

*du Verbe*, etc. — and a gastronome famous for his encyclopaedic approach to life, would certainly have had a hand in the planning.

It was a summer of unparalleled beauty and remoteness, but the months passed too fast; the crops were in and the storks were gathering before heading south; and suddenly, not unannounced, the evil omens had begun to multiply quickly, until all seemed black. To forget and exorcise for a day the growing assembly of trouble we set off, on 2 September, to pick those mushrooms in a wood about ten miles away, some of us in an old open carriage, some on horseback; through the vineyards where the grapes were almost ready to be harvested and pressed, and out into the open country. The clearings in the wood, when we arrived, were studded with our quarry. Alighting and dismounting, we scattered in a competitive frenzy, reassembling soon with our baskets full to the brim. In the glade of this mysterious wood, with the tethered horses grazing and swishing their tails under the oak branches, the picnic spun itself out. Soon it was late afternoon and all the bottles were empty and the old Polish coachman was fidgeting the horses back into the shafts and fastening the traces. The ones on horseback set off by a different way. We raced each other across the mown slopes of the vast hayfields and galloped in noisy and wine-sprung zigzags through the ricks and down a wide valley and up again through another oak spinney to the road where the carriage, trailing a long plume of dust, was trotting more sedately home, and reined in alongside.

The track followed the crest of a high ridge with the dales of Moldavia flowing away on the either hand. We were moving through illimitable sweeps of still air. Touched with pink on their undersides by the declining sun, which also combed the tall stubble with gold, one or two shoals of mackerel cloud hung motionless in the enormous sky. Whale-shaped shadows expanded along the valleys below, and the spinneys were sending long loops of shade downhill. The air was so still that the smoke from Matila Ghyka's cigar hung in a riband in the wake of our cavalcade; and how clearly the bells of the flocks, which were streaming down in haloes of golden dust to the wells and the brushwood folds a few ravines away, floated to our ears. Homing peasants waved their hats in greeting, and someone out of sight was singing one of those beautiful and rather forlorn country songs they call a *doina*. A blurred line along the sky a league away marked the itinerary of the deserting storks. Those in the carriage below were snowed under by picnic things and mushroom