

From **A Proper Holiday**

Chapter 1. The Woman in the Golden Bikini

Crispin Delancey raised his head from his sunbed and turned it slightly to look at the woman who was about to lower herself into the aquamarine pool. The effort was painful. He was lying on his stomach, which was not quite what it had once been, and muscles buried beneath the layers of untanned flesh twanged uncomfortably when he tried to call them into service.

She was thirty-ish, he supposed. Her compact body wore a yellow bikini like a second skin. She had light, crinkly hair which sparkled in the sharp mid-morning sunlight, creating altogether the appearance of a svelte, illuminated lemon. Crispin watched her as she swam proficiently across the circular pool. He didn't recollect seeing her at the airport yesterday, but then there'd been several busloads of them destined for different hotels.

'You'll burn if you don't do something about it!' A large tapestry bag arrived by Crispin's right ear accompanied by his fun-loving, fattish, forty-something wife, Dodo. 'Remember last year? You looked like a beetroot. And it's worse now, because of the ozone layer.'

Crispin turned over, sat up, and squinted at the sun on its busy skin-damaging journey across the sky. 'Okay, where's the stuff, then?'

'You always rely on me, don't you?' grumbled Dodo happily. She reached into the depths of her very large tapestry bag, wherein sun creams nestled with Mary Wesleys and Fay Weldons, and packets of sweets and plasters and aspirin and tissues and Jacob's cream crackers, and a copy of the insurance document which told them how to get flown home in the event of broken legs and other emergencies. 'There you are, you can start with a factor twenty. I'd better do your back for you.'

Dodo's hands pounded his flesh with thin almond-scented cream, and her mouth rattled words, wrapped in the same aroma, towards him. 'The girls have gone off to inspect the village. They're convinced there's a disco in it somewhere. Can you remember what the man in the travel agent's said? That rep for the travel company - the one who met us at the airport yesterday - she's supposed to be coming here today. We should ask her about going to Ephesus. It'd be good for the girls to have a bit of culture. There,' she gave his creamy back one last slap, 'you'll do for a bit.'

Crispin lay down again. It was nice to get away from everything. They always spent two or three weeks abroad in the summer - Dodo claimed a spell in the sun was essential to her survival. He wasn't sure about his. Somewhere in his head he fantasized about a real holiday - one without obligations, without routines, in which one was absolutely free to - well, have a holiday. The problem of getting away from everything was that an awful lot of it seemed to come with you...

Crispin was a reluctant businessman. He and Dodo had been children of the 1960s. Flower children. Dodo had worn long skirts and Crispin flowered shirts, and they'd stuck flower transfers on their Citroen Dyane: roses and poppies larger and pinker

than life and Crispin's own about-to-be-sunburned back. All had been rootless pleasure - music, laughter, love, sex, freewheeling circles of hash smoke - though he had been keener on that than Dodo, who'd always worried that it would make her do something she didn't want to, a possibility that was made more likely in view of the fact that she usually didn't know what she did want.

From then to now: Crispin has problems piecing this journey together. Though he wears business suits (and fashion has brought bright-coloured shirts back in), though he has an accountant and a solicitor and a bank manager and too many bank accounts, mortgages and loans to list on the fingers of both hands, and though he and Dodo live in fashionable Hampstead in a married, nuclear family kind of way, though he is a father and attends PTA meetings to protest against the education cuts, and is a member of the local Residents' Association to protest about the residents' parking scheme and the bumps in the roads, yet it is still possible that at heart Crispin Delancey remains an unrepentant flower child.

Later, when the representative from the Proper Holiday travel company came, they all sat round the bar by the side of the pool. Next to Dodo was the woman with the nice body in the golden bikini. Crispin tried smiling at her slightly while the state of his face still allowed him to do so in comfort. Next to golden bikini was a tall man, brown and furry as a monkey, wearing a peaked cap and a brass chain. Peaked cap man had lost his mother, apparently, and someone else, more credibly, a child. The Delanceys' own off-spring, Jade, aged sixteen, and Star, aged fifteen, strode towards the bar from the direction of the town with the sun striking the metal eyelets of their DMs and glancing off their purple (jade) and black (Star) hair, though only Jade's had multi-coloured extensions in it (£16 a time from Here's Hair in Hampstead High Street)...

'What shall we do this afternoon?' asked Dodo brightly. 'How about a spot of rock climbing? Or snorkelling?'

The girls groaned. 'We've only just got here.'

'I think I'll have a sleep,' said Crispin, 'if you don't mind.'

The Rhapsody Palas had only thirty rooms, built in an L-shape round the circular pool. All the rooms had little patios opening either on to the pool or on to the river. Crispin and Dodo's room opened on to the river, but tall reeds hid it from view. In front of the reeds Suleyman, the hotel gardener, had planted some carmine pink miniature roses called 'Angela Rippon'. The flowers gave weak colour and fragrance to make up for the lack of view and for the incessant noise of the tourist-laden dolmuses making their way down river to the sea and the turtles, or up river to the lakes and the mud baths...

Crispin lay between the cool white sheets listening to the noise of the river boats.

There was a slight breeze, so the reeds and the orange-pink and white blooms moved gently between the butterflies and the ordinary flies and the purple-bodied military-looking dragonflies. The door on to the patio was open, but Crispin had drawn the white curtains across it to prevent himself from being seen.

He closed his eyes. The beer had given him a headache. The white curtains waved and voices passed in between the roses. 'If you go to Kas ... the site of the old theatre ... binoculars ... shrub warbler ... not right ... how much ... My wife?' There were two

voices, one Turkish and male, one male with another accent. Crispin heard but didn't listen. He was on holiday.