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The Devil's Hole

Julia Bell

The discount website promised a glossy five-star hotel with spa facilities, a view of the photogenic castle in the bay, and an inclusive ferry ride from Poole. This was in the days, not-so-long-ago, when I was looking for things to do with my soon-to-be-ex-girlfriend. We weren't really suited, and it wasn't really her fault, but nonetheless I was trying to make it work with the gesture of a romantic break in a place that might inspire our flagging romance.

Jersey. I knew hardly anything of it except hazy memories of my mother watching Bergerac. I Googled it saw an island with pretty beaches, discovered it was occupied during WW2, and due to its southerly geography and milder climate was famous for its produce – for the richest kind of cream and buttery new potatoes. I also knew it was a British offshore tax haven, but I didn't really think this meant anything, except that it would ensure, surely, that we would spend our relaxing vacation perhaps spying on some wealthy people, and like the hotel brochure, they might somehow cast the soft glow of aspiration upon us and thus transform us.

But in the week prior to our departure the weather had whipped up a storm, there had been high tides and floods, a few nights of wild wind. By the time we got to Poole it had subsided, but the wind was still strong, the waters grey and churning, it was going to be a rough crossing. I took a seasick pill even though they make me feel sleepy and we settled ourselves into seats with a view of the grey sea listing through the porthole window.

What started as a gentle swaying soon became, once the ferry was in open sea, more of a bucking kind of motion. Instead of moving forward the ship seemed to be rocking from side to side and walking or standing up involved a new kind of physical logic. The layout became suddenly treacherous, there was a mezzanine level with a staircase with chrome bannisters and wooden floating stairs, a design that seemed more suited to a cheap hotel than a ship. I watched a woman, clinging as she tried to climb down the stairs. It looked dangerous, something later corroborated by the man serving at the bar. When I mentioned that it was rough, he shook his head and told me I'd seen nothing and then told me almost casually that the boat had sailed during the storms last week and that a woman had been pitched from the stairs and broken her leg. When I asked him why they were

sailing in a storm, he shrugged, and muttered something about penalties if they didn't stick to the timetable. I wondered as I staggered my way to the bathroom how much worse it would have to get before they cancelled a crossing.

My girlfriend started feeling nauseous, and as I had booked and paid for this little trip, she had decided that her sickness was clearly my fault. I don't blame her for coming to this conclusion. If it had been me in her position, I probably would have blamed me too. To begin with it had all been so possible. We were hot for each other in a way that was exhilarating, she was statuesque and smart and also a teacher. We'd had a promising start. But lately something had shifted, I had the increasing sense that I was being judged and found wanting, that the left swipe of Tinder was looming.

After making me loudly aware of her sickness and refusing to take a seasick pill, I thought she might value some time on her own, so I went out on deck, wrapped in all the clothes I had, and faced the grey sea and the piercing headwind. Better than being inside with the smell of chips and cheap coffee and resentment. Out here was the taste of salt spray on my lips, the physical assault of water and wind, bracing, with the romantic sense of freedom, of the open sea and the fact of our island status.

There are about 4,400 islands in the British Isles, but this number only counts the ones that are over half an acre in size and are islands at all states of the tide. Of that number 210 are inhabited, and 850 of these are in the Republic of Ireland. Beyond that – the islands that are only such at high tide – the figure rises by another 6,000 or so. When you look at the map, we live in a country that seems fractured at the fringes, islands outline the shape of the mainland like tracers, especially in Scotland and in Ireland, where the landmass seems to be in a power struggle with the sea. This is the hard, Precambrian rock which takes millennia to weather which faces into the North Atlantic, next stop Canada. Around the back of the country, the one that faces the North Sea, is merely soft sediment, especially on the East Anglian coast, which is fast eroding, destroying villages and houses – a trip to Happisburgh in Norfolk with its houses falling off the soft cliffs onto the beach makes you wonder about what will be left of our weird little island once climate change wreaks its havoc.

Jersey is part of an archipelago of islands, including Guernsey, which are closer to France than Britain, protected from the full force of the English Channel and the Atlantic by the Cherbourg peninsula to the east and Brittany to the south. They are ostensibly a Crown

Dependency, which means the British Sovereign is responsible for their security and safety, but their governance is a throwback to William the Conqueror and the formation of the Duchy of Normandy. Jersey is a Bailiwick – itself is an ancient word – a term for government that exists only here and in a few places in mainland Europe and which emerges from the Old French word for bailiff – *bailie*. A Bailiwick is an area of land over which a bailiff has jurisdiction. The Bailiff of Jersey is chosen by the Crown, which means that Jersey has a strange insider/outsider status relationship to Britain. Protected by Britain, their laws are supervised by the UK, yet they are also classed as an independent state, meaning it's possible to run business from there which has no tax relationship to the mainland.

Reading through all this, the headline seemed to be that as a small island at the fag-end of Empire, it was too small to manage its own defence and expensive to defend, but its strategic value meant that it could be conveniently overlooked as an anomaly which no one wanted to change, and this situation suited everyone just fine as it was often a haven for those who might not want to be discovered. It had the perfect conditions for an OFC or Offshore Financial Centre, with a captured democracy and a settled population. I'd just started on the Wikipedia history of Jersey in WW2 and the way in which it was occupied and among the last to be liberated when my girlfriend came out on deck, and we sat there for a while in companionable irritation letting the wind blow our hair to ribbons and watching the land in front of us getting closer.

The hotel was kind of warehouse style new-build with huge windows overlooking part of the marina and the Elizabeth Castle. It had the sleek finishing of international business, anonymous, clean, and bland as stock photography. Our room was huge, the bed big enough to sleep a large family, but given our current relationship status, we looked at its invitation nervously. The windows were dramatic, floor to ceiling and draped with long, thick black curtains. It had the atmosphere of a noir film set, while at the same time, when all the lights were on, the curtains closed, of being a room that could be anywhere in the world. You could open the curtains and be in Dubai, or Geneva, or Singapore but the room would stay the same. I guess that's the point, for the kind of business oligarchy who travel all the time, they need something minimal, impersonal, static, to help filter out all the noise of place. But it was also a weird kind of room to encourage romantic feelings, more suited to the hard lens of fashion shoots or porn films.

We flicked through the guest information, and the menu for the spa and booked pedicures which were the cheapest treatment on the list, coming with a discount as part of the package. Then my girlfriend said she was still feeling dizzy after the boat, and wanted to nap, so I went downstairs to have a cigarette and explore the hotel.

Outside it was raining, a kind of fine grey mizzle that frosts hair and soaks through clothes, I went out the back of the building facing the marina, the air carried the brackish smell of seaweed and rotten fish. One of the hotel staff was huddled in the doorway smoking and looking at his phone. I asked him for a light. He seemed a bit hunched in the way that everyone is in front of their phones, but it was maybe something else, something like a nervousness of strangers. He was wary, not friendly. I smiled at him and walked out along the harbour wall to look at the boats. Row upon row of mostly the same kind of white powerboat, differentiated only by their names. Most appeared to be brand new. Tarpaulins tied tight across their decks, ladders firmly battened. There was one that particularly caught my eye, with gold trim and tinted glass which looked like an insect, or a robot. It was called Liquid Assets.

I walked back towards the man on his phone.

‘Who owns all this?’ I asked.

He shrugged. ‘People who come here.’

‘But some of them don’t even look used.’

He nodded. ‘Most of them.’ He raised his eyebrow and stubbed out his cigarette then went back inside.

I don’t know why but it made me angry. I wanted to ask him more questions, but he’d retreated to back behind the front desk, not looking up from his computer. I sat in the café bar and drank tea, looking for other customers, but there didn’t seem to be many other people around. A man on his laptop who hadn’t bothered taking off his overcoat, an older couple at the other end of the bar. That was the weird thing about this island on first impression, it seemed almost deserted.

I went back to our room and started looking up tax havens. Numbers, bigger than the imagination – in a report by the Tax Justice Network somewhere between \$21-32 *Trillion* is stashed offshore. *Trillion*. Not billion. A million is nothing really. One modest family home in London’s Zone 2 can cost that now. A billion is a thousand million. That’s when you

can buy football clubs and penthouses and small islands. With a *trillion*, one million million. 1,000,000,000,000,000, 21-32 of those units, with that, you could buy the whole world.

I woke my girlfriend to tell her what I had learned. But she just blinked and looked sleepy and annoyed.

‘But it’s so unfair! It’s criminal!’

‘Life is unfair! Did you have to wake me up to tell me that?’

She was getting bored of me. Although we had not yet reached the granular stage of irritation; that would happen soon after this holiday, but we were close. Bodies that once loved each other which now could not bear to be near each other, it was awkward.

‘But imagine all the schools that could pay for! Or all the houses! Rather than being stashed in banks or in stuff that nobody uses!’

‘Oh for fuck’s sake. It’s how the world *works*. People have always been hoarders.’

Hoarders. I thought of the stashes that are still periodically unearthed by archaeologists. Roman coins found in a sealed jar, or the hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold in a field in the Midlands, or the guy around the corner from me whose kitchen caught on fire because of his huge hoard of plastic bags and newspapers.

My girlfriend was now on her feet. ‘What time is our spa treatment?’

The spa was new and small, there was a swimming pool which was occupied by a woman and two kids and an older guy with an over-tanned, walnut body who was swimming relentless splashy lengths. This didn’t leave much room for us, so we sat in the sauna for a bit. It wasn’t really hot enough.

I went to have my treatment at the appointed time, the girl who was doing it had her hair pulled back in a severe bun, was young and seemed to be in a terrible mood. I felt immediately awkward and judged. As if I didn’t already have enough middle class guilt about paying someone to do something for me that I could do for myself.

‘What’s it like to live here then?’ I asked, thinking now might be the time to seek out some intimacies about the island.

‘Alright.’ she shrugged.

I persisted as she proceeded to cut my cuticles. ‘I’ve read that quite a lot of rich people live here. Ow.’

‘Sorry.’ She wiped away a bubble of blood from the cuticle of my big toe with some cotton wool. ‘They don’t even come here.’

She had the same kind of barely submerged hostility as the guy on the desk. A kind of passive aggressive attitude, as if I should already know the answers to my stupidly obvious questions and she was annoyed with me for having them. I stumbled on anyway, asking her if she spoke French.

‘No.’

‘Do many people speak French here?’

‘Not really.’

‘Didn’t you do French at school?’

She was filing my nails now with a kind of sadistic intensity. ‘What colour would you like?’

I picked a purple and wondered how much she got paid. She rubbed a thumb across my toenail. ‘You know you’ve got a fungal infection.’ She smirked.

Afterwards, I went back to our room and angrily flicked through some channels on the TV. Looked at my sparkly nails and the small crust of a scab that was forming on the cuticle line of my big toe. It throbbed.

When my girlfriend came back to the room she was livid. ‘That girl was terrible. She hurt my foot!’

‘You too? She told me I had a nail fungus.’

She paused and wrinkled her nose. ‘Do you?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘I think we should complain.’

At this point I shrivelled. Complaining. Making a fuss just makes me cringe, partly because it draws attention and makes everything unpredictable, and partly because it turns the world into a situation that suddenly requires my personal management. And also that girl frightened me, or her resentment did; she thought I was rich and she was judging me.

‘She was probably having a bad day.’ I said.

‘So?’

‘And she’s probably on crap money. And anyway, I paid for it.’

‘You didn’t tip her did you?’

‘No.’ I lied.

‘I just don’t like wasting money.’

‘Well it is *my* money.’

She laughed at me then, and not in a good way.

My money. Was it really? I had instantly fallen into the trap of thinking that paying for something gave me the right to own the experience. Who was I trying to kid? I had paid for this trip on my credit card. Who was owning who?

This echoed in my head as we walked out for dinner. The slippery hypocrisies of money and the acquisition of it. I was bad with it, prone to impulsive spending and periods of protestant cost saving. One of my students, a successful businesswoman and consultant said to me once: 'if people show me their attitude towards money, I'll show you their life.' What did this say about my life? I didn't want to look.

We walked into town, navigating a new and strangely deserted roundabout. This place certainly wasn't a cute fishing port, gone were many of the traditional buildings, replaced by the kind of glass and chrome business aesthetics I more associate with London. Bland, reflective glass and chrome. Utilitarian in its own way. In place of a high street, there were offices for banks and lawyers and insurance companies and hedge funds and wealth managers. On the doors there were plaques for Barclays Wealth Management, Deloitte, HSBC, Lloyds, RBS, Deutsche Bank, Standard Life. This was not really a holiday destination at all. There were no buckets and spades, no seaside tat. Nothing much to look at, no history to engage with. The shops, such as they were, were not distinctive, mostly branches of familiar high street brands, Specsavers, Boots, Topshop, one high end kitchen design shop, and hairdressers, a few gastro pubs and brasseries where you could conduct a business meeting with the kind of décor that are always ersatz versions of another era. Life was happening here, but I wasn't sure if anyone really *lived* here.

Jersey is not just a tax haven, although parking money offshore away from government taxation is one of its financial services – in one of the leaked memos from the now defunct and disgraced law firm Mossack Fonseca source of the Panama Papers – said 'ninety-five per cent of our work coincidentally consists in selling vehicles to avoid taxes.' But it is also a 'secrecy jurisdiction' meaning the business affairs that happen here do so under a cloak of anonymity that is permitted by the laws of the island. Laws which are passed by an Assembly which is made up of people who all favour the financial industry and written by lawyers who work for the banks and the corporations and the wealth managers than surround them. Written in the deliberately complex language of 'MEGOS' (My Eyes

Glaze Over), the levers and instruments which the representatives are being asked to pass are often beyond their understanding. This means the island is a site of wealth accumulation and Jersey has an estimated \$5 billion worth of assets per square mile. But behind this, it's essentially a captured state. It exists to be a piggy bank and exchange mechanism, connected to the City of London, but beyond the reach of nations. Hidden behind trusts and shell companies, this is a place to clean and transfer money from or to criminal activity, or park the extracted wealth of nations, as well as help rich individuals and big corporations avoid paying tax. And as all of it sloshes around together in ever increasing amounts, within a web of ever increasingly complex financial vehicles, it has become more and more difficult for the ordinary citizen, whose lives this financial capture so affects, to see through the deliberate opacity to understand what exactly is going on.

There are many territories like it in what is left of the British Empire, all serving slightly different functions in the system. These fiddly little islands are perfect places in which to rewrite the rules of business away from the prying of mainland society. The Cayman Islands for example, ranks by some estimates as the sixth biggest banking system in the world in spite of only having a population of just over 60,000. It also means that 50% of the world's offshoring is under British control. Is this what our nation really stands for now? Is this our global contribution? A financial system which allows clean money to mix with dirty, which welcomes the wholesale flight of capital from nations vulnerable to exploitation, and which impoverishes and over-leverages its own society. In Jersey a few whistle blowers have tried over the years to stand up to the legislature, but they have been shouted down, their testimonies rubbished, and been hounded out of the society. State capture always begins with the press.

'Will you stop looking at your phone!'

'Sorry. This place is diseased.' I said.

'There's nothing wrong with the menu!'

I had let her choose the restaurant and now she thought I was criticizing her choice. It was an Italian, a family owned business, that said in the window that it prided itself on having been on the island since the 1950s. It was green and cheerful with red check tablecloths and the waiters were friendly.

'No I don't mean that. This place creeps me out a bit.'

'This is a nice restaurant!' As if to underline her point, the not-unattractive Italian waiter winked at us and sashayed over to pour us some wine.

'I don't mean this restaurant. I mean this island. There's something off about it.'

'You're just jealous.'

'Of what?'

'Rich people.'

In my life I have met a few genuinely wealthy people. One came from a British family of great landed wealth, the heir to a Baronetcy, he had just returned from salmon fishing in Russia on a private jet and was engaged to be married to a colleague of mine. What I most clearly remember about this encounter was the way that I was coolly appraised, both for my breeding and my attractiveness. It took less than a few seconds to be evaluated then dismissed as not the right sort. How easy it is for money to make the human individual feel superior, superhuman, sovereign, far removed from society. In another encounter, on a trip to the States where the wealthy person I met was paranoid and unhappy, made stressed and vulnerable by their wealth, to the point where at a party of theirs that I attended, the only other guests seemed to be people in their employ. Another was generous and gave to charity and did many great benevolent works, but their life seemed consumed by the guilt of owning and managing such immense resources.

'I'm not jealous. It would do my head in to be that rich. I'd be so paranoid. I'd become a recluse. Or else I'd end up getting horribly exploited and losing it all.'

Brooke Harrington, at the Copenhagen Business School, whose book *Capital Without Borders* (Harvard University Press) was based on research into the world of wealth management, is instructive on this point. In order to conduct a study of the profession, she trained to become a wealth manager, allowing her enough access to conduct a series of interviews with wealth managers across the globe. What she found was a class of people whose role it was to protect and stabilize the wealth of their clients, who saw their job, as chivalric, medieval - 'income defence providers'. They were loyal to their high net worth clients, sorting out everything from their personal life – putting their kids in rehab, making arrangements to pay a mistress – to looking for the best investment vehicles for their clients' assets. They often described clients who found their wealth to be a great burden, who became obsessed with personal security, privacy, vulnerable to criminals and con

artists, but also in their own way, powerful and unboundaried, and sometimes clearly criminal themselves. 'Like social work for the rich', is how one manager described his role.

And all the while, this wealth without borders accumulates and solidifies, generating more and more and more with the margins getting ever more extreme. The engine of the system working to the logic that it was designed for: more. And the numbers are astronomical, illogical, and so it can only follow that the nation state is pulled out of shape by the gravitational force of all this money. The fact that it happens silently, privately, on computers and servers all across the globe gives it an invisible, metaphysical power.

To be politically conservative, is increasingly defined as being on the side of this accumulation, pushing the tired old line about growth delivering the best for everyone and that it will all happen the most efficiently without pesky regulation or government intervention. Here is the attempt at state capture. Because to anyone who has eyes, the exact opposite of this is true. As wealth has stabilised into the hands of a few, it has taken income out of the system at a terrifying pace, financialising everything in search of profit at any human or environmental cost. And the hyper-connectivity of globalisation means that these wealthy individuals and their defenders, acolytes, riders, and spooks, now all co-mingle all over the globe. The effect on democracy is palpable.

Add to this toxic mess some increasingly influential 'think' tanks, whose funding is deliberately opaque and whose chief purpose is to brief ministers with 'research' that further favours the politics of state capture. The lobbies for gambling, mining, and financialization and the wealthy right wing, have become powerful steers to government policy, against the opinion (and also the knowledge, thanks to the largely captured press) of most of the polity. Brooke Harrington discovered in her research that about 23% of the people she interviewed had views about their responsibility to a wider society that 'would make Mr Burns blush'. It is these opinions, this deliberate cruelty, absence of empathy or insight, coupled with a deep chauvinism, which is so troubling.

'I'm not jealous. I'm scared.' I said, and then we were both a bit uneasy, and realising that I'd been ranting and she'd been tolerating it, I changed the subject and we ate our pasta and our panna cotta and were satiated for a while and the wine made me feel like it had maybe been a nice idea to have a holiday, or at least be in this restaurant and that it was a relief that in this moment she seemed to like me after all, and we went back to the hotel and had sex.

The next day, the weather was at least dry, but still grey, there was a heavy cloud seemingly sat on top of us, with a fringe of light somewhere out at sea on the horizon, but there was little wind, so no chance that it would clear anytime soon. My girlfriend woke up in a dark mood and it took quite a long time to actually leave the hotel. We planned to take a walk across the cliffs, because we'd read that it was beautiful. But to get there we had to take a small public bus that rattled across the island. On the bus were a few old people and a man who kept making loud mooing noises. I wondered at the lives of the ordinary people in this place and what they were like. There didn't seem to be much social housing that I could see. As we crossed the island it seemed that the land was parcelled up into small square fields, and everything had a large defensive hedge or a fence. Plot after plot with the same kind of white, shuttered houses. There was something very weird and oversold about the place, as if every particle of it had been weighed and valued.

We got off the bus and walked across a verge and then found that we were on public land. We had a map from the hotel which was a bit more approximate than accurate, but at last some views and some fresh air. The thump of our feet on the soft, tussocky grass, the satisfying crunch of gravelly soil, the smell of the sea, I could feel my shoulders opening a little. Nature at last, the impassive surface of a flat calm sea. We walked uphill, following the path in silence. It was strange, although it was by the sea and it was pretty, it still seemed utterly joyless, the reason why suddenly hove into view. Around the corner was the remains of a military installation. A WW2 artillery battery, with a round observation tower carved into the cliff edge. A turret, of smoothed concrete, covered in smears of rust, the eyes of its observation decks narrow like a warning. A relic of the Nazi occupation.

'Eugh.' We both shuddered and wandered around the ruins. My girlfriend walked away from me, down a path, lower and closer to the edge. I watched her and sat on a low wall looking at the scratchy gravel the heather and campion.

Jersey was among the last places to be liberated. Although, here, the horrors of its WW2 history is more nuanced than some. It was a 'soft' occupation, the Wehrmacht saw Jersey and Guernsey as their first stepping stone to the bigger prize of the UK. There were no Gestapo or SS officers in Jersey and the islands were allowed to keep their own laws, courts and civil governments. It wasn't until towards the end of the war, when food was in short supply that conditions became difficult. Even so, there is something sobering about

encountering the physical remains of the Nazi regime. The terrible expanded heat of it, the rage and abjection, the horror, the wasted lives, all seem to be contained even in the dust of its remains.

When I looked up from my phone, my girlfriend had vanished. I walked down the path that she had taken to find her a few hundred yards away out of view, standing, staring at the sea. She was too close to the edge and seemed to be unsteady on her feet and I looked at the vertiginous drop below, the sharp rocks and the ferment of the sea. Then she looked up at me and seemed to shake herself out of it, wiping away tears with the corner of her sleeve.

When she got close enough I said. 'I thought you were going to throw yourself off.'

She held my gaze and said nothing and I wasn't sure what to think and I was glad when we returned to the relative safety of the main path.

We carried on along the clifftops the scale of the hotel map making it hard to figure out the way. There was a natural crater, made of a collapsed cave, called The Devil's Hole some way along the cliffs and we thought we might end there. And we walked on, getting into a warm rhythm, her mood seemed to lift a little. Lability, what a pain in the arse it is.

But then we became hot and thirsty and realised we hadn't brought enough water. Somehow, we became baffled by a series of unexpectedly blocked off paths, some thickets of brambles, until we found ourselves walking into the remains of what looked like a block of holiday chalets. Broken and abandoned, there were large chunks of fallen masonry, rubbish, the remains of a fire. Surrounded by a breached fence it had clearly at some point been used for impromptu parties. Spray painted in capital letters in the doorway were the words RAPE HERE.

'Something twisted in my gut.

'What *is* this place?' she asked.

We looked at it uneasily, wondering if there might be something monstrous hiding in the dark of the broken doorway.

'Let's get out of here.'

It was the sight of this catastrophe that sent us off on the wrong path, we couldn't figure out how to get round it, so we ended up walking inland instead more than we should have done.

'Probably just kids.' I said, trying to rationalise my fear.

‘Is it this way?’ We set off down the lane, lost and a bit disorientated. I looked at my phone, but there was no signal.

We tramped on. By this point we were very thirsty, although not yet hungry, because we’d eaten too much of the buffet breakfast. The lane became narrower and the hedge more tangled and unkempt until it seemed that we had followed a private path. On the hotel map there was a road nearby that should have taken us to a bus stop but it was increasingly clear we weren’t on that road.

‘Come on let’s go back.’ I said.

‘I don’t want to go back to that rape place. Let’s just get to the end – maybe there’s a way through.’

When we arrived at the end of the lane there was no road, just a smell which was turning into a stench and the sense that we were stumbling deeper and deeper into something unknown, and then suddenly there it was, not even a field, more of a muddy enclosure, dark and wet and full of rubbish – scraps of blue tarpaulin flapping in the wind and rolls of barbed wire. And the noise, which stopped abruptly when we saw them, and they saw us, and for a suspended second, we looked at each other, before they turned and moved towards us as one, necks raised, beaks open, hissing. Geese, all with clipped wings, necks raised, swarming towards us.

We backed off. The only alternative was to return the way we’d come to the rape place and find another exit. We did this with gritted teeth and then found that there was indeed another turning that in our haste we’d missed.

‘This was a really terrible place to have a holiday. I’m sorry.’ I said, as we finally reached the bus stop. My soon-to-be-ex-girlfriend didn’t contradict me.

When the bus came, we sat on it, thirsty and relieved, and I was glad that we were going home in the morning, but also, suddenly afraid for the future of my country. About this strange place with its City of London values. It was almost like visiting the phenomena of a cult. And it wasn’t until we arrived back in St Hellier, to the glass and chrome and uncannily empty streets, that I realised at last the true nature of my error. I had been seduced by the stock photography, had done what Audre Lorde warned against, mistaken ‘the trappings of success in a sick society for a meaningful life’. I had bought into something that promised relaxation and glamour, but found instead something else, something far

more frightening: the loud hiss of anxiety and a vertiginous sense that there was some unnameable wrong being done in the air all around me.