ceited, she needed all of these qualities for her survival."[39] Their brother Shiva noted that she had rigid ideas about history: "my mother has always found it hard to forgive the Muslims for their numerous invasions of India and for forcing the partition of the subcontinent."[40]

In his own presentation of the past, Vido would concentrate subsequently on the virtues of his father, with the result that Ma's voice can be hard to hear. An academic who interviewed her in 1988 for a study of Trinidadian Indian women noted: "Her answers are always alert, sometimes aggressively so; she is a confident and self-assured woman." When asked why her mother had sent her daughters to school at a time when other Indian women were illiterate, Ma replied, "Don't ask me that question again. She decided to educate them and I think she was very correct in educating them." To an enquiry about her non-Indian neighbours, she answered: "Don't ask me anything about other people, ask me nothing about other people . . . my husband can't come home and see me gossiping on the street . . . You see a woman has a place in this world and when she abuse that place, she has lost the thing they call womanhood because she is no more that woman."[41] Ma's bright, certain, robust, slightly mocking tone of voice would be inherited by Vido; without the impetus of Ma and her family, his later achievements would have been impossible.

CHAPTER THREE

"Like Oliver Twist in the Workhouse"

THE NEAR HALF-MILLION PEOPLE of Trinidad were given three scholarships each year to a university in Great Britain. Innumerable children would compete for the chance to have a free education overseas, and to change their own and their family's future. In a colonial society where the opportunities for advancement were so restricted, island scholarships, like places in the better cricket teams, were fought over fiercely. Success marked you as a person of intellectual ability, part of a new group that was being groomed for the day when Trinidad gained self-government.[1] Jean-Paul Sartre put it this way: "The European elite undertook to manufacture a native elite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of western culture, they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, whitewashed."[2] In 1938, Ma's younger brother Rudranath won an island scholarship to study medicine, an achievement that had the potential to shift the status of the Capildeo family from being big in Chaguanas to being big in Trinidad. He was one of the first Indian winners, defying expectations. Half a century earlier, the Governor of the newly united colony of Trinidad and Tobago had told a group of Indian schoolchildren: "Now all you children, all of you little boys and girls can never hope, of course, can never hope to occupy any very high social position in life—it would be very foolish and over-ambitious on your part to expect to do so."[3] With nationalism flourishing after strikes and riots the previous year in the oilfields of Fyzabad, led by the splendidly named Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler, a Grenadian small-church preacher, the prospect of

constitutional reform was imminent. Butler's "British Empire Citizens and Workers Home Rule Party"—backed by the trade-union leader Adrian Cola Rienzi—was attracting popular support.

In order to give her son Rudranath a home near his school while he was studying for the scholarship, Nanie had bought a house, 17 Luis Street, in the Port of Spain suburb of Woodbrook, a mixed-race area distinct from St. James, the down-at-heel quarter known as "coolie town" which was occupied mainly by people of south Indian descent who had left Hinduism far behind. During the week, Nanie would stay in Port of Spain to look after Rudranath and make sure he did his school work. She bought other properties too, and needed a family member to administer them and collect the rents. This coincided with Seepersad's recovery from his breakdown, and his success in 1938 in regaining his job as a *Guardian* journalist. It was decided that the Naipaul family, now including a baby girl named Savi or Savitri, would move to Luis Street. With Trinidad in a state of unrest and the Second World War looming, Ma, Pa and the children had a moment of respite. The family took the steam train from the station at Chaguanas for the slow twenty-mile journey to Port of Spain, and began afresh.

Pa's confidence revived, and he began to write stories for his own entertainment. George John, a young black sports reporter on the *Guardian*, found Seepersad to be "a very quiet man who didn't mix very much. He was basically a rural Indian, not a town Indian. He came from the sugar belt. Naipaul would not go drinking with other journalists." Although there were now two other Indians working on the paper, their community was still associated by the citizens of Port of Spain with low status activities such as street-vending, carrying head-loads and collecting garbage. Indians were looked down on. In all professions, according to John, "There was a definite bias in favour of the lighter-skinned. Not only in newspapers. It was like that in the civil service, in the higher ranks of the police. You entered the banks and all the people you saw, the tellers and so on, were white girls or white men."[4] "White" or "lighter-skinned" in this context in Trinidad in the 1940s might mean British expatriate, Portuguese, "French creole" (someone of European appearance, usually descended from plantation owners), "Spanish" (mixed ethnic descent with fair skin and "good"—meaning straight—hair) or "Red" (African features with light skin and hair). The gradation was strict and instinctive, part of a way of thinking that was instilled early in this ethnically diverse colonial setting, although people might try to "pass" as something they were not. There was even a Bajan rhyme about skin shades: "white, fusty, dusty, musty, tea, coffee, cocoa, black, dark black."

In Luis Street, Vido came to know and appreciate the qualities of his father. These were, in retrospect, idyllic days for him. Woodbrook had been built on an old sugar estate near the harbour owned by the makers of Angostura Bitters, the Siegert family, with its streets laid out on a grid and named after members of the family such as Alberto, Luis and Ana. For the first time, Vido encountered electric lights, pavements and running water. The capital had cinemas, rum shops and cricket pitches, and on Sunday afternoons the police band would play for the crowds near the Queen's Park Savannah. The Naipaul family appeared to have a home of their own. The house was a three-bedroomed wooden building raised on pillars, with a verandah, a yard and an outdoor latrine. A Negro carpenter lived in the "servant room" in the yard; when Vido asked him one day what he was making, he replied "the thing without a name."[5] At the end of the road was the harbour and the reclaimed area of land known as Docksite. Vido's uncle Rudranath, preparing for his departure for England, had one bedroom, and another was rented to a mulatto couple, Mr. and Mrs. Guy, who were friendly to Vido. The children usually slept out on the verandah. For Vido, "This whole thing unrolled every day in front of my eyes: the life of the street."[6] It would give him the material for his first book, *Miguel Street*.

For a term, he went to Woodbrook Canadian Mission School, where his teacher was Mr. Dairy. Vido liked "the writing and the paper and the pencils and shaping letters. It was at Mr. Dairy's school that I began to make the letter J, the capital J, endless curls in my J, you know, out of pleasure indeed in the shape of letters. And I took this one day and showed it to my father, and he told me, 'No, no, too many curls.' So I lost that little bit of style." In 1939 he joined his cousin Boysie at Tranquillity, which had a strong academic reputation. Former students included the pan-African theorist George Padmore and the sprinter McDonald Bailey, who would be the first black athlete to win an Olympic medal for Britain. At Tranquillity Boys' Intermediate School, Vido made friends across cultures, despite Nanie's racial injunctions: Winston A. G. Springer, known as WAGS; Kenneth Cazabon, related to the painter Michel Jean Cazabon; and Yip Young, a "very bright and delicate boy who was half-Negro and half-Chinese."[7] He would swap his morning snack with a Negro boy named Tanis. "He was excited by the food I brought to school. I was a ready swapper. I gave Tanis my stuff. There would have been curried potatoes, in a little tiffin carrier. He gave me a kind of parlour cake, with coconut inside. I have a clear memory of that."[8]

In the middle of the day, Tranquillity children walked home for lunch. Kamla went to the girls' branch of the school. One day Vido stopped to read

a street sign, Cipriani Boulevard. "Cipriani Boul Edward," he said, "and a Negro man there, he was very amused and he told me how to pronounce it. Big word and I'm quite young." Most of the pupils and all the teachers were black or mixed, and it was a new experience for Vido to be surrounded by many people who came from a different culture. He stood out: "I was an object of great curiosity to people. I was very small, and they couldn't have been nicer. There were few Indians, almost no Indians in the school. It was the first time we were coming out [of the countryside]. If I had gone to a rough place, it might have been different. I have to record how nice people were to me, as an unprotected little boy."[9] He was now called Vidia on paper, a shorter and more modern version of Vidyadhar, and he was placed second out of thirty-six in the class at the end of his first term. His teacher Mr. Romilly noted in the school report that he was "an intelligent pupil."[10] At Tranquillity he was given a solid grounding in grammar, spelling, vocabulary, arithmetic and geography, and on Empire Day the children all sang "God Save the King" and "Land of Hope and Glory," including the immortal line "Britons never, never, never shall be slaves."[11]

At home, Vido made friends with Mr. Guy, the lodger, who "made the world very, very exciting. I was six or seven. He must have had some talent for getting on with children." One day the two of them were standing on the verandah at 17 Luis Street when a decrepit Indian man came past pushing a handcart packed with steaming ice, selling ice lollies or palettes at a cent each. He was calling out "Palette! Palette!" Vido wanted to run out and buy an ice lolly. But: "Mr. Guy said to me, 'No. He will bring it to you.' " To Vido, this was no simple message: "It was an important kind of instruction to me, meaning, once you're spending money, you have certain rights. It was a training in the ways of the world—you don't run after that barefoot man in the street; he must come to you. I remember it to this day."[12]

The idyll could not last. In 1940, Seepersad and Droapatie were told by Nanie that they would be moving to a new family commune at a place called Petit Valley.

COOL AND SHADY, with savannah and plenty of snakes, Petit Valley was unfamiliar land, an estate of three hundred acres to the north of Port of Spain. An old colonial house built by one of Trinidad's respected "high brown" families, the Maillards, stood on a verdant, forested hillside. Around it were oranges, shaddocks (a citrus fruit, like a grapefruit), cacao trees, nutmeg, zabocas (avocado pears), tangerines and mangoes. The people in the village near the house were "panyol" or "cocoa panyol"—coming from the word *Español,* or Spanish, meaning they were of mixed ethnicity, although probably their ancestors would have come from Venezuela. The local patois had many French words, from the days when the owners of the cocoa estates had brought slaves from neighbouring islands. The long-established overseer at Petit Valley was called Metti, from the French *métis,* meaning half-caste, a name Vido would use when he came to write *A Bend in the River.* The Mausis, Mausas and cousins all moved there, although some would travel back and forth to Port of Spain or to Chaguanas, where Nanie remained in the Lion House. Her elder son, Simbhoonath, now aged twenty-six and studying to be a lawyer in the town of San Fernando, was the guiding force behind the project. The family would develop the land at Petit Valley. When Vido heard about the move, he was distraught: "I think I must have made a great scene about it, and my grandmother began to talk to me. I don't know why she took the care. She told me how beautiful it was, how lovely the house was, how lovely the big trees were—so I was primed to love these things."[13]

Coming from the cane fields and rough dwellings of Chaguanas, the Capildeo family led by Simbhoo had little idea what to do with their new domain, which had been sold to them cheap by the Maillards because it was unprofitable. To the dismay of people in the local village, the area around the house became squalid, in its beautiful setting. "They did a kind of peasant agriculture," said Vido later, "burning down the hillsides and planting corn, maize and peas. They pillaged the oranges from the orange trees, took the avacadoes. They planted nothing. They were camping . . . It was all so improvised, all so dreadful. We were given a very low idea of human needs. I think without anybody knowing, this was coming from Mother India, from a beaten-down, broken-down people."[14] Trees were uprooted and the house reworked. A big, unfamiliar brick oven was taken apart, and the area beside it roofed over in corrugated iron and tree branches. The verandah was used to store crops and old bread, which Nanie would buy in bulk from a baker in Port of Spain. The indoor water closet with its European cistern and chain was dismantled, and an outdoor latrine built in the woods, to which a sodden path was soon worn. "I think the WC offended the Hindu sense of cleanliness and so it was destroyed. It became a room where people sewed . . . I am talking about people who were close to immemorial peasantry."[15] An ornamental cherry tree by the tennis court on the side of the

main drive was turned into logs. "There was no reason to chop it down. It was just something to do, something to chop down. Where we come from ancestrally, there are no trees—they think spirits hide in trees."[16] While the children watched in excitement, Uncle Simbhoo supervised the destruction of the electricity generator, the leaves of lead being melted in a large pot and tipped into Ovaltine tins; pipes were put between the tins and the molten metal hardened, creating dumb-bells for the Mausas to use for exercise. "I think they played with them for a while and then forgot them."[17] The house was lit by oil lamps now, like the Lion House. Vido's retrospective cynicism was matched by the memory of Margaret Maillard, the granddaughter of the vendor, who visited. "It was a roomy house. The Capildeos were very gracious to us when we came but we were horrified by the way they had partitioned it."[18]

Ma and Pa were given a space in the servants' quarters to the back of the house, overlooking the hillside. Seepersad hated being part of the extended family again, and took to demanding meals in his bedroom. There were frequent, angry disputes with his brothers-in-law. Vidia noted later that his father avoided touching the ground at Petit Valley, and linked it mentally with his supposed Brahminism. "I don't think my father ever let his foot touch the ground. He couldn't go to have a shower barefoot. He always had to wear wooden sandals. He never let his foot touch the ground."[19] The children had little contact with their uncles, aunts or cousins on the Naipaul side of the family. Ma cooked, cleaned, washed and looked after the five of them with the occasional help of her sisters. Vido took his mother's care and support as his right, in the manner of a boy in a Hindu joint family. In Kamla's opinion, "Our vanity, our conceit, our resilience, our tenacity, our strength—these things we got from our mother. Words, the sound of words, our love of books, our sense of humour, our passion, our occasionally neurotic behaviour, our physical frailties—these things we got from our father."[20] Vido's own view in later life was: "My mother would cry because she thought my father was being awkward. Her loyalties were really to her clan, her sisters. She was part of the mess, you know." When pressed, he said, "I adored her as a child. She was a beautiful lady. Carried herself very well . . . I think my father was a weak man, a suffering man who could only work when people loved him. My mother was very tough and strong. I think I got my strength from her."[21]

As the atmosphere at Petit Valley worsened, Pa built a plain, pretty timber house for himself in the forest, standing on stilts. When he burned heaps

of leaves and wood that he had cleared, a fire began and lingered in the undergrowth. At night it flared up, as Kamla remembered:

> Vidia and I were awakened and told to run to the big house to get help. There was a forest fire at the back of the house and it was spreading. A patch of forest separated us from the big house. In the daytime it was no problem to run through it, following a path we naturally made going from one house to the other. But it was night and it was dark. Vidia and I were terrified of the fire, of the dark and of the forest on either side of the lonely road. Stories of forest spirits became very real in that setting, of La Diablesse, the enchantress with the cloven hoof who led men astray, of Soucouyants, who were women who could turn themselves into balls of fire [and become vampires]. Holding each other's hands, Vidia and I took the road. I was calling upon the name of Rama, the only name that came to me at that time and I was encouraging Vidia to do the same as a means of keeping these evil forest creatures at bay. Once aroused the family came immediately to our assistance.[22]

They beat down the flames with branches, and Pa was left without a house again.

The cousins—boys and girls of all ages—were not encouraged to associate with people who lived nearby, such as the mulatto family who lived by the road and worked on the estate, or the Indian Muslim family who kept a parlour and had a pretty daughter. There were no friends, only family. Although the status of the Naipaul children was complicated by Pa's chronic disputes, they were in a stronger position than some of their cousins, such as the children of the widowed Tara Mausi, whose husband, Ramjattan, had been gored to death by a bull. Tara's daughter Phoola remembered being entirely dependent on the goodwill of Nanie and Simbhoo. "We had to respect the aunts and uncles, even when they were wrong. The aunts were smart people. On reflection, I would say anyone who had a father had more security than us."[23] More unfortunate still were the children of the oldest Mausi, Rajdaye. Her husband, Aknath, had been the overseer on the family sugar-cane plantations in Chaguanas and Nanie's enforcer in many of her business ventures. When Rajdaye died, there was a feud which led to Aknath Mausa being purged. His children became virtual orphans, living in a shack in Petit Valley. One of them, Jai, remembered: "We were 200 yards

from the main house. I was twelve, my brothers were nine and six. I had to cook for them and look after them. My grandmother wouldn't allow my father's name to be spoken. I feel we were really, really badly treated. There was no compassion from her."[24]

The children made their own entertainment, outdoors and indoors. Each morning each child would take the crushed end of a fresh stick to use as a toothbrush, then split it and use it as a tongue-scraper. They husked corn and harvested coffee, cocoa, oranges and bananas for market. One day they put on a play of the trial scene from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in the drawing room, and Vido was struck by the beauty of his female cousins. In later years, he "found it very hard to think of making love to an Indian girl. It had an incestuous sense to it." A little before this he had his first sexual experience, when he was seduced by his cousin Boysie. The encounter was unwanted. As he put it: "I was myself subjected to some sexual abuse by an older cousin. I was corrupted, I was assaulted. I was about six or seven. It was done in a sly, terrible way and it gave me a hatred, a detestation of this homosexual thing. I never went through a period of liking the same sex."[25] Molestation continued intermittently over the next two or three years, usually in the area where the boys slept. Vidia never mentioned it to anyone, at the time or later. He insisted he was never a willing participant, although his denial is not wholly convincing given the similarity in age of the two boys. He feared the idea that he was a participant in sexual experimentation between male cousins. "It was an outrage, but it was not a defining moment. I was very young. This thing was over before I was ten. I was always coerced. Of course he was ashamed too later. It happened to other cousins. I think it is part of Indian extended family life, which is an abomination in some ways, a can of worms . . . After an assault one is very ashamed—and then you realize it happens to almost everybody. All children are abused. All girls are molested at some stage. It is almost like a rite of passage."[26] The Mausis were alert to any hint of burgeoning sexuality between male and female cousins. "If we sat boy and girl in a hammock together, it was a grievous thing. An aunt would come and say, 'What are you doing there?' " Savi remembered.[27]

Vido spent much of his time at Petit Valley with Pa, who would read to him and sometimes to the other children: extracts from *Julius Caesar*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Three Men in a Boat*, Charles Kingsley's retelling of the Perseus myth in *The Heroes*, and later from Gandhi's *Autobiography*, Conrad's *The Lagoon*, Maupassant's *The Necklace* and Maugham's *Cakes and Ale*. Although such authors described unfamiliar worlds, the stories lingered: "I still remember *Cakes and Ale* begins with the narrator going back to his lodgings, and there is a message from his landlady Mrs. Fellows saying Mr. Kear rang up twice. 'He says it's important.' And Maugham observes in the Maugham-like way, which stays with me to this day, 'I know that when people say things are important, it doesn't mean it is important to you; it's important to them.' So one was being trained early in this way. The effect was to introduce me to the romantic idea of this world outside, and to the romantic idea of writing."[28] Representations of the West Indies were to be found mainly in books by white visitors, like Alec Waugh writing of indolent bellboys and "the inevitable negroes" in *The Coloured Countries*, or Edmund Whitman using chapter titles like "Banana Escapades" and "Jamaica Ginger Snaps" in *Those Wild West Indies*.[29]

Pa and Vido positioned themselves in an ordered fantasy world derived from European literature, far from the noise, squalor and their own powerlessness in Petit Valley. At school, Vido might read an extract from *Martin Chuzzlewit* in his *New Royal Reader*, containing place names that would one day become familiar: "The coach was none of your steady-going, yokel coaches . . . It cared no more for Salisbury than if it had been a hamlet. It rattled noisily through the best streets, defied the cathedral, took the worst corners sharpest . . ."[30] Aspiration and ambition became an alternative to daily life in Petit Valley. "I suffered like hell in this place," Vido said later. "It has given me all kinds of things [for my writing]: my understanding of the ease with which civilizations can be destroyed. When I was in Africa [in 1975] and saw in the Congo the ruins of Belgian cities, when I saw the same thing in Rwanda in 1966, I knew about people camping in houses and not knowing what to do with the things, just stripping it apart."[31] At Petit Valley, Vido began to keep a diary, written in pencil in a *Guardian* reporter's notebook. He wrote about the death of his paternal grandmother and Pa's distress, but after a while the diary "became very affected and melodramatic. I was melancholic, and I had a slight wallow, as a child. I remember writing, 'I feel like Oliver Twist in the workhouse.' I knew it wasn't true, but I had no other means of expressing what I felt."[32]

At Christmas 1941, the local school in the village at Petit Valley held a concert. The family walked through the tropical night to the school, which was full of lights and people singing songs. Vido was excited by the glamour of the occasion. "One of the songs had a little Negro boy, nattily dressed in a suit. Clearly his parents had dressed him up for this occasion. Whether he

did a little dance or whether he just came out dressed in this way, he looked so cute in that suit. But he sang, 'Oh, I'm a happy little nigger.' It was the most successful number of the evening. I remember people laughing till they almost cried with pleasure at the little boy. 'Oh, I'm a happy little nigger and my name is John.' The chorus was, 'I can sleep on a cotton bale or roost up a tree, tell you what it is boys, nothing hurts me.' I think it goes: 'I like cake, I like honey, I'm not the boy to refuse any money. Once I went a courting with my little black sioux'—or it might be, 'my saucy black sioux'—'her brother Tom insulted me and peppered me too.' It was only years later that I understood what we'd heard. Clearly it's written by an American white man, out of a kind of love for the little black boy, but within this love is complete contempt."[33] The song would stick in Vido's formidable memory, to be pondered over subsequent years, and used to show the way in which culture and meaning change in a different historical setting: the American south, a "panyol" village in colonial Trinidad, the independent Caribbean. It resurfaced in 1967 in *The Mimic Men,* where Browne is humiliated to have been a "singer of coon songs" as a child, and indirectly in *A Way in the World* in 1994, where Lebrun tells a similar story and concludes, " 'Every educated black man is eaten away quietly by a memory like that.' "[34] This was how V. S. Naipaul's fiction would work: a moment would be stored, remembered, examined and retold through the decades.

At weekends, Simbhoo would arrive and take command of the family. Each Sunday evening, he gathered the children and taught them Hindu mantras, or gave a talk on Indian civilization and the epics. They had to learn the Hindi alphabet and some vocabulary, but never learned how to connect the words and speak the language. Later, as "Pandit Simbhoonath Capildeo," he would self-publish *100 Questions and Answers on the Hindu Religion,* a book that his nephew Vido would proceed to satirize in *The Mystic Masseur.*[35] He expected deference from his nephews and nieces, and his brothers-in-law were always aware that he held the purse strings. According to Brahm, "Power corrupts—and it was an accepted fact in the family that Rudranath and Simbhoonath were the gods, so [as children] you had to bow down to them and literally put your hand down to their feet, so they could bless you. Simbhoo was given full rein to do anything and everything he wished to do. From my point of view, he was a tyrant. Our grandmother would always defer to him, to both her sons."[36]

For Vido, Kamla and their cousins of a similar age, travelling the five miles to and from school each day was a complicated manoeuvre. Like her

brother, Kamla worked hard and was an academic succcess at Tranquillity. Sometimes they would take the Sam Super Service bus, at other times they would travel in an old Ford motor car with running boards which Nanie had bought, but it broke down and nobody knew how to repair it. Pa would cycle to work at the *Guardian,* and sometimes stay in Port of Spain overnight. When the Americans came to Trinidad in 1941 and built the Churchill–Roosevelt Highway and a deep-water naval base at Chaguaramas (under the Lend-Lease agreement, which exchanged British empire bases for American ships) an uncle bought a truck to rent. It had to be at the new base that was being built at Docksite by six o'clock each morning. The truck was driven by Sahadeo Mausa, known as Power Mausa by the children because of his interest in mechanics, who would drop them at Luis Street with an aunt to wait for school to start each day. He continued to assault his son Brahm. "He would punish me with strapping, slapping, depriving me of food, he would hit me with whatever was at hand. My father was mentally and emotionally unstable."[37] Vido remembered this period as a time of unhappiness and hunger. He started to get asthma, gasping for missing breath, sucking in air, wheezing his way through the long, hot nights. Often, there would be no proper food available, and he would go to school or to bed on an empty stomach. In Kamla's view, this was the result of wartime food shortages rather than neglect, and she thought Vido's claim of being starved was "a ridiculous memory, it is a damn stupid memory."[38]

Full-bellied or hungry, he kept up his studies at Tranquillity, encouraged by Nanie, who would appear in Petit Valley from time to time for an inspection, usually accompanied by her black servant Miss Blackie. When classes ended, Vido would remain behind for extra tuition with a teacher from the school. In 1942, although ranked fifth in a class of forty-five, he won an exhibition to his Uncle Rudranath's old school, Queen's Royal College, where the government now paid his fees and gave an annual grant for the cost of books.[39] Although physically weaker than his contemporaries, he was marked out as an achiever, one of twenty children across the island who had won an exhibition. "He was brilliant," said his cousin Jai, a view shared by Brahm: "Every day for school we had to learn twenty Latin words. So we'd come from school and study, and after five, ten minutes he would say, test me and everything was bang on. Amazing. He said to me at Petit Valley he would like to become a writer."[40] Vido's own view was that his cousins had been told to revere academic success, "I suppose because they respected my brightness. I was always treated with regard. And I could make jokes. Very

good jokes too."[41] He never felt completely part of the world of his cousins. "There was a distant relation who came to stay with us in order to go to school, an elegant boy, and he was mocked and mocked. They told terrible stories about his personal habits, eating the scabs of his sores. I was horrified. Reason told me it was wrong. I couldn't run with them."[42]

In the vacation, Pa would take Vido to Tunapuna to stay with his old mentor Sookdeo Misir, now a rich man from his Arima Bus Company. Vido liked the atmosphere at Sookdeo's more wealthy household, and the food that came from its kitchen. A cousin there had a less affectionate memory of the precocious scholar. Sookdeo's grandson Romesh recollected Vidia, aged about ten, lording it over the other children: "Instead of joining us playing cricket, he would stay reading. He would wait until my grandfather came home from the estate, and would sit there on the back porch and read newspapers very impressively. He was able to pronounce and understand every word in the newspaper. The old man was very enamoured with him because of his brilliance." Sookdeo was himself uneducated. "Of course we were pitted against Vidia by our grandfather saying, 'See what you all are doing, playing football and cricket. Why don't you learn to read and write properly, like Vidia?' "[43] Margaret Maillard, who went to school with Kamla and would marry another future Nobel laureate, Derek Walcott, remembered his academic talent. "We knew he was bright. He had to do a French exam, and he learnt in full the answer for a question—in French."[44]

In 1943, Seepersad could stand it no longer at Petit Valley and the Naipaul family moved in desperation to 17 Luis Street. Once again, Pa was relying on Nanie's network of support, even while he railed against it. Over the next year they were joined by more family members, and the little house became crowded. Each branch of the extended family used its own kerosene stove to cook. For Vido, school seemed to be an alternative world where he could find a footing. Queen's Royal College, or QRC, had been set up in 1859 by the colonial government to counter "French" influence on the island. It was a substantial late-Victorian colonial building done in multicoloured stone and fringed by palm trees, located on the edge of the Queen's Park Savannah by the Anglican bishop's residence. QRC was modelled on an English boys' public school, and offered a high standard of education. It was rivalled by St. Mary's or the College of the Immaculate Conception, which was run by Roman Catholic priests. No other Caribbean island had the same rivalry between two schools of such academic excellence.[45] Like Tranquillity, QRC had few Indian pupils, and they were mainly Christian or Muslim.

Although Vido was brought up like many Hindus to be aware of his difference from Muslims, there was no obvious communal divide in Trinidad. Watching newsreels of events in India at the cinema, he felt they were engaged in a common struggle: "I thought of Muslims as being part of us, one people. Some Indian Muslims went to school with me. I never thought about it . . . We were fed Indian nationalism by people [such as Simbhoo] who were doing nothing about it in real life—imagine us as village bigshots. There was a man called Chandra Bahadur Mathura, who ran a wretched little rag of a magazine called *The Indian*. We were schooled in it: we knew about Gandhi, we knew about Nehru, we knew about Azad [the Muslim president of the Indian National Congress]. I remember seeing the newsreels of the Cripps Mission in 1942, Stafford Cripps talking to the Mahatma . . . I felt proud."[46]

At school, he made no deliberate effort to associate with other Indians. "My friends at QRC would have been black people," he recalled.[47] From Tranquillity came Yip Young and WAGS, who liked his humour. He made friends with Charles John, whose father was a Woodbrook policeman, and William Demas, a tall, gangly, flat-nosed black boy who got free textbooks because his father was a DPO, or deceased public officer. The boys called each other by their surnames, in British style. Each morning Naipaul would walk to school early and run home to Luis Street for lunch, accompanied to the end of the road by Charles John. He never brought friends home, preferring to keep the two worlds separate. "It seemed natural to have the friendship outside the house. You wouldn't want another boy to see your poverty," he said later.[48] To his sister Savi this seemed odd, particularly as Vido grew older: it appeared to represent a separation arising from social, ethnic or cultural embarrassment.

The school buildings at QRC were "very beautiful" to Vido. "I liked the ritual of the school life. I liked the formality. I liked the spaciousness of the grounds. Every form had its form master, and he did the roll every morning. For me, the school was immeasurably exciting."[49] He enjoyed classes in Latin, French, Spanish and Science. Still small, he was conscious that he was one of the youngest boys in his year. Since it was wartime, many of the British teachers had been called up to fight and replaced by West Indian teachers, making the staff as racially diverse as the pupils. The principal, Mr. Hamer, was English. It was a highly competitive school, with metropolitan values. Caribbean dialect was ironed out in favour of standard English, although the pupils remained bilingual—outside class, they might still say, "Higher monkey climb, more he show he ass," or, "Cutlass don't leave mark

in water," or "Play jackass, they go ride ya." At home, a boy might have a third language, deriving from his parents' country of origin: Portuguese, Bhojpuri, French, Cantonese. Selby Wooding, who was at QRC a couple of years ahead of Vido, considered it "an honour school. Boys could be depended on to be trustworthy. It is a world that has vanished now." The happy few were expected to behave like English schoolboys in the tropics. According to Wooding, "You had to wear the mask of the master in order to advance."[50]

When Seepersad Naipaul conceived of becoming a writer, in emulation of authors he admired like O. Henry and W. Somerset Maugham, he had few indigenous examples. Herbert de Lisser, a Jamaican, had published a couple of books in London during the First World War, and was followed in the 1930s by Alfred Mendes, a Trinidadian who placed two novels with Duckworth of London, one with a blurb by the writer Anthony Powell.[51] Jamaican-born Claude McKay had moved to America and achieved some literary prominence as part of the Harlem Renaissance, and W. Adolphe Roberts published detective novels in the U.S.A. Jean Rhys, a woman from a white creole family in Dominica, had published stories and novels. The nearest thing Pa had to a homegrown model was C.L.R. James, a former QRC student and one of its earliest black teachers. His realistic street novel *Minty Alley* was published by Secker & Warburg in 1936 after he sailed to London to try his luck in the imperial capital. James wrote a series of letters for the *Port of Spain Gazette* in the year of Vido's birth: they told how he liked the "intellectual ferment" of Bloomsbury, enjoyed reading "the delightful Miss Rebecca West in the *Daily Telegraph*" and claimed he had bested Edith Sitwell at an evening lecture with a clever reference to William Faulkner. Parodying the manner of the European visitors who wrote about the West Indies, James observed that since "the English native is so glum and dull and generally boorish in his manners . . . any man of colour who is not repulsive in appearance, has good manners, and is fairly intelligent, is a great favourite with the girls." The habitations of the English he found glum, owing to "the terrible habit of joining all the houses one to another for hundreds of yards."[52] Apart from these rare achievers, aspiring Caribbean writers like Pa faced self-publication, a haphazard activity that was taken less than seriously in this busy, verbal, storytelling culture.

Pa knew he had written good stories, and wanted to see them in print. He

needed money, and in 1943 turned to Simbhoo. "My father paid for the publication of his stories," Simbhoo's son Suren remembered. "Without that book, Seepersad would have been nothing."[53] A thousand copies of *Gurudeva and Other Indian Tales* were printed at the *Guardian* commercial printery, selling at $1 each. Pa brought home the proofs in his jacket pocket each evening. Not realizing the extent of his literary ambition, most people assumed this was a venture to make money. The publisher was listed as Trinidad Publications of 17 Luis Street, and an advertisement to the left of the title page asked for submissions of short stories, essays and novelettes. *Gurudeva* was like a booklet, seventy-two pages long with a soft blue cover showing the veiled head of an Indian woman above a rural scene: palm trees, the sun, an ajoupa hut, a Hindu temple and prayer flags high on bamboo poles, drawn by a local artist, Alfred Codallo.[54] Devotedly, Kamla and Vido stuck an errata slip to the flyleaf of each copy of their father's treasured book. Over time, the entire print-run sold. There were complaints from Indians who thought the book insulted their community.

In linked short stories, *Gurudeva* described the picaresque progress of its title character, a rogue who starts out as a juvenile husband, becomes a boastful but cowardly village stick-fighter, gets sent to jail, and ends up as a phoney pundit before sacking his wife, Ratni, in favour of Daisy, who bobs her hair and dumps him. Set in the 1930s and 1940s, it shows the Indian community in Trinidad cut adrift from its origins, coming to terms with a confusing, changing world. Seepersad based Gurudeva on his former brother-in-law Dinanath Tiwari, a gangster and pundit who had given the name "Vidyadhar" to his son, and who was now divorced from Ma's sister Ramdoolarie.

Gurudeva and Other Indian Tales might be dismissed as a literary curiosity, the work of a famous writer's father, but is a book of rare quality in its own right, an early text in the tradition of Indian diasporic fiction that was to develop vigorously later in the century. At its best, the writing has a classical quality. Here is Gurudeva collecting and preparing sticks for fighting:

> He would take himself into the high woods up in Chickland, three miles away, and cut the pouis that flourished abundantly on the high lands, and gathering them in a bundle, he would tote them home. Out in the yard he would make a blazing fire of dry leaves and bake the sticks in it and beat the barks off them on the ground. Then he would cut each stick into the desired length—from ground level to his lower

> ribs—and then with cutlass, with broken bottles with razor-sharp edges, and finally with sandpaper, he would impart to each stick the smoothness and uniformity of a ruler. Then he would go to the giant bamboo clump near by and bring forth a length of bamboo, stout and ripe and roomy in its hollowness, and an inch or two longer than his stick; and he would punch out all the compartments but the last, and order Ratni to make enough oil from coconuts and fill the bamboo vessel with it to the very top . . . Into the bamboo he would immerse as many of his precious sticks as it could hold. Then he would stand the vessel in a corner of his room and would not bring out the sticks from it till ten days or a fortnight when he would let off a whoop of joy. For the sticks would be found to have taken on a rich brown colour and almost twice the weight they had before their protracted bath.[55]

The prose is economical and illustrative, giving the reader a rapid, intimate glimpse of a completely alien world. Unlike other Caribbean writers of this period, Seepersad Naipaul wrote only about what he knew. Part of his achievement was to shift between rival forms of the English language in order to show his world. The narrative is in standard English. Gurudeva speaks in dialect. When Ratni asks why he needs quite so many sticks, "Gurudeva promptly silenced her with a slap. 'Mind you' own business,' he said. 'Don' put goatmouth.' "[56] Mr. Sohun the schoolmaster, who stands in for Seepersad in the narrative, speaks in educated English. He tells a baffled Gurudeva that Trinidad's pundits are more concerned with wearing sandalwood paste caste-marks than with learning how to read the scriptures: "Not caste, but the shadow of caste remains in the West Indies," he tells him. "Its only use here is to inflate some people's ego."[57] In the final scene, where Gurudeva is hauled before the village council, or *panchayat*, for taking a second wife, the proceedings are conducted in Hindi. When a man accuses him of beating Ratni, Gurudeva stands up and shouts, " 'Why you don' keep you' dam mouth shut? Why you 'terrupting?' Pundit Shivlochan raised both hands to heaven and said: 'No *Angrezi*, please! I do not understand *Angrezi*.' "[58] The shift in language and tone through these stories, written by a man who had taught himself English in early adulthood, is done effortlessly. The humour too is gently done. When fighters from a rival village arrive during Hosay, Gurudeva wraps a handkerchief around his jaw in a pugnacious manner and says he has toothache and a sprained wrist. Scowling in the direction of the enemy, he mutters, " 'It is lucky for them, though, that I get sick today. Odderwise I woulda show them.' "[59]

Some writers spend a lifetime finding a style. They experiment, reject their forebears, imitate their contemporaries. Reinventing language is part of their literary ambition. Samuel Beckett, born in the same year as Pa, squeezed words in order to see what they might do. Modernist writers, and the deconstructionists and critical theorists who came in their wake, believed language is necessarily fictive and that its rupture might lead to creation; sometimes, in the work say of Ezra Pound or Virginia Woolf, they were right. Apart from a slight shift around the time he wrote *The Mimic Men,* V. S. Naipaul never went through a process of linguistic experimentation. He would circumnavigate Modernism, even as he absorbed its implications. His writing style formed early. At the age of only eleven, he was given his own private epic by his father, and took it as his model; his later achievement came out of this restriction. When he was asked—fifty-seven years on—by the Indian website *Tehelka* for some rules for aspiring writers, V. S. Naipaul's response owed much to Pa's instruction:

1. Do not write long sentences. A sentence should not have more than 10 or 12 words.
2. Each sentence should make a clear statement. It should add to the statement that went before. A good paragraph is a series of clear, linked statements.
3. Do not use big words. If your computer tells you that your average word is more than five letters long, there is something wrong. The use of small words compels you to think about what you are writing. Even difficult ideas can be broken down into small words.
4. Never use words whose meaning you are not sure of. If you break this rule you should look for other work.
5. The beginner should avoid using adjectives, except those of colour, size and number. Use as few adverbs as possible.
6. Avoid the abstract. Always go for the concrete.
7. Every day, for six months at least, practise writing in this way. Small words; short, clear, concrete sentences. It may be awkward but it's training you in the use of language. It may even be getting rid of the bad language habits you picked up at the university. You may go beyond these rules after you have thoroughly understood and mastered them.[60]

Seepersad's idea of literature, conceived in colonial isolation and arrived at by rejecting the florid Victorian tomes that had impressed him early on, became Vido's. Language was to be plain; where it became beautiful, it was through simplicity. To describe the process by which Gurudeva might turn a length of bamboo into a vessel for soaking sticks, Pa took only ten words: "he would punch out all the compartments but the last."

Gurudeva and Other Indian Tales was the prequel to *A House for Mr. Biswas,* and gave V. S. Naipaul the picaresque character of Ganesh for his first published book, *The Mystic Masseur.* In old age, he believed his father's book was under-appreciated, particularly by Indian critics, despite his attempts to promote it: "No one in India knows that it's good writing. They think it's purely my sentimentality . . . They wouldn't be able to compare it with Tolstoy's later writing, *Master and Man.* They wouldn't be able to compare it with *The Odyssey* or Gogol. They would think this is just peasant writing about peasant details. The more I look at it, the more I [can] see the actual way I write—very pictorial, very fast, the details. I knew that I had been given a feeling for language, and it was very beautiful, and it was my own epic."[61]

CHAPTER FOUR

To the Mother Country

BY THE START of 1945 the liberation of Europe was under way and the Second World War was coming to an end. Many West Indians had volunteered to fight, including thousands in the Royal Air Force and the Royal Canadian Air Force. The presence of American and British servicemen in Trinidad had precipitated social adjustment. Films, gum and raised hemlines came to town. As peace loomed, so did political change; the British empire was bankrupt, and decolonization was being discussed freely. Elections to the Legislative Council were planned for the following year, the first to be based on a universal franchise; Simbhoo would run unsuccessfully as a United Front candidate in Caroni.[1] In V. S. Naipaul's novel *The Suffrage of Elvira,* Mrs. Baksh says, "Everybody just washing their foot and jumping in this democracy business. But I promising you, for all the sweet it begin sweet, it going to end damn sour."[2] Old conventions changed; where Droapatie and the Mausis wore clothes modelled on Indian fashions of centuries ago, they put their daughters in dresses. Some thought of trying to establish their own households outside the joint family. At the far end of Luis Street, a man named Tubal set up a brothel; when walking past, the cousins were instructed to cross the road and not look inside. Vido wrote later, "The American soldiers loved a fat back-street whore, the blacker the better; they packed them into their jeeps and raced from club to club, throwing their money about . . . Beside them the British soldiers were like foreigners . . . they spoke this strange English; they referred to themselves as 'blokes' . . . not knowing that in Trinidad a bloke was a term of abuse; their uniforms, their shorts in particular, were ugly."[3]

During the school term, the three-bedroomed house in Luis Street would be filled with children, sometimes more than two dozen staying

CHAPTER NINE

"Something Rich Like Chocolate"

FOR THE NEXT FOUR YEARS, Vidia Naipaul had an insecure billet as a stalwart of the BBC Colonial Service. It gave him an opportunity to find his feet as a writer, to widen and extend his talents and to feel an integral part of a circle of intelligent men, and a few women, of roughly his own age and background. Gone was the white world of Oxford University; he was again among people who reminded him of Port of Spain and QRC. Henry Swanzy left Vidia and his colleagues in no doubt that their material was real material. In their spare time, the *Caribbean Voices* "boys" would go to the George pub near the BBC, or chat in the freelances' room in the old Langham Hotel opposite Broadcasting House, a grand Victorian edifice with a literary heritage (Mark Twain stayed there, Oscar Wilde drank there, Sherlock Holmes sleuthed there). Vidia ate lunch in the BBC canteen, finishing with heavy English puddings topped with custard. A decade later he wrote in an Indian newspaper, "I worked mainly for various overseas services of the BBC, contributing to magazine programmes, doing tiny features about books, doing interviews and taking part in discussions. To hear oneself being introduced by an announcer with a well-known voice was to feel honoured, and also nervous." He believed the experience taught him how to interview successfully, by "lightly drawing out information."[1] In Frank Collymore's journal *Bim*, Vidia marvelled in retrospect at his own audacity in taking the job as a literary presenter: "For now I see I fitted into none of the accepted categories of critics. I was not a gentleman, to whom criticism meant a display of sensibility and polished prose: an accomplishment, like a knowledge of pictures and wines, which might grace one in society."[2]

The contributors, actors and presenters who worked on *Caribbean Voices* and other BBC shows came and went, month by month. They were older than the precocious Vidia Naipaul, and with the exception of the acculturated Sam Selvon, none was an East Indian West Indian. To Vidia, they seemed more experienced, adept and socially confident. George Lamming was born in Barbados, and had travelled to Britain in 1950 with Selvon and stayed in the same hostel. His influential book *In the Castle of My Skin* examined colonialism in the West Indies through the eyes of a growing child; Henry Swanzy thought Lamming had "one fatal lack, a sense of humour."[3] Errol John, brother of Pa's colleague George John, was an actor who wrote the play *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*. Edgar Mittelholzer was a Guianese novelist who produced books at speed ("It pleased him," Vidia wrote in *A Writer's People*, "that he was not too much darker than his publisher Fred Warburg; it was an unexpected way of judging a publisher").[4] Andrew Salkey, born in Panama and educated in Jamaica (he bears some resemblance to Percy in *Half a Life*), wrote folk stories in patois and was a lively and influential member of the group; he regarded literature as sacred, and with his wife Pat gave long Sunday parties at their home in Holland Park. Gordon Woolford was from British Guiana; he planned to write a novel but had never progressed beyond the first chapter. The resident reviewer was British, Arthur Calder Marshall, born in 1908, an early Marxist and friend of poets like Auden and MacNeice, who had written a travel book on Trinidad and been heralded in his youth as a coming writer—one of his novels used no fewer than sixty-seven first-person narrators. John Stockbridge was an English journalist, and "a friend and encourager" to Vidia: "He told me I dressed badly and would be a great writer." Edward Brathwaite was a Cambridge graduate and poet from Barbados: "He's become very black; when I met him then he wasn't so black."[5] Sylvia Wynter, a Cuban-born Jamaican who "used words like comprador bourgeoisie," would marry Jan Carew, "a mulatto from Guiana, a tall and handsome man with pretensions to be a writer; he published a couple of books, but they've disappeared."[6] As for Willy Edmett, he was "a small, thin man who later started a shop in the countryside. He thought he was going nowhere."

Despite his subsequent barbs and snubs, Vidia was a wholehearted member of this group. Jan Carew remembered: "We would do broadcasts at the BBC and then go to a pub nearby. Vidia was a very good companion, very witty. Cruel wit. Some West Indians used to work at the back of the kitchen at the BBC cafeteria. He called them 'the blackroom boys.' He had an under-

lying sense of compassion for the less well-off West Indians in London, which later he was accused of not having. People of my generation spoke about race in a way that was full of jokes; there was no animus, we would joke about each other's background—race and class. Vidia didn't hold himself apart. There was certainly a sense of community. Before the independence movement developed, our group in London was much more integrated." Carew thought the relationship between Gordon Woolford and Vidia had been "very close and intense. We went to a party given at the house of Peter Abrahams, the black South African writer. I remember going back on the tube late at night, Vidia and Gordon Woolford were hugging and kissing. It could have been simply alcohol. Big drinking was more the rule than the exception at that time."[7] Vidia remembered, "Gordon Woolford was very important to me. He was thirty-five in 1954. He was an alcoholic, married a shop assistant, a very handsome man. He was a good reader, distinct. He had a sister who was a beauty queen. His father was Sir Eustace Woolford, a mulatto who became a speaker of the legislative assembly in Guiana. Now the joke they tell about him in Trinidad, a wicked racial joke, is that Eustace was sitting in his club in Georgetown playing cards with his back to the door. A white American comes up the stairs and says, 'Hey, there's a nigger in here.' And Eustace says, 'Hmm, throw him out.' "[8]

At the BBC, Vidia reviewed new novels, interviewed writers and chaired discussions on West Indian literature with scripted informality. He contributed to a series on "Contemporary Negro Poetry," looked at the "uncompromisingly worthy" Japanese novel *The Makioka Sisters* by Junichiro Tanizaki. He reviewed the film *Sea Wife*, making sure he was reimbursed eight shillings and sixpence for "cost of a seat at the cinema." With his reporter's notebook filling easily, he wrote and broadcast scripts about a model engineer's exhibition, the International PEN congress, literary teas at Harrods and the National Portrait Gallery.[9] He exchanged staged banter about trends in writing with Kenneth Ablack (who was not "a black," but an Indian, or half-Indian; his father, Mr. Ramprasad, had changed his name to something less classifiable): "ABLACK: 'Thank you Vidia Naipaul—now that you have given news of Samuel Selvon, ought I to mention that you are in the course of writing your own first novel?' "[10] Like Willie in *Half a Life*, involvement with the BBC gave Vidia "a sense of the power and wealth of London" that he did not find elsewhere; like Willie he went to interview a rising African carver, a man named Felix Idubor, a sculptor and seducer from Nigeria: "He walked Willie round the exhibition, the heavy African gown bouncing off his thighs, and told him with great precision how much he had paid for every piece of wood. Willie built his script around that." Like Willie, he "loved the drama of the studio, the red light and the green light, the producer and the studio manager in their soundproof cubicle."[11] Working as a BBC presenter enabled Vidia to learn theatrical skills that never deserted him. "They taught me I was never to let my voice drop at the end of a sentence. They taught me to speak from the back of my throat, which I still do—easy for an asthmatic—and never to talk from the mouth. I learned how to throw my voice. They taught you to have a picture in your head when you are speaking."[12]

His friend Willy Edmett at the Colonial Schools Unit gave him plenty of work, and better still arranged swift payment. V. S. Naipaul wrote about "Dr. Livingstone the Geographer" for Edmett, and prepared a sequence of ten scripts on Shakespeare's *Henry V* to help children study for exams. He gave talks on George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and H. G. Wells's *The History of Mr. Polly* (a favourite book of Pa's, which was to influence *A House for Mr. Biswas*) for a Colonial Schools Unit series titled "Reading for your Delight," designed to generate another crop of culturally British colonials even as the Suez Canal prepared to flow through Lady Eden's drawing room. Collecting a guinea here and there, he read the part of Hounakin in a performance of Derek Walcott's one-act play *The Sea at Dauphin*, narrated short stories by John Figueroa and the Tobagonian poet E. M. Roach ("I liked his poetry: 'Seven splendid cedars break the trades.' A tender man") and earned two guineas reading a poem on a sister programme, *Calling West Africa*.[13] Alternating between BBC studios in Maida Vale and the West End, Vidia praised Edward Brathwaite's poetic fluency, narrated *The Strange Flower*, a short story by his newly discovered Trinidadian contemporary Michael Anthony, and called Edgar Mittelholzer "the most professional and the most successful" of his fellow West Indian writers.[14] Later, having reinvented himself as a different kind of person, he forgot all these thespian performances: "I am not an actor. I have no memory of reading other people's work, except my father's story [*Ramdas and the Cow*]."[15] Vidia's subsequent claim to have had no literary influences bar his father was a deliberate blanking of the role of his colleagues at *Caribbean Voices*, who were crucial in forming his idea of what did and did not work on the page. After the 1950s, now securely in print, he rarely found it necessary to test his literary thinking against the opinions or techniques of others.

Vidia interviewed Francis Wyndham, the writer and critic, Stuart Hall,

his exact contemporary from Jamaica, who was emerging as a left-wing political theorist in Britain, and Sam Selvon, whose reputation as a novelist was still rising. Despite an excellent rehearsal, the recording with Selvon went badly. "Woolford, who was listening in the studio cubicle, said I sounded as though I were a bored and blasé seventy year old don," he wrote to Pat in Birmingham. It may have been an instinctive, emotional response to Pa's old literary rival and Kamla's former lover. "At the end of that ordeal I was sweating, literally . . . Talking about Woolford, he came home last night and drank every drop of the wine I had there, and he begged me not to begrudge it him. What could I do? Incidentally, we were fooled with that sauterne. Some sugar remained at the bottom of the bottle and Woolford said it is an old trick of the wine merchants: sweetening cheap two and six wine with sugar and selling it for six shillings. One learns. Don't get angry about the wine. Woolford is an alcoholic and, poor man, he cannot get by without liquor."[16]

IN THE NEW YEAR of 1955, Vidia began to use a tiny pocket notebook. "For writing overheard conversation & sharpening observation," he noted on an envelope when he sealed it away for posterity.[17] It is the only notebook of its kind to survive. Later, he stopped collecting scraps of material or making notes, preferring to let ideas or memories rest in his mind before letting them come out in an accumulated, indirect form in his writing. For the same reason, he rarely kept a personal diary except when travelling to research an article. The notebook gives an evocative picture of his preoccupations during this seminal year. Pat is not mentioned once. It shows his direct experience of post-war London, a world of Lyons Corner Houses, down-at-heel bars, lodgings, poverty, friendship, alcohol, prostitutes, racial mingling and the sexual fascination and dissatisfaction that he would later depict in fiction. Vidia was usually an observer rather than a participant, a solitary figure watching and listening intently, jotting down what he saw and heard. He showed a London that would soon disappear, and there are moments in his writing when he seems to be describing a city from the nineteenth century, after Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoyevsky or Emile Zola.

At a late-night bar, he wrote: "Pervading colour: cream. Cheese rolls. Fat, tarty woman, with a face like a man's, wearing a soiled overall. Fat, plump, white man, rimless glasses. Whores. Pimps . . . Types of whores. Thin. Low forehead & villainous features. Half baked look . . . The woman 2 seats away inquiring about the quality of what I was eating—through the man between." He would record snatches of conversation from a bus ride, a cafe or the street: "You Greek ponce . . . Snappy Joey's must have been a terrific dive, eh. One girl had a large ? tattooed on her behind . . . So I meets him and I says to him ' 'Ello!' and 'e says, ' 'Ello!' . . . I might have a woman for you this week . . . Kill time you know. Hardest thing to kill." He recorded what he saw, simple images designed to create a possible spark for later stories. "Girl bending back to straighten stocking . . . The Nigger-Lovers. Drawings of blacks on wall. Couples no conversation . . . Victoria on a hot afternoon. Cat & 3 pigeons . . . Cloakroom. Single black hat on hook." He noted a line from his loquacious landlady, Mrs. Lloyd, about a coal delivery man: "He asked for the lady with the Indian gentleman—but he didn't finish it because he was too embarrassed to say it. You don't mind, do you? He is a nice man." He made observations, which at times implied a larger knowledge than he had: "Sisters are invariably proud of brothers' sexual success . . . The Decline of the Society Writer . . . At one time I used to think my salvation would be a wife. Well, I got a wife. No what I need is a woman . . . Man at Bow St. [Magistrates'] Court seeing pro[stitute]s come in. 'They've come to pay their income-tax' . . . A man who didn't believe all he read in the papers . . . Woman who runs a paper on improving race relations but doesn't want black people in her house." Race and sex were never far from his thoughts. One night aboard a double-decker London bus, he noted, "2 low-class Englishwomen with two flashily-dressed Indians. All drunk & singing at the top of their voices. Old, round Jewess & wizened husband come on top. Woman: Oh, let's go back downstairs. But they remain & foursome notice distaste. So: sitting behind old couple: Hey, Pop, can't you sing? Can't you sing? Woman: They're just angry because you're coloured. Man: Shut up."

His relationship with friends and colleagues at the BBC such as Jan Carew, John Stockbridge, Gordon Woolford and Willy Edmett were central to his life at this time. He discovered something of London and the world beyond through their stories and romances, and the experiences which he himself did not dare to have. Stockbridge told how he felt unfaithful to his mistress whenever he slept with his wife, and Vidia recorded his conjugal woes: "Going to beat him up, beat her up, & tell her I'll kill her if she does it again. It wasn't honour. It was self-pity. But I am glad it didn't get me down. I have come out on top. Must get a hat.—Why?—Feel like it. For the new tough male role I am filling. So we walk along a crazy, crowded Oxford

Street to Dunn's & his face falls as he sees the prices, £2 etc." Willy Edmett's quirky phrases were recorded, as was his response to a remark from Stockbridge. "J.S. Met a practitioner of black magic yesterday. W. It is white magic when we practise it . . . Typical Willyisms: It's like dust. You didn't see it falling, but you suddenly say, hello, the table's covered with dust . . . Willy is a dark horse. Willy with black woman." Jan Carew's attitudes and adventures impressed him: "Another of J.C.'s stories: Court-martialled & dishonourably discharged. All terribly hush-hush. Wrote a seven-page memorandum to my commanding officer telling him how the army ought to be run. He is a married man, of course. But: You should see the Italian girl I have coming over here in a few days. 5' 10", built in the Roman way, with sex crawling all over her skin . . . Used to go out hunting in the jungle, when I was a boy, two weeks at a time. Butted a S. African last night. I was hungry & when I am hungry all my intellectual poses drop off."[18]

Nights out with Gordon Woolford yielded notes like "Gordon owes me 8/6." One evening as they walked through Piccadilly Circus with its streams of people and electric billboards and the Eros statue,

> G[ordon] pointed at a woman in a doorway & said, "I know you!"
>
> The woman looked G over & said, "Let me see, I know you too. You are G."
>
> "How did you remember?"
>
> "Meet Gordon," she said, turning to her fellow-tart. "He was in the RAF when I was in the WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force]."
>
> Her eyelids and forehead & her hair were sprinkled with twinkle dust. Likewise her companion's.
>
> Woman grew definitely sad. Kind face. Glistening eyes.
>
> "Well, G. I never thought I would see you in Picc[adilly]. Never thought I would see myself here either."
>
> Chat about careers.
>
> "Come and have a coffee."
>
> No interest.
>
> "Where?" she asked finally.
>
> "Snack-bar in Dean St."
>
> Then, out of nowhere, a man: "Snack-bar! Snack-bar! Don't want to break up your little what not—."
>
> Without a word both girls walk away, after ceremoniously shaking hands.

Vidia's encounters with prostitutes in 1955 remained theoretical, or chaste. His interest in women who would do imaginable sexual things for money dated back to his teenage days in Port of Spain. Seduction would not be involved; nor was the woman required to dissemble. A woman who sold herself to a man for sex embodied his internal collision between repulsion and desire. Speaking years later he saw his fascination with the bars of Soho and Shepherd's Market as youthful bravado: "I used to go actually for the sex in the head, that kind of excitement. I was taken by it almost like a nineteenth-century French writer—although that didn't enter my head, about being like a French writer. I was lured by the idea of their bodies. It was just the idea of the bodies. I found them very attractive. One was young and inexperienced and . . . thank God I didn't have money. I would have probably done a lot of foolish things."

He saw such voyeuristic contact as an imagined idea rather than a practicality, as a prolonged, intangible form of arousal, "sex in the head" that did not involve the intimacy and risk of sex with another person's body. "It is very much an innocent approach really, and all my time in London there was that innocence. I felt unhappy that I didn't have the money to be debauched. I loved the idea of debauchery." His relationship with Pat did not, or could not, move beyond the shy, virginal form in which it had begun. They were both trapped by the formal taboos they had been raised with at a time of unspoken ignorance in Port of Spain and Kingstanding. Sex itself was "an embarrassment, and I think it had to do with my own background. I was born in 1932, so I am very much a child of another age: the shyness, the embarrassment—and the absurd idea that the main thing was for me to have my ejaculation. That was very foolish. Nobody told me anything else. I've written about it somewhere, and I think in the old days certainly—I don't know what it is like now—it's true of most Indian men, this very private idea of sex being something for you alone and not related to the person in front of you. The idea of sex as one of the talents of life doesn't enter into it at all. It's just something dark at the corner . . . I think Pat could never get rid of her inhibitions, her shame and everything else. And in the cinema, any scene of intimacy on the screen, I couldn't bear to look at it. It was just the way I was made. So I would look down. I would tell her, 'When they have stopped kissing let me know.' It went on and to this day it goes on. It seemed to me such an intimate thing, two people kissing, why should I be asked to look at it?"[19]

. . .

AT THE END of 1954 when he got the job at the BBC, Vidia had used his newfound financial security to move out of Owad's house. Getting accommodation was not easy, and the literary editor Karl Miller had a story about Vidia from this period: "Asked on the telephone if he was coloured, by an English landlady to whom he was applying in his youth for a room, he was said to have replied: 'Hopelessly.' "[20] One of his cousins finally arranged for him to rent rooms from a Barbadian doctor in Notting Hill. The warmth of his sexual and emotional relationship with Pat revived; he could see a way ahead. He became affectionate. "Write & tell little boy immediately what train you are coming down by. Have found flat—ideal as far as your visits are concerned. Moving Saturday. Do come, darling. It will be so depressing moving without you. Last weekend was a miracle of joy & love." Pat came to London for the weekend and helped him move in to the house in Oxford Gardens. "So," he remembered in old age, tears running down his face, "for the first time in my life, there was semblance of a household of my own." Pat cooked a meal. "It was a very, very moving moment for me, a sacramental moment. It was very beautiful. I have probably written about this in other ways in my work. For the first time I felt a little bit in control."[21] It reminded him of his short story "This Is Home," when a young couple move to a new house, and as the man leaves, the woman reminds him, "This is home." Within weeks, Vidia was "thinking of moving to a better place, where one can type, where the ceilings are thicker, where there are carpets on the stairs, and where the doors lock properly." With the help of a BBC doorman he found a sitting room cum bedroom with a little kitchen attached in St. Julian's Road in Kilburn. Different people lived on each floor of this new house and shared a communal bathroom. Vidia would remain at St. Julian's Road for two and a half productive years.

He knew that Pat held him together emotionally, and decided without enthusiasm to marry her, despite feeling that he would be going against his family's wishes. In retrospect he thought they might have done better to live together: "It was the social pressures of those days . . . She wanted to get married." Vidia wanted a respectable witness and approached a fellow Trinidadian, Frank Singuineau, "a mulatto fellow, a nice educated man, married to an Irish girl" who worked as an actor at the BBC and would later appear in films such as *Carry On Again Doctor* and *An American Werewolf in London*. But Frank Singuineau, the chosen witness, would not cooperate. Vidia and Pat were isolated. "He said he couldn't do it because he was Catholic and didn't approve. I had to get somebody else."[22] Gordon Woolford was the less-respectable substitute, accompanied by Vidia's cousin Dec Ramnarine.

The marriage took place on 10 January 1955. The groom was identified as "Vidiadhar Surajparashad Naipaul formerly known as Vidiadhar Swrajparashad Naipal, son of Supersal Naipal deceased Journalist," a "Radio Script Writer (B.B.C.)." The bride was Patricia Ann Hale, "University Post Graduate," daughter of a "solicitor's managing clerk."[23] They were both twenty-two years old. Neither family was informed of the marriage. Vidia produced no wedding ring, an oversight which Pat did her tentative English best to put right some months later. "I do feel the lack of a ring very acutely You did promise & I will think you don't quite realise how 'odd' it seems to people. Don't be irritable about it—it isn't just a fancy, whim or extravagance & I don't think I am mistaken in regarding it as rather important." A wedding ring represented all that Vidia wanted to avoid: expense, the trap of marriage, social expectation. He had chosen to marry Pat, but did not want to accept the consequences of doing so. Rather than address the chasmic inconsistency in what he was doing, he tried to turn his back on himself, and offered these bizarre subsequent justifications for his behaviour: "I had no interest in jewellery. I didn't think it was important. I simply had no money."[24] Pat finally bought herself a wedding ring, a plain gold band which she rarely wore.

Initially she remained living with Miss Gilson in Birmingham while she completed her studies in history and philosophy, and only came down to St Julian's Road at weekends. Before arrival, she would send Vidia a shopping list and basic instructions in housewifery: "bed made with one clean sheet (put top to bottom) & clean pillow cases." Vidia kept her in touch with London by post, watching the other lodgers in the house with a writer's eye. "Mrs. Cariddi has left for Italy, and she left very quietly, without telling anyone. The little wop boy is left alone, so very alone. But he is doing the illegal thing, with the assistance of the Rex Lloyds: he is working. Last Sunday, he asked me in, and offered me loads of macaroni and spaghetti (uncooked). I was really touched by this generosity and the effort to gain friendship. But alas, I don't like spaghetti or macaroni, and I had to refuse. This is when these people cease to be stupid, and become very, very sad." He was rereading D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. "It is a very great book: the greatest writers can write only one book of that standard." Pat lent him money to send to his family in Trinidad, which he was careful to repay. Ma made repeated requests for money to support herself, Sewan and Nella

"Although Kamla is giving me every cent of her salary to spend in the house which I must be grateful for she also gives me the same amount of torture."[25] Kamla added that "even a single pound" from him would help to pull them through these difficult months. Vidia felt he was trapped in a vacuum. "I have written a message of hope on that piece of cardboard the Thornhill laundry sends with its shirts: It is Foolish to Fear Failure. I did this last night, and the effect has really been wonderful, though the nagging, aching feeling of unease continues constantly, like a nail in the shoe . . . At the moment I just can do nothing; the terror and the unease and the deep deep sense of futility seem to float just in a cloud above my head."

Pat wished to tell her parents about their marriage, but did not. She visited them, and said nothing. She knew that Vidia was not being supportive, and reacted by nagging him rather than demanding he take responsibility for their situation: "I just can't do it when I feel all alone . . . I am seized by little fears that you resent my asking you, that you want to live in a vacuum writing your novel, that you want to hide from all those things." She suggested that Vidia might write a letter to Mrs. Hale telling her the truth. His reaction to this demand was not to confront Pat's parents, but to ignore their very existence: "I wasn't interested in them at all. I was not interested in them."[26] Soon after the wedding, in another doom-laden symbolic gesture, Vidia lost the marriage certificate. Pat urged him to obtain a copy, or better still "look for the original. I can't help feeling a little miserable that you've mislaid something like that." The secret of the marriage remained with them, and grew with each passing month, as rumours reached Trinidad. Vidia's mind was still as much on Pa as it was on Pat. A fortnight after his marriage, he wrote home, "Two or three nights a week though I still dream about Pa—always nice things; and I see him as clearly as I did at home . . . I am not lying when I say that I am trying to be a writer more for his sake than my own. I am at the moment tidying up his stories before sending them to an agent, but I burst into tears whenever I see his handwriting."[27] Soon afterwards, Mira wrote mentioning a relation who had married a woman in England and kept it secret from his parents for more than a year: "The poor souls are shocked, hurt and disappointed." Three months later, Kamla dropped a heavier hint, "Oh by the way, if in case you ever get married, please don't make yourself equal to these Indians in T'dad by not telling us."[28]

Vidia did nothing, nor did he tell his friends about his marriage. Jill discovered about it in a way that caused her great embarrassment. "I gathered subsequently that I was not the only one person he did this to—Brenda [her

flatmate] and I had a party and we invited him. We invited twenty people and he was one of them. After the party I had his telephone number and I telephoned, I got the landlady and she said, Mr. Naipaul isn't here but Mrs. Naipaul is. I thought his mother must have come to visit. Pat got on the phone and I was absolutely appalled. How could he have done that? He never told me he got married, and I would never invite a married man to the party without inviting his wife. I had met Pat before, only I didn't know her well. I was extremely distressed and upset by this. It made me feel that she would think that I was carrying on with him."[29] Vidia put a different construction on Jill's outrage, at least in retrospect, claiming it was because she was jealous: "Brenda thought Jill would marry me."[30] According to Jill: "He reads it wrong. Vidia put me in a socially impossible position because he made me look rude by not inviting Pat."[31] Jill's version of these events is more plausible, given Vidia's reticence in expressing his feelings to her at the time, and because she was engaged to another man. Her own happiness soon turned to tragedy when, six weeks after her wedding the following summer, her husband died. Not long after this, Vidia made his attraction more explicit. "He once made a pass at me, but only once, in the flat in Chelsea after [my husband] died. I remember him making some sort of gesture. I think I was still mourning . . . Don't get me wrong. I have been laughed at over the years for my preference for what some people refer to as dark little ethnics. Indeed I married one, and have been happily married to him for more than forty years. So if I was brushing Vidia off, it was not because I was being standoffish about him being Indian."[32]

When Vidia looked at his early correspondence with Pat many years later, with a view to writing a book called *In My Twenty-Fifth Year*—which he failed to complete because it was too emotionally disturbing—he made these notes:

> I feel it would have been better for me if I had married >or made love to< Jill. Reading these letters I see (for the first time) that she was interested. Pat really had too many hang-ups. Too many complaints. Too many demons . . . I had been in too deep with Pat, who did not attract me sexually at all . . . I should have steered clear of that damaged family . . . [Pat's letters] contain much of herself. Her virtue, her humanity . . . And in spite of my feeling of two days or so ago, that I should not have married Pat, I find myself in tears again on reading her letters of 1952. Her love was beautiful. And is beautiful . . . The

> relationship—on VSN's side—was more than half a lie. Based really on need. The letters are shallow & disingenuous. Trivial letters for the most part.[33]

IN MAY, he sent $30 (£6.25) each to Ma and Kamla, and reported that the manuscript of the novel he had begun in 70 Bravington Road was "being considered this moment by Arthur Calder-Marshall."[34] He had taken his cue from George Lamming, whose *In the Castle of My Skin* was having a success. Calder Marshall had recommended Lamming to the publisher Michael Joseph, and on the strength of merely three chapters, the head of the firm had invited him to a meeting where Lamming was given a contract and a cheque on the spot.[35] (Willie Chandran has a similar experience in *Half a Life*.) While Vidia waited hopefully for a response, and prepared his scripts for the BBC, Pat sent him instructions: "Now, it's Whit weekend. Therefore you must do the shopping on Saturday—now you must. That means you'll have to get the money today (Friday)." He went to the shops with his new wife's letter in his pocket:

> *1 lb coffee (Jamaica medium ground) from Beverley's*
> *Butter*
> *Sugar*
> *1 tin Tomato Soup!*
> *1 tin Baked Beans*
> *2 tins Garden peas*
> *6 eggs Large*
> *6 oranges*
> *2 lbs New Potatoes*
> *1 lb Carrots*
> *Bread—1 small brown, 1 Snow's small white*
> *Sainsbury's lg chicken*
> *or*
> *2 chops (large) & Lambs Liver—ask for 1/4 worth*
>
> All my love dear. I pray that this Calder Marshall man likes the novel all the time.[36]

Vidia was still eating meat, although he claimed to be revolted by it. A couple of years later when Pat served him lamb's liver, "I just broke down. Liver was intolerable. This was in the late 1950s. I felt I was a vegetarian who had been violated."[37] As for the novel, Arthur Calder Marshall "read it promptly, and wrote a long letter back with single spacing on two sides of a big sheet of paper. He began by saying, you must abandon this book at once. Then he said a few kind things. When that happens, and people tell you things which in your heart you know are true, you are at once relieved and full of anger. And it was out of that, that some despairing weeks later I began to write in the BBC, the first story of *Miguel Street*."[38]

In early June 1955, in the freelances' room at the Langham Hotel with its ochre walls and pea-green dado, Vidia wound a piece of "non-rustle" BBC studio paper into a standard typewriter and adopted a singular posture, his shoulders thrown back, his knees drawn up, his shoes resting on the struts on either side of the chair in a "monkey crouch."[39] Setting the typewriter to single space, he wrote: "Every morning when he got up Hat would sit on the banister of his back verandah and shout across, 'What happening there, Bogart?' " He had a sentence, a start. He tried to go on. "The man addressed in this way would turn in his bed . . ." He crossed it out and began again. "Bogart would turn in his bed and mumble softly, so that no one heard, 'What happening there, Hat?' "[40] And Vidia had the opening of his first publishable book. Some figures in *Miguel Street* were simplified versions of people from Luis Street: Bogart was Poker, Hat was a man called Topi (the Hindi word for hat), Uncle Bhakcu was Power Mausa. For Vidia's family and other inhabitants of Woodbrook, the characters would be familiar. Kamla remembered meeting a fellow teacher when she went to work at a school in Pointe-à-Pierre in the 1970s: "Her name was Lorna Lange and she said to me, 'Kamla, I know you, so don't come with any style to me, I lived all my life in Luis Street until I got married and came south, I know Hat, Hat is Topi, you can't fool me, and Man-man is Thakrine's son, I know Bogart, and the drunken chap who started running a whorehouse.' She knew every single character in *Miguel Street*."[41]

The book is a lambent collection of linked stories, written with artful simplicity, depicting life in a Port of Spain street in the 1940s through the eyes of a fatherless boy. Although ethnicity is rarely made explicit in the book, most of the characters are the equivalent of St. James or Woodbrook Indians, people with a slim chance of moving out of the ghetto and destitution. The men drink rum, and dream. To escape, they live little fantasies and concoct plans which come to nothing; humour and tragedy are laced together, and the cruelty is absurd. Man-man, for instance, has no luck getting elected to office and so arranges his own crucifixion. When people stone

him, at his own instigation, he shouts, " 'Cut it out, I tell you. I finish with this arseness, you hear.' . . . The authorities kept him for observation. Then for good."[42] Popo, a carpenter, is making "the thing without a name." B. Wordsworth is writing the greatest poem in the world. George turns his pink house into a brothel for American sailors. Eddoes, who drives a scavenging cart, has shiny shoes and boasts he knows "everybody important in Port of Spain, from the Governor down."[43] Elias studies hard and fails exams. " 'Is the English and litritcher that does beat me,' " he says. The narrator adds: "In Elias's mouth litritcher was the most beautiful word I heard. It sounded like something to eat, something rich like chocolate. Hat said, 'You mean you have to read a lot of poultry and thing?' Elias nodded."[44]

For all its simplicity, Vidia had written an ambitious and remarkable book, sparked in part by the Spanish picaresque romance *Lazarillo de Tormes,* which he had studied and translated at university. To appeal to a British readership, Vidia might have attempted a Mittelholzer-like jungle romance, a clever Oxford novel or something set in Trinidad with English characters; he might even have written of Mr. Teughnsend, cultivator of hallotments. Instead, he wrote about an alien world and used strange dialogue. Bar a woman with straw-like hair ("I hated that woman," notes the narrator) there is scarcely a white character in *Miguel Street.*[45] V. S. Naipaul had turned a slum in Port of Spain into a setting for a universal fable. Pa's legacy, the critical success of Sam Selvon, the high standard set by Henry Swanzy and the encouragement and example of other writers on *Caribbean Voices* convinced Vidia that good literature could be written about his own country. He was a long way from Oxford now, far from the literary canon he had been taught by the dons. His chosen subject was the powerless: those who, although in the majority in the world, had appeared in European literature only as peripheral characters, or at best as Man Friday.

Despite some acts of kindness, the relationships in the book are bleak and survivalist. Men chase women, women try to trap men and "make baby"; men beat women and women beat children. Hat says of Toni, " 'Is a good thing for a man to beat his woman every now and then, but this man does do it like exercise, man.' "[46] If a character on the street tries to sound authoritative, another cuts him down to size. The larger world is unknowable, a place so far away it can only be guessed at, and ignorance makes people invent and falsify. When war breaks out, a pavement commentator says, " 'If they just make Lord Anthony Eden Prime Minister, we go beat up the Germans and them bad bad.' "[47] The only character to move beyond this setting is the narrator, who by the end of the book is like a more sophisticated version of Vidia who "takes rum and women to Maracas Bay for all-night sessions," to his mother's consternation.[48] Ganesh Pundit, "mystic masseur from Fuente Grove," helps him to obtain an overseas scholarship and leave the island. The narrator walks briskly to the aeroplane, looking only at his shadow before him, a dancing dwarf on the tarmac.

This, then, was the book: but would anyone publish it? Stockbridge liked it, Salkey liked it and Gordon Woolford liked it a great deal. Vidia was loath to ask Calder Marshall for help again. Salkey had a suggestion. At the Piccadilly nightclub where he worked, a louche establishment called the Golden Slipper, he had met an editor from the publishing firm André Deutsch. She was named Diana Athill, moved in bohemian circles and had a weakness for West Indian men. Salkey made contact, and Vidia handed Miss Athill the manuscript in a coffee bar near her office. She remembered him at their first meeting seeming "very young, just down from Oxford. He appeared absolutely confident in himself, and he was very clever and well read, that was obvious. I was impressed by him."[49] She read and liked *Miguel Street,* but the eponymous André Deutsch, the Hungarian-born impresario behind the company, thought a book of short stories about Trinidad by an unpublished author was unlikely to sell. The manuscript was passed to the firm's reader, Francis Wyndham, who was as enthusiastic about it as Athill. After some months, she wrote saying they would like to see a novel if he had one, and might publish the stories later. It was the start of a crucial professional relationship for both of them. "If there hadn't been someone like Diana Athill at the publisher," Vidia said later, "my work would never have got going. She was the best editor in the world at that time. I have the utmost regard for her."[50]

His retrospective view of his fellow immigrant, André Deutsch, was less happy. "Deutsch was a foolish man, really an illiterate, and he caused me a lot of anguish. He said stories don't sell, and of course *Miguel Street* has not been out of print since it was published. It has not been out of print. He tormented me in that way. So I had to write a novel, and I did *The Mystic Masseur* with great unhappiness."[51] Quickly, he wrote this new book. It had a similar tone to *Miguel Street,* but was set mainly among rural Indians in Trinidad. It told the story of Ganesh, a character who owes much to Pa's *Gurudeva.* Like Gurudeva, he is a chancer, and progresses from failed teacher to masseur to entrepreneur, ending up as an author and politician. The narrator, who appears at the beginning and end of the book, is like the

boy in *Miguel Street*. On the first page he visits Ganesh, the healer. " 'I know the sort of doctors it have in Trinidad,' my mother used to say. 'They think nothing of killing two three people before breakfast.' This wasn't as bad as it sounds: in Trinidad the midday meal is called breakfast."[52] The atmosphere and humour were set. Ganesh is cannier than Gurudeva, extorting money from his father-in-law by saying he is establishing a cultural institute in Fuente Grove, a hot, remote village with a single mango tree. He writes and publishes *101 Questions and Answers on the Hindu Religion*; American soldiers visit him for advice. In a narratorial intrusion, the larger implications of the book are suggested: "I myself believe that the history of Ganesh is, in a way, the history of our times; and there may be people who will welcome this imperfect account of the man Ganesh Ramsumair, masseur, mystic, and, since 1953, M.B.E."[53] By the end, Ganesh is an aspiring statesman named G. Ramsay Muir.

Although most of Vidia's 1955 notebook is buoyant, and revolves around his social activity with his BBC colleagues, towards the end there are the beginnings of a withdrawal. Vidia hated the idea of being rejected by people that he liked. "The impact made by the discovery that someone, who has kept silent about it, really hates you & has been trying to do you down," he noted. He saw people less and closed in on himself once Pat moved to London full-time in July. "My circle of acquaintances grows smaller & smaller," he wrote. "I have even dropped out of it." By the end of the year he had removed himself from his old social circle, established a permanent day-by-day relationship with Pat and begun writing properly. As a writer he was all set; but as a person his interaction and opportunities began to reduce. For Vidia, friendship could never be wholehearted. He could not extend trust to another person: neither at this point, nor later in his life, would he ever reveal or unburden himself in full. "Never. I wouldn't do it. It's just not my nature. There is no moral quality in it, it's just the way I am. And I have never examined it before."[54]

On 8 December, less than six months after he began writing *Miguel Street*, Vidia had good news for Ma. His telegram home said simply, "NOVEL ACCEPTED LOVE. VIDO."[55] Graham Watson of the literary agency Curtis Brown agreed to take him on as a client, if in a half-hearted way. By now Pat was working as a supply teacher for the London County Council. Vidia received a cheque in the post from Deutsch for £25, with a promise of another £100 to come. "If it is of any use to you," he wrote to Miss Athill, "my telephone number is MAIda Vale 1054."[56] When finally he deposited

the £100 cheque at Barclay's Bank the cashier stood up, leaned over the counter and shook his hand.

News of his marriage to Pat was gushing across the Atlantic. Vidia confirmed the truth to Kamla, but asked her not to tell Ma; only in October did he write the dreaded letter, and his mother's response, written in her curling, spiralling hand, was forceful but magnanimous. "Congratulation's on your wedding . . . I told Kamla a month before receiving your letter that your not writing home is that you are married . . . Well I am very disappointed that you really don't know your mother . . . In future always remember that I am a very good mother to all my children. I have given all of you freedom to marry who they like, but choose wisely. No secret from now."[57] For Ma, Kamla, Sati, Savi, Mira, Sewan and Nella, it was not easy to hear of Vido's marriage: it meant that the first son of the family would not be coming home to support them. Pat told her parents, and they responded remarkably warmly by inviting the married couple to spend Christmas with them in Kingstanding. Told of Deutsch's cheque, her father wrote, "I am very glad to learn that at long last Vidia is getting satisfaction from his publishers. He has been very patient." In an effort to show acceptance to his son-in-law, Mr. Hale tried to get him a ticket to a cricket Test match at Edgbaston. "Now for news from home. I am sorry to say Uncle Reg died last Saturday . . . Now to more cheerful things. I bought Mummy another budgerigar. Same colour as old Bill."[58]

Christmas 1955 at 593 Kingstanding Road proved an ordeal. The tiny family flat was owned by Mr. Hale's employer, and

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was painted across the three sash windows in the front room, which had to double as an office for meeting clients. Kingstanding embodied Midlands dreariness, a poor suburb caught between the city and the countryside that was being developed fast and badly in a slum clearance programme. Vidia drank too much in an effort to cope with the unfamiliarity, and Pat made conversation. He remembered: "It was a terrible experience when I went there for the first time. They were living in a flat, and it had been dreadfully neglected. Everybody was trying to be friendly, but it was painful. I was bored in an hour and I drank a lot of gin." Going up the wooden steps from the back garden, Pat's sister Eleanor asked Vidia to put on her mother's wartime ARP helmet. "She got a bat and she hit me on the head. She was

about ten or eleven and she thought because of the helmet I would feel nothing. I remember that very well. It was stunning more than painful."[59] Eleanor, a sporty child with piercing blue-grey eyes who did not share her sister's academic bent and had spent her early life convinced she was a boy, found Vidia to be unexpectedly good company. "My mother told me Pat was secretly married and I told my best friend and that's how it got back to my father. It was a big disgrace marrying a coloured man. Immigrants were only in Handsworth in Birmingham then . . . Vidia wasn't as I imagined, he was much darker than I thought he would be, and small. I thought he was going to be tall. I remember when we went to a stately home and the guide told us William the Conqueror gave a herd of goats to the original owner, Vidia said, 'You get my goat.' I thought that was very funny. He was jolly to me, I liked him. When he was young, he was snobbish but he was always joking; later he was just snobbish. My sister always said the Naipauls thought they were better than everyone else."

Edward and Margaret Hale, Ted and Marg, had almost no point of contact with their new son-in-law. Pat's success at school, a result of the widening of opportunities that had stemmed from the 1944 Education Act, had introduced her to a world far from her origins. Soon after their wedding in Gloucester, Ted had got badly into debt and run off with another woman, but under pressure from her father the marriage was resurrected. Ted sold their house without Marg's knowledge, and they had to move north in disgrace to Birmingham. "My mother was never a confrontational person," Eleanor thought. "If she didn't like something she would moan about it, but not do anything. My mother's family disliked my father, said he came from a family of ne'er-do-wells and his mother had ended up in the workhouse."[60] During the Second World War, Pat was evacuated to Gloucester to live with Auntie Lu and her maternal grandparents, who manufactured confectionery. She attended a local girls' school, Denmark Road, where she remained through her education, returning the fifty miles to Birmingham only for the holidays. Both her parents supported her intellectual ambitions; her mother was a keen borrower of books from the local public library. In 1943 Pat was awarded a "special place," which meant her fees were reduced to £6 a year. Intellectual self-improvement was impressed upon the pupils of Denmark Road; Pat took elocution classes at LAMDA and won a distinction.[61] In Eleanor's words: "Pat was a swot. They taught you the Queen's English, how to say 'round' and not 'ree-ownd,' and not to talk in a Brummie accent."[62] In her last year, Pat wrote a Chekhovian play called *The School* about progress, sentiment and good Communists, with characters such as "Ivan Sergeyevich Chubukov . . . a respected and intelligent worker on a collective farm."[63] She was the only girl in her year at Denmark Road to win a state scholarship to Oxford.[64]

In an autobiographical note written during the days of women's lib and bra-burning in the late 1960s, Pat wrote that she had been liberated from the depressing influence of her mother by her Auntie Lu and cousin Jose: "I accepted the received doctrine in my immediate family that being a woman was a dreary, dangerous business . . . I remember the red sweater Jo[se] gave me when I was a student. It was figure enhancing . . . She was six years older than me and I worshipped her as a child. 'You need a bra.' 'Mummy, Jose says I need a bra.' Words like bra stupefied my mother, let alone more serious matters . . . My tenuous breasts ached under my first bra. I come from a small-breasted family but mine are the smallest . . . I end as I began in the smallest size. But I will not be burning mine. Instead I celebrate the wearing of the bra . . . My happiness was suddenly cut short by the onset of menstruation for which I was totally unprepared. My poor father eventually realised the cause of my distress . . . My aunt, my mother's unmarried sister, was my constant companion as a child. I think she would have liked to be a man. She spoke sadly then of the motorbike she had owned but family pressure had forced her to sell."[65] In 1975, examining her own behaviour in a diary during a time of trouble, Pat wrote of her mother: "I think pride entered into her care for me . . . She sacrificed life to self-sacrifice. But the loneliness of life in the flat at Kingstanding must have reinforced her obsessions with her own fate, and with my future."[66] Like many people, Pat could see the mistakes her parents had made with their lives, but was unable to avoid making different, though related, mistakes in her own. She too would, finally, sacrifice life to self-sacrifice.