



Source: Abraham Rabinovich, 'Israel planning to put fiscal squeeze on Hamas 'terrorists'', *The Australian online*, 16/02/06.

Tags: [travel](#), [husband/wife](#), [plants](#), [discomfort](#)

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When they met at the Arrivals gate, Cees was already sweating, although Sydney Airport was air-conditioned. At first he could not make out his brother in the shifting crowd of welcomers. Balloons, squeals, waving hands, all seemed directed at someone just behind him. Cees kept looking round. The faces blurred in front of him. He clutched the plastic handle of his roller suitcase for support, shuffled forward slowly in the yellow light.

Out of the blur, a broad, reddened face he recognized took shape. He could not have said straight away that here was Anton. Rather, a phylogenetic echo, that made him think more of his mother's face than anyone else's, tugged at his memory. He nearly said his own name aloud. At the last moment, 'Anton!' surged up unbidden.

Anton stood before him, tall, shuffling his sunhat between his hands, and staring at his brother. His brows were grizzled and knotted, like his hands. Sunspeckles paraded across the sides of his face, and jauntily made their way down his arms. 'Ja, so you've come. How was it? Shall we go? Ja, ja, little brother, so you finally made it'.

Cees's hands were scrabbling at something too, and he put them both on the handle of his bag, to stop the shaking from showing too clearly. He was jostled from behind by a trolley stacked with metallic cases, so high that he could not make out who was pushing. Cees became aware that they were standing in the narrow neck of passengers flowing out of the baggage hall. He gripped the bag once more, and pulled determinedly forward. Anton fell into step beside him. He did not offer to take the bag.

They stepped out into the early morning drizzle of a summer Sydney day. The humidity enveloped Cees like one of the damp towels he had been offered every few hours on the plane. The fetid air clung to him, a second skin. He felt as though he had gone underground instead of emerging into the light.

'Is it always so hot?' he asked Anton. The older man did not seem to hear him, but was already striding ahead towards the ticket machines. Cees struggled along behind. They reached the nearest pay station almost together.

'Here, let me', puffed Cees, trying to reach into the zippered traveller's wallet that Geraldine had strapped around his waist some thirty hours previously. It stuck to his belly, which seemed to have inflated during the flight, so that his hand stuck uselessly in the waistband of his trousers. Anton looked at the flapping hand, and reached into the pocket of his shorts, jingling out some brassy coins. He turned his back on Cees and pumped them into the machine, grunting softly under his breath and squinting at the digital display. It spat out a ticket, and Anton was off again. Cees could only follow.

When they reached Anton's hire car, a white Toyota, he fumbled with the keys, swearing quietly. With a final slap on the roof of the car, the doors were open, and he went around to the back to open the boot, then climbed into the driver's seat. Cees stood for a moment at the back

catching his breath, and wondering how to hoist the bag up. His head swam slightly. Anton started the engine, so that gusts of exhaust snorted over Cees's shins. A shot of red adrenalin powered through Cees, that seemed to pick the heavy bag up of its own accord, throwing it effortlessly into the boot, and slamming down the lid.

The two men said nothing as they made for the exit.

Cees looked out of the window at the bougainvillea and cannas that seemed to line it for miles. Beyond the bank of pink and yellow blossoms were ranks of what he assumed were eucalyptus trees, with crusty bark hanging off trunks and limbs. They looked as if they were moulting, he thought, and his heart lurched at the thought of wholesome deciduous trees that would rise stark above him in the Cambridgeshire winters as he walked near Ely. He had never thought about trees before. How much of him had landed in Sydney, he found himself wondering. It was as though he were suspended on elastic, and might at any moment reach his limit and hurtle back through space.

'Geraldine all right, is she?' Anton eventually broke the silence, several kilometres down the freeway. He seemed to have lost his accent. Anton's reference to his wife came like a stick in the ribs. Cees prickled at the sound of her name in his mouth.

'Ja, now, she's fine, she's happy to have the house to herself I think, you know. She wants to work in the garden, I don't know what...' His voice petered out. Anton didn't reply. A ghost's gap opened between them. With Geraldine had to come a question about Anton's wife.

'How is it these days, without, you know, without Anneke?' Cees reached about for the right words. Geraldine would know how to put it, she was always so good with their friends. More and more of them were losing wives and husbands. It was the first time Anneke's name had passed between the brothers since her death two years previously. Geraldine had sent a card, and organized the wreath. They had not even telephoned, at that time it was still so expensive to call, and there had been some other reason, Cees racked his brain...Now she used email.

'Well, you know how it is, some days good, some days...She was ill in the end, it was better.' Anton's speech was trimmed as though with shears.

'Ja. So...and the girls?' Cees realized with a start that they were speaking in English to one another. His own accent grated in his ears. Why weren't they talking Dutch? The road flashed past, and they were in the city centre without warning. Sydney was smaller than he had expected. They were on the bridge, and past the Opera House before he had registered where they were. Turning off the freeway, Anton steered into a maze of hilly streets, expertly turning this way and that. Cees was completely lost. Were they North or South of the city?

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ingrid Wassenaar.*