

Greek Tragedy

Ioannina, Greece

He is a world-renowned medical researcher. We are sitting by the green water of Lake Pamvotis, sipping Turkish coffee. In front of us, Justinian's castle and the minaret of Aslan Pasha Mosque; in the distance, the shadowy mountains of Epirus.

A ferry trundles past, taking tourists to the little island in the middle of the lake, where they'll visit the Monastery of St. Panteleimon and the house where Ali Pasha² made his last stand.

"You would not believe it. To get an X-ray, I have to argue with the lab. Forget about getting an MRI. I have a private practice, too. My patients all have the same thing: high blood pressure, cholesterol, and hypertension. I prescribe the same three pills. They ask if there's a pill that will make the other

2 Ali Pasha ruled the western portion of the Ottoman Empire's European territory. He waged a three-year rebellion against the unpopular Sultan Mahmud II, and was killed by the Sultan's troops in the monastery of St. Panteleimon.

three go away. 'EXERCISE,' I tell them. 'THAT'S THE PILL TO MAKE THE OTHERS GO AWAY.'

"I'm most afraid for the young. They want to destroy the current system, to start all over. But they have nothing to offer. They don't work, they don't study. They live at home, smoke cigarettes, and play idiotic computer games all day. One kid brags to me he's NEVER read a book. Can you imagine?"

"We're a MIDDLE EAST country! The common good, what's that? Look after your family, and screw everyone else. Our only hope is to cut out the rot—the civil service, the unions, the protected industries. The worst thing would be to go back to the drachma. Our debt would triple overnight and the rot would still be there."

"Some people blame the Turks. Did they destroy the social contract? I don't know. But nobody pays taxes; nobody wants to work. And they want to retire at age fifty-five—with a full pension. LEAVING WAS THE BEST THING YOUR FAMILY EVER DID."

So why do you stay, I ask.

"Because I love Greece."