

Reva Mann

Unable to get away from the war

A hurricane is blowing outside. I pull the covers over my head to block out the whooshing sound. The shutters of an adjacent room in the hotel where I am staying are clanging against each other. This has been going on for hours. The Cycladic wind is so fierce that I'm scared the hotel will collapse like a house of cards. When there are a few moments of reprieve, the constant dripping of the air conditioner is audible. I consider taking another sleeping pill. But no, nothing could help me now. In Israel it is the second night of the ceasefire with Hizbollah, but here in Greece, I am waging my own battle against the elements.

On Mykonos, the happening venue of the young and trendy, it is not only the weather conditions that trigger reminders of home. If I were to brave opening the shutters, I would look out onto a landscape similar to the Judean hills, a barren terrain of browns and grays and chalky white. Here the hills are spotted with churches, some with neon crosses that light up the skyline, unlike our horizon where Arab villages are dotted with minarets that spike into the Jerusalem heavens.

Another huge gust whizzes around me. There is no chance of sleep, so I let my mind wander back over the day. I am strolling down the narrow cobbled streets that labyrinth down to the port where designer stores and outdoor cafes served as temporary relief from the sadness of the war and whitewashed walls and arched doors painted turquoise brightened up the darkness of the Ketyusha rains. The conflict couldn't have been further from my mind until planes flew overhead bringing tourists to the local airport. Then I looked up at the blue skies remembering the constant drone of helicopters buzzing over our holy land in the past four weeks.

In the afternoon, I lounged at Paradise beach that stretches over the south coast of the island. The green clear sea in the protected bay was still and cold, a perfect relief from the forty-degree heat. Waitresses served food and cocktails to the shore—indeed paradise. Nevertheless, there were many queuing for the pleasures of Super-Paradise, a beach accessible only by fishing boat that leaves from the sands every half an hour. I remember noting that even when drenched in hedonism, we are all yearning for Gan Eden.

The early hours of the morning, when I am usually fast asleep, was party time. In the upbeat club El Pecado (the sin) at the old port, my body tried to jive to the Latin beat, but I found it hard to let go the tension that had settled in my muscles held in fear of news and worse news. There was a moment when the thumpa thumpa beat built up, climbed through my feet and reverberated in my chest to a climax as a deafening metallic sound resonated through my head. The barman had rung the big bell and released a shower of confetti. It poured down from high above and fell like snowflakes around us. Dancers cheered in ecstasy. I looked up at the barrage of paper only to remember the leaflets thrown down from IDF planes warning Lebanese civilians to flee.

I toss and turn. The storm is dying down. Maybe I will be able to get some sleep now and recharge for another day of sun and fun. I need to switch my mind to idle mode and experience the relief of the sheer absence of a life threat. I need to let go of the dread that has seeped into the deepest pores of my existence, even though I know I will be losing an essential part of my being. The air is settling. I think I can rest now.