**Island Life -** An extract from *My Family and Other Animals* by Gerald Durrell

One hot, dreamy afternoon, when everything except the shouting cicadas seemed to be asleep, Roger and I set out to see how far we could climb over the hills before dark. We made our way up through the olive-groves, striped and dappled with white sunlight, where the air was hot and still, and eventually we clambered above the trees and out on to a bare, rocky peak, where we sat down for a rest.

The island dozed below us, shimmering like a water-picture in the heat-haze: grey-green olives; black cypresses\*; multi-coloured rocks of the sea coast; and the sea smooth and opalescent, kingfisher-blue, jade-green, with here and there a pleat or two in its sleek surface where it curved round a rocky, olive-tangled promontory. Directly below us was a small bay with a crescent-shaped rim of white sand, a bay so shallow, and with a floor of such dazzling sand that the water was a pale blue, almost white. I was sweaty after the **ascent**, and Roger sat with flopping tongue and froth-flecked whiskers. We decided that we would not climb the hills after all; we would go for a bathe instead. So we hurried down the hillside until we reached the little bay, empty, silent, asleep under the brilliant shower of sunlight. We sat in the warm, shallow waters, drowsily, and I **delved** in the sand around me. Occasionally I found a smooth pebble, or a piece of bottle which had been rubbed and licked by the sea until it was like an astonishing jewel, green and translucent. These finds I handed to Roger, who sat watching me. He, not certain what I expected him to do but not wishing to offend me, took them delicately in his mouth. Then, when he thought I was not looking, he would drop them back into the water and sigh deeply.

Later, I lay on a rock to dry, while Roger sneezed and clopped his way along the shadows in an attempt to catch one of the blue-finned blennies\*, with their pouting, vacant faces, which flipped from rock to rock with the speed of swallows. Breathing heavily and staring down into the clear water, Roger followed them, a look of intense concentration on his face. When I was dry, I put on my shorts and shirt and called Roger. He came reluctantly, with many a backward glance at the blennies which still flicked across the sandy, sun-ringed floor of the bay. Coming as close to me as possible, he shook himself vigorously, showering me with water from his curly coat.

After the swim, my body felt heavy and relaxed, and my skin as though it was covered with a silky crust of salt. Slowly and dreamily we made our way on the road. Discovering that I was hungry, I wondered which was the nearest cottage where I could get something to eat. I stood kicking up puffs of fine white dust from the road as I considered this problem. If I went to see Leonora, who undoubtedly lived the nearest, she would give me figs and bread, but she would also insist on giving me the latest bulletin on her daughter’s state of health. Her daughter was a husky-voiced girl, whom I cordially disliked, so I had no interest in her health.

I decided not to go to Leonora; it was a pity, for she had the best fig trees for miles around, but there was a limit to what I could endure for the sake of black figs. If I went to see Taki, the fisherman, he would be having his siesta, and would merely shout, “Go away, little corntop,” from the depths of his tightly shuttered house. Taki and his family would probably be about, but in return for food they would expect me to answer a lot of **tedious** questions: Was England bigger than Corfu? How many people lived there? Were they all lords? What was a train like? Did trees grow in England? And so on, **interminably**. If it had been morning I could have cut through the fields and vineyards, and before reaching home I would have fed well on contributions from various of my friends on the way: olives, bread, grapes, figs, ending perhaps with a short detour that would take me through Philomena’s fields, where I would be sure of ending my snack with a crisp, pink slice of water-melon, cold as ice. But now it was siesta time, and most of the villagers were asleep in their houses behind tightly closed doors and shutters. It was a difficult problem, and while I thought about it the pangs of hunger grew, and I kicked more energetically at the dusty road, until Roger sneezed protestingly and gave me an injured look.

**End of extract**

**Glossary:** Black cypresses – a type of tree Blennies – a type of fish