



# Swimming to Ithaca

*Simon Mawer*

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On her deathbed, Dee Denham whispers to her son Thomas that her cancer is a punishment for her past actions. Compelled by a grief he cannot articulate and a confused childhood memory of betrayal, as Thomas begins the process of dismantling his mother's life he finds himself searching for the meaning of her last words. He delves into Dee's past as a forces' wife in 1950s' Cyprus. Dee had sailed out to join her husband Edward, serving as a Wing Commander in the waning British Empire's messy embroilment in Cyprus's partisan guerrilla war. Embarked on a dangerous liaison of his own, he searches through faded photographs and love letters, seeks out survivors and examines his own imperfect remembrance, and suddenly a whole vanished world comes to life. The restless, seductive island of Cyprus at the end of Empire, a place of oleander and carob trees, cocktails at the Harbour Club and adultery in shuttered bedrooms, peopled by ghostly admirers and conspirators, lovers and spies. With gathering momentum Dee's story unfolds, an intimate history of violence and tenderness for which Thomas finds himself quite unprepared, and in the background the distant, ominous roar of approaching disaster. The most startling revelation waits until the end. The real victim of Dee's betrayal, Thomas discovers, was someone apparently detached from the family orbit.

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