



Source: Reuters, AFP, AP, 'Bombers destroy Shia holy site', *The Australian online*, 23/02/06.

Tags: countryside, Greece, child/parent, travel, dystopia
Writer/s: Linda Botham

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

The plane trip was horrendous; 36 hellish hours of traveling to reach their destination—'paradise'. They chose to sit in the non-smoking area of the plane, (she could have killed for a fag), but of course it made not one iota of difference as the smokers' smoke kept snaking its way insidiously to where they sat, simmering in silence. Silence; ha! That was a joke; it sounded like her in-laws' chook enclosure with the volume amped up to the max; didn't smell much better either...

They'd had a laugh when their five year old first pointed out what looked like a package of oddly-shaped, uncooked sausages protruding between their seats. Upon closer inspection, the stinky snags were revealed to be dirty toes belonging to the yiayia seated behind them. Her husband had produced a cigarette lighter from his hand luggage and the three of them giggled together wickedly at the prospect of an impromptu barbecue.

On a trip to the loo she'd had to queue up for an age only to find the toilet paper was non-existent. As she left the cubicle, an overwrought, overweight woman in black snarled at her and accused her of wasting all the paper. It never ceased to frustrate her that she could understand so much Greek when spoken by others yet whenever she'd want to reply it took an age to construct a sentence. By this stage she felt pretty pissed off herself and wasn't about to take the blame, so she resorted to a rather crude hand gesture which wasn't quite appropriate; roughly translated it meant, 'I write you on my testicles'.

Island life seemed unimaginably beautiful and romantic to her; after the first day she'd written in her diary: 'Peace and quiet abounds; a goat is 'maaaing' softly, birds are twittering, cicadas are singing and a gentle breeze is blowing. Behind our place there's a tiny whitewashed church built by a devoted son for his parents; full of ancient icons, it's incredible! I feel confident that all will be well. This holiday is just what we needed.'

Awoken next day to church bells clanging, roosters crowing and a cranky child caterwauling, (their own, with a temperature of 38.7), she felt her optimism to be sorely tried. She could hardly taste her breakfast due to the pall of smoke from the European cigarettes favoured, (and savoured in chain fashion), by her father-in-law and his cronies. It was nearly 9.30am; just about ouzo time at last, although it was a funny thing that on this side of the world you could drink all day and remain sober and she did so want to write herself off, just a little.

After a shaky beginning, (thank the dear lord for Panadol), and a few ouzos, she and her husband were hot to trot down the mountain to explore the shops. Yiannaki, little John, was staying happily behind to explore the layout of the land with his grandparents; oh joy. Seated outside the baker's shop, they sipped on Turkish coffees steaming thickly before them and shared yet another chuckle about her difficulties with the language. Last night she had been trying valiantly to explain to her mother-in-law and a

friend that she wished her vocabulary were more extensive. Somehow the pethera had translated this to mean that her daughter-in-law was concerned about her cholesterol intake. Bloody hell; all that money spent on lessons; perhaps she'd treat herself to some new shoes today and a handbag to match...

Watching her husband relax, she felt a great warm wash of feeling for him; yes, all would be well, she was almost certain. Just as this thought had formulated in her mind, his mobile phone rang. Leaping out of his seat, he motioned madly for her to follow, talking ten to the dozen into the phone while she trotted alongside trying to keep up. She could hear their son's wails midair as the phone was thrust into her outstretched hand. Yiannaki was put onto the phone screaming, 'Yiayia put acid in my eyes.'

She placated him with loving assurances; his screams abated and were replaced with wretched sobs and greedy gulps for air.

Not a taxi to be seen so they had to hotfoot it, (literally; the temperature was 45 degrees in the shade), back up the mountain. After the Great Acid Incident—the 'acid' turned out to be witch hazel—the in-laws refused to look after Yiannaki again, just in case he woke up and started screaming whilst his parents were out. Housebound, they now had to cope with a never ending cavalcade of visitors who came by every evening, bearing well meaning wishes and gifts. Alas, not a Trojan horse amongst them all, damn it. Proceedings could have been enlivened somewhat.

None of the women smoked cigarettes nor did they drink alcohol, so she sat with the men. She did not feel extremely comfortable with the situation, but she was a 'skip' and so her behaviour was tolerated. If she hadn't been sitting with the men she would have missed out on the tale of 93 year old Vasilis who visited the doctor recently in regard to his impotence problem. Apparently, Vasilis's wife was as mad as a cut snake: she'd been seen just the other day, removing her voluminous undies while standing in the middle of the road and shaking them furiously to rid them of imaginary insects. Privately, she thought the wife was probably invoking some ancient prayer to ward off her lecherous husband and who could blame her?

When it was time for farewells she was more than ready to leave; they all thought her silly, as she had laden the suitcases with marble pebbles from the beach. She didn't try to explain...

Her son is still at home, the pebbles are in a glass bowl on a wooden table; she dusts them regularly. Sometimes she tips them out onto the carpet and strokes their cool, smooth shapes.

Her son's father has a new wife.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Linda Botham.