little money. 'M' was already adapting successfully to her new environment.

We had an Indian meal in the restaurant on Wimbourne Road where I liked to eat every Saturday evening. By now knew every item on the menu.

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After we returned to my room in the boarding-house, 'M' made a half-hearted attempt to rekindle the relationship but graciously backed down when she saw I was resolute. 'D's financial resources were already adequate to meet her all of her needs. As I had had the prescience to foresee all these months before, 'M' and I were on different paths through life. These paths had temporarily—and for both of us happily—coincided in Bucharest but were assuredly diverging once again.

## **Edinburgh**

In Edinburgh, I introduced 'M' to friends I already had there—mainly fellow-students who had studied with me in Aberdeen and had moved to the capital for work. She saw how they lived, and how I lived, and she adapted.

'M' befriended the visiting German professor whose advanced German class she attended as part of her programme of studies. He was a likeable, serious young man perhaps six or seven years older than she was and treated her with great courtesy and affection. She completed her undergraduate degree with distinction. She was ranked first equal with a British student two years her elder and for whom English was his first language. She married her German professor and they returned to Cologne where he held a permanent professorial position. 'M' completed further studies in Germany while working with great success as the director of a private language academy.

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## **Romanian fallout**

### **Tibi reappears**

One afternoon, in 1972 or '73, I was sitting in my office at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne where I held a post as Lecturer in Applied Linguistics. The telephone rang. It was my mother. She had retired from her work first as a bookkeeper in London and later as a domestic bursar in boarding schools and latterly at the Medical Faculty of London University and come to live with me in Gosforth in Northumberland where I had bought a semi-detached house. My mother looked after the house and an enormous vegetable garden half-an-acre in extent.

"Ronald, there was a call for you from a Dr Baruch. He called my old number at the Medical School in London and they gave him our number here. He wants to speak to you urgently. I gave him your office number and called you right away to let you know." She sounded excited.

"What's it about," I asked.

"He said it was confidential but asked if you were the Ronald Mackay who had been Visiting Professor at Bucharest University in 1969. I told him you were. So it must be something to do with Romania." Pearl had loved Romania and any reference to it rekindled the excitement of her visits.

I thanked her and promised to tell her all about Dr Baruch's call when I got home that evening. I'd no sooner hung up than the phone rang again.

"Mr Mackay please?"

"Speaking."

"I am Dr Baruch, a psychiatrist at a hospital in London. My patient Tiberiu Stoian has told me that you can vouch for him. Is that correct?"

"I know Tiberiu Stoian, yes. I met him in Bucharest when I was working there in 1969. What exactly does 'vouch' for him mean?"

"It puts you under no financial or custodial obligation, Mr Mackay. It just means that you can vouch for his identity if that becomes necessary. My psychiatric

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duties are conducted on behalf of the Home Office and Immigration.”

“So Mr Stoian is in London?”

“He has been interned a psychiatric facility for his own well-being. When the necessary investigations have been carried out he is likely to be released. I can tell you nothing more, but I would like to ask you some questions.”

Dr Baruch proceeded to ask me for Tibi’s physical description, height, weight and any particular characteristics. I was able to provide them.

Then he asked me, “Mr Stoian claims to have worked for Radio Romania, can you confirm that?”

“That is what he told me, that he had been an announcer for Radio Romania.” I was waiting for a question about the school for spies but it didn’t come. “Can I speak to Mr Stoian?”

“That’s not possible at this point, Mr Mackay.”

“Can you let me have your telephone number, Dr Baruch?” He gave me a number and I thanked him.

“*Thank you* for your cooperation Mr Mackay. I may have to call you again.” I told him I would be happy to cooperate further. It worried me that Tibi seemed not to have told Dr Baruch that he had been head-hunted from Radio Romania by *Securitate* to teach in their spy school.

I told my mother all about Dr Baruch’s call when I got home that evening. And I also told her about how I knew Tibi and all that he had confessed to me.”

“Why do you think he’s in a psychiatric hospital?” Pearl asked.

“I’ve no idea. Perhaps when East Europeans defect, the British authorities have to debrief them before granting them asylum. Maybe a psychiatric assessment is part of the process.” I suggested. “But it bothers me that there was no mention made of Tibi’s working for *Securitate*. I don’t think I can let that pass. If Tibi’s seeking political asylum in the UK he must be totally honest with the authorities. Why would he not tell the Home Office’s he worked for a school that served *Securitate* unless he’s been sent on a mission as their agent?”

Pearl immediately saw the point. “So what are you going to do?”

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"I'm going to sleep on it and decide tomorrow." I said.

The following day I did things one at a time. I called the number Dr Baruch had given me. I decided that my first step was to confirm that Dr Baruch was who and what he said he was.

I dialled and the phone at the other end rang. It was promptly answered, "St Bernard's. Which department please?"

I played dumb. "I'm trying to locate a friend of mine who came in a few days ago. I'm not sure what department he's in."

"I'm sorry sir; I need to know the department."

"Could it be psychiatry? The patient's name is —" She cut me off.

"I don't have patient list Sir but I can put your through to the psychiatric unit."

"Is there a Dr Baruch there? I asked?"

"Yes sir, do you want me to put you through to Dr Baruch?"

"Is St Bernard's easy to find? I was thinking of visiting."

"We're located in Ealing, Sir but if it's the psychiatric unit you should really talk to Dr Baruch first, you can be admitted only by appointment. Will I put you through?"

"I'm sorry," I said, "I'll have to call back later. Thank You!" I hung up.

I'd confirmed the credentials of Dr Baruch; the institution was St Bernard's; it had a psychiatric unit; the psychiatric unit was secure; and St Bernard's was somewhere in Ealing in West London. I had learned how to obtain and confirm information in Romania with a few seemingly innocent questions. I had been afraid that Dr Baruch was a phoney whose only role was to establish credentials for Tibi in the UK if he were on a mission sent by Securitate.

Then I called the same number again and when the telephone operation answered, I asked for the Psychiatric Unit and was put through.

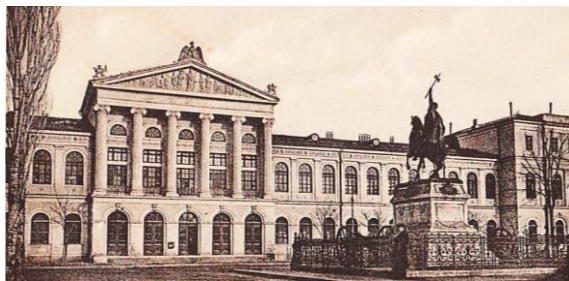
"I'm calling from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne," said. "I need to speak to a Dr — I'm not sure how to pronounce his name — is it Bark? Burke? Barack? It's about a Home Office case.

"Dr Baruch is the consultant psychiatrist, Sir. He is responsible for Home Office

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internees. Can I put you through?"

"Please!" I said.

I'd learned that Dr Baruch was the consultant and that he was in a position of responsibility. I could assume that he had access to most, probably all, of the details taken from Tibi. My thoughts were interrupted by Dr Baruch.

"This is Ronald Mackay, Dr Baruch, we spoke yesterday. About Tiberiu Stoian."

"Yes Mr Mackay."

"You asked me to confirm that Mr Stoian had worked for Radio Romania and I did."

"Yes, Mr Mackay."

"I need to know if Mr Stoian also mentioned any other employer in Romania."

"I can't discuss details of the patient's case with you, Mr Mackay."

"Not even a friend who has asked me to vouch for him?" I just wanted Dr Baruch to talk.

"I'm sorry Mr Mackay. All I can tell you is that Mr Tiberiu Stoian was brought to our facility for his own safe-keeping after he arrived At London's Heathrow Airport a couple of days ago. More than that I am not able to divulge."

But now I had what I wanted. Dr Baruch spoke perfect English but with an accent, probably German. Baruch was a Jewish name. Judging from the high quality of his English, he'd been in Britain a long time. In his position he must be familiar with the procedures used by the Home Office and the British Security Services to screen arrivals seeking political asylum.

I was going to attempt something and I expected that this German-Jewish doctor would fully understand and cooperate to the extent needed.

"Dr Baruch, I have information about Mr Stoian that would be important to the Home Office and I need to know if he himself has shared that knowledge with them."

"As I've told you, Mr Mackay, I cannot divulge details about a patient's case with you. I'm sorry."

"I understand Dr Baruch. What if I divulge what I know and you simply say

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‘Yes’ if he has given the information to the Home Office?”

There was a silence on the other end of the line and then, “I can do that, Mr Mackay.”

“Was Mr Stoian interviewed in depth by the British Security Services?”

“Yes.”

“Have you read the transcript?”

“Yes.”

Does it include the information that he worked for State Security in Bucharest?”

“Yes.”

“Thank you Dr Baruch, that’s all I needed to know.”

“I understand, Mr Mackay. You can rest assured.” We hung up. Dr. Baruch had understood my concern.

Now my mind was at rest. Had Tibi not shared that information he would have had an ulterior motive of some kind for withholding it and I would have had to tell the Home Office what I knew. That would not have boded well for Tibi and I had no desire to hurt him.

I told Pearl about the conversation and she was relieved.

“Why not invite him here when he gets out?” she said, “We have an extra room.” Usually the extra bedroom was rented out but at that moment it was free.

The following day I called Dr Baruch again at St. Bernard’s, told him about the invitation. Dr Baruch said he thought it was a very good idea. Spending time in a family with friends would be good for Tibi once he was released. He promised that Tibi would call when the time was right.

And so when Tibi was granted asylum in the UK and released from St Bernard’s, he called me and accepted Pearl’s invitation. He arrived by train a day or two later.

He spent several days with us. He couldn’t stay longer because he’d been given accommodation in a hostel in London and was only allowed to leave the room vacant for three or four days at a time.

Tibi was the perfect guest in every way. On arrival, he presented Pearl with a

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bouquet of flowers sealing his welcome. He was affable, a good conversationalist, entertaining and amusing. Given his experience, he was convinced that BBC World Service broadcasting in Romanian would employ him.

Both my mother and I tried to introduce him to the realities of life in Britain. Romanians generally had an exaggerated idea of both the standards of living in the West and were overly optimistic about the opportunities for work and advancement. Many Romanians I had met in Bucharest were convinced that the system they worked under was limiting their natural talents and holding their careers back. They were certain that given the chance to work in 'the West', the fetters would be removed and they would prosper, be free to reach their potential and rise to the level they were convinced they deserved.

I explained my situation to him honestly and openly. The semi-detached house that we lived in and on which I made monthly mortgage payments and would continue to make payments for the next 28 years according to the agreement I'd signed with the bank who lent me the money for the purchase. My brother-in-law had generously lent me the money for the down-payment and I had already paid that back. I had begun my employment with the University of Newcastle upon Tyne as a lecturer with a salary of £2,045 a year. After taxes and deductions I had about £100 a month to cover all costs for myself and Pearl – housing, heating, clothing, food, transportation and leisure. We used public transport as did most of my colleagues at the University. Cars were expensive to buy, to insure, to run and to maintain and at that point in my career I simply could not afford one.

While we shared our reality with Tibi, he shared his experiences with us, since arriving in the UK and made us laugh long and loud.

He had been sent to the UK by his Romanian employer for a month, he told us, to gain additional expertise which would benefit his work performance. He had bought a bottle of whisky at the duty-free shop in Otopeni before boarding his BAC One Eleven airliner made in Britain and purchased by TAROM in 1968. I'd had dinner several times at the British Consul's apartment with the British pilots who trained the Romanian pilots to fly these new short-haul jet aircraft.

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When he arrived in Heathrow Airport and disembarked, he destroyed his Romanian passport and presented himself at Immigration Control with the announcement, "I am free!" The Immigration official politely asked him for his passport.

"You don't understand," said Tibi, "I've defected. I want political asylum." The Immigration agent insisted on seeing his passport.

Tibi had become outraged. He had expected to be welcomed with open arms. He'd planned his 'escape' for years and now here was this uniformed idiot insisting he present his passport.

"You must present your passport to me first, Sir, then we will see what happens," insisted the patient officer.

Tibi pulled the bottle of whisky out of his hand baggage, "You will see stars, that's what going to happen if I give you a crack on the skull with this bottle of whisky!"

Tibi had been immediately overpowered by two policemen and led away in handcuffs. He had continued to rant and rave. An ambulance was called and he found himself a guest of the Home Office in a secure psychiatric unit in St Bernard's. Fortunately, no charges were brought against him, he was granted asylum, released and provided with accommodation, meals and some money.

Tibi made his arrival in the UK sound amusing but he was fortunate to have come out of it so well.

Tibi left and returned to his hostel in London secretly believing, I think, that the North of England was a depressed area and he would do much better, certainly much better than I was doing, in the great metropolis of London with his superior skills, insight and capacities.

We spoke on the phone from time to time. He was not immediately offered employment by the BBC. He simply could not understand why. It had to be some form of discrimination. He would go to work for the CIA-funded Radio Free Europe in Berlin. The Americans understood better than the British how to conduct the war of ideas, undermine communism in the satellite counties of the Soviet Union and bring

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it down. He left Britain aggrieved, feeling that he had been wronged and short-changed after all the efforts he had made. We lost touch. I heard that he had been employed by Radio Free Europe but had later returned to London to take up a position with the BBC Romanian section.

Tibi, like so many well-educated and highly-capable Romanians had to learn and come to terms with the lessons—often unanticipated, difficult to master, and occasionally discouraging—that the West, with all its advantages and its imperfections had to teach.

### **Suspicion reappears**

There were no immediate repercussions from my unfortunate ‘debriefing’ in Petty France, nor the following year while I studied in Edinburgh, 1969 to 1970 nor the 4 years after that while I taught at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1970 to 1974, nor the two years after that 1974 to 1976 while I was teaching at the national Autonomous University of Mexico and undertaking a project in Quintana Roo.

The first fallout was in 1978. I was working at Concordia University in Montreal, in the Province of Quebec, and living on a farm in Glengarry County, Ontario, travelling to and fro every day by train. One afternoon I drove home from the Alexandria railway station to find a truck parked by the farmhouse. Two men were examining the interior of an old drive-in shed where I kept my tractor. One of them walked, unhurried and confident, towards my car to engage me while the other appeared his search for something high up among the rafters.

“We’re interested in buying the farm,” said the one who approached me. I stood at 5’7” and weighed 150 lbs. Each of these men was over 6’ and carried more than 200 lbs of bone and muscle.

“The farm’s not for sale.”

“Oh? We were told it was.” I knew he was lying. His partner completed his search and joined us. Both were dressed as all farmers dressed in Glengarry – in green workpants and green shirts and wore tall, unlaced Kodiak boots. They were different

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from real farmers in that their clothes and their boots were new. They exuded confidence. *'Army or police'*, I reckoned. *'What could they want with me or my farm?'*

They were officers in the Security Service branch of the RCMP, the body authorised to undertake counterintelligence operations in Canada. I was suspect. All this, they told me, later.

For a period of two or three years, they called me or simply appeared at irregular intervals and quizzed me about my political views and my friends in Canada, Mexico and in Romania. I took all my Romanian transparencies to their headquarters in Ottawa and we projected them, one by one. They were disappointed that few of the slides showed people.

But that's an entirely different story!

The end.

Lima, Peru 11 March 2016



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### About the author



After leaving Romania, Ronald Mackay went on to pursue 'problem-solving' as a career. Until the mid '90s, using his training as an applied linguist, he paved the way for a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, addressed issues in First Nations and Inuit education in several Canadian provinces including the Northwest Territories and the Arctic, helped mend a dysfunctional university department in Concordia University, Montreal, and held visiting posts in Singapore, Edinburgh and Toronto. From the end of the 90's, using his expertise in planning, monitoring and evaluation, a field in which he wrote his doctorate, Ronald worked internationally to improve the management of agricultural research and development. In 2012 he wrote his last technical evaluation report and turned to writing for the theatre. Ronald and his wife Viviana, live in the house they built in 2009 on the shores of Rice Lake near Peterborough, Ontario.

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