



THE DANCE OF THE BOAR

A fête dansante in a Turkish cove



The springs of Pamukkale, late afternoon

My five passengers in the van were sick as dogs. They'd been retching and heaving since waking up that morning and were spending most of the ride to the sea dozing off and wallowing in self-pity. Curiously, I felt fine, though something in last night's dinner seemed to have affected the rest. Worst of all was the Old Turkey Hand, who considered himself an expert, having lived in-country with his family for several years in his youth. Confident of Pamukkale's medicinal properties, he had drunk from the spring with great élan and now his belly had bloated up like a rock. Despite his bravado and apparent savoir-faire, the rest of the crew had timidly resisted the temptation to share in Pamukkale's medicinal waters and now, in the clear light of day, we were beginning to get an inkling as to why there were so many tombs lined up outside Pamukkale.

The drive down the mountains was scenic and we passed through peaceful villages, tidy fields and the occasional stream. Stopping at a village for refreshments we bumped into a tambourine-playing street musician, complete with dancing bear.

By now The Old Turkey Hand felt sufficiently recovered to show us how slow-dancing with the animal was done. Positioning himself for the dance, he quickly discovered

that his overly friendly partner had latched on to him with fierce determination and we watched him try desperately to free himself from the bear's tenacious grip. The ensuing struggle gave us great amusement, impressed as we were by The Old Turkey Hand's skill in an ursine pas de deux. The animal finally let go and, with little more than scratches and a bruised ego, our friend boarded the van and we continued on, driving down the winding road into Bodrum, aroused with the anticipation of boarding the *Lorima*, a 45-foot sailboat we had chartered for the week.

Parking near the charter office, I proceeded to do the check-in, signing the necessary paperwork and going over the ship's systems while the rest of the crew shopped for provisions in the local market. Besides my wife and I, we had two other couples on the trip. One of them were our neighbours in the Sausalito Yacht Harbour who lived on their boat and had decided to join us only at the last minute. The other couple consisted of The Old Turkey Hand and his wife. Although he had almost no sailing experience, he provided impeccable credentials as an expert in all things Turkish. His recent affairs with Pamukkale's water and the dancing bear, however, had cast a minor pall on his reputation, yet we remained hopeful his background would provide us an inside track to Turkish customs, knowledge that we considered invaluable in negotiating with the locals during our cruise.

Early the following morning, with the boat fully provisioned and everyone well rested, we cast off and set course across the Gulf of Gökova. The boat handled well in the freshening breeze, clipping along at 9 knots under reefed main and jib. But the Turkish charter company's poor maintenance of the vessel soon became apparent, as we lost the second and third reef lines through the boom and, more alarmingly, we started to take on water through the toilet through-hull. We also found water under the sink, though a simple taste test determined it was a fresh water leak from one of our tanks. It was obvious that we'd have to stop to effectuate repairs. A quick look at the charts showed the protected harbour of Geçi Bükü only a few hours away and we altered course for the inlet, our darkened mood lightened considerably by the Bloody Marys being passed around.

By late afternoon we were nosing into Geçi Bükü, marvelling at the spectacular scenery. Wild rocky formations and densely forested headlands competed with the occasional ruin of an ancient fortress. The wind had died down and the water was still as a mill pond. At the innermost part of the inlet lay half a dozen restaurants and a small dock. Very few boats were at anchor and we motored to a spot near the restaurants, dropping the hook in mud over ten feet of water and securing our stern with a line to a tree on the shore.



Still cove, afternoon, Turkey, 1989

With the crew eager to get off the boat, I endeavoured to inflate the dinghy but soon discovered it was a dilapidated piece of useless junk. Several unpatched holes made it impossible to keep inflated, so we hailed a water taxi to take the restless ladies ashore while I went below to try and make sense of our situation. Trying the radio, I couldn't determine if we were beyond signal range or if the VHF was dead, since nothing but static emanated from the machine. I decided to make a list of the repairs we'd need to do and tackle them in order the following morning, starting with locating and plugging the leaks. A little music would be nice, so I put a CD in the boat's sound system. Nothing. It too, was on the fritz. What the hell, we were on holiday and there was no use in getting my knickers up in a twist. Committed to enjoying this beautiful place, I hailed a water taxi and made my way ashore to join the crew for drinks and maybe dinner at one of the quay-side restaurants. We'd deal with these issues in the morning. Might as well have fun tonight.

We stirred the next morning to find dead house batteries and virtually no water in the tanks. The steady leaks had kept the bilge pumps and water pressure pumps working all night, draining the batteries; our fresh water tanks had leaked into the storage bins; food and our shipmate's video camera, as well as much of his clothes, could be seen floating in a storage locker. By now the crew was grumbling about our deteriorating situation and, before it got any worse, I figured I'd head into shore and phone the charter company to demand repairs, another boat or our money back.

Several hours later we were visited by the charter repair crew, having driven over from Marmaris with tools, a new dinghy and an eager disposition to please. By late afternoon, the mechanics had fixed the leaks and replaced the broken parts, wishing us well on our journey as they climbed back into their car.

During the course of the day, while the mechanics were at work on the boat, the crew had split up. Some had gone swimming, others lazed on deck with a book and a few had spent the day exploring the tiny village. Later that afternoon, we were all aboard enjoying a leisurely drink in the cockpit when we were hailed by an enthusiastic fellow on a rowboat, inviting us over to his restaurant that very evening, informing us that tonight they were serving fresh wild boar and that they would be honoured with our presence.

“Boar! Now I could really go for some of that,” I enthusiastically exclaimed with a broad grin. “Can’t think of a better way to end this unfortunate hiccup in our otherwise perfect cruise! What do you say, are we on?”

The crew looked at me with some trepidation, but my eagerness and optimism was infectious and we soon agreed to join the chap in his restaurant in an hour’s time, after finishing our cocktails. I reminded my friends that Turkish food is some of the best in the world and I was sure that tonight we would enjoy their superlative cuisine as it’s meant to be relished: in a small taverna on the beautiful Turquoise Coast, surrounded by friends and good cheer.

Piling into the dinghy we motored over to the restaurant’s dock. The girls were sporting their finest and the mood was buoyant. Our boat was fixed and our holiday could now begin in earnest. Happily, we filed up the ladder and walked up the dock toward the restaurant. Although the weather was mild and the sun had shined all day, no tables had been set on the terrace. Eating was obviously not going to be *al fresco*, so we stepped into the restaurant, taking a few moments for our eyes to adjust to the gloom. To the left was the bar, backed by rows of dusty bottles and football posters. A naked 60-watt bulb hanging overhead lit the shining dome of the portly barkeep who, spreading his arms wide, said, “Welcome, dear friends! Please take a table! Dinner will be served shortly!”

In the darkness we could see several tables set up with plastic table cloths and we headed for one seating six. Not much was visible in the rear of the restaurant but the dull gleam of an old jukebox slyly glimmering with the promise of great entertainment to come.

The waiter quickly brought us beers and salad, which we proceeded to devour. Despite the unglamorous feel of the place, I was feeling optimistic. This was the real thing: we would feast like the locals! We finished our salads and nibbled away at the bread, waiting for The Boar, the pièce de résistance. But it wouldn't come. It was obstinately waiting for our appetites to grow, so that we could appreciate each morsel with the dignity it deserved. How else to explain this unexpected delay? Despite my unflagging enthusiasm, the ladies were beginning to fidget and question the wisdom of having come, when there was so much food on the boat that we could have eaten instead.

Finally, and with great ceremony, we were served The Boar. On my plate lay several charred pieces of meat of dubious origin, looking very much like a half-smoked cheeroot. "Must be the local way of cooking it," thought I, as I stabbed it with a fork and put a piece in my mouth. Then I began to chew. After chewing for several minutes, the morsel had not yielded an inch in its determination to wear out my jaw, unwilling as it was, to let even the bravest of my digestive juices make a dent in its carapace. It was clear that this was going to be war: one of us had to give, me or The Boar. So I happily continued chewing, oblivious to the faces our spouses were making and the concerned looks they were giving each other. There was little in the way of conversation at that table, with everyone focused on his chewing, but the gist of what I was able to ascertain was that the general opinion regarding the origins of this animal was that it was simply road kill. My ungrateful crew, impervious to the generosity of these hospitable Turks, was hinting that this boar, if indeed it was a boar, had been run over on the road from Marmaris, quite possibly weeks ago, and that our hosts had finally found some suckers to sell it to. Unbelievable!

My friend, The Old Turkey Hand, suggested we continue our meal with rakı, assuring us that after a few drinks we would all feel better about our meal and perhaps could continue our chewing on those disconsolate pieces of meat that sat stubbornly on our plates.

Rakı is the Turkish version of rotgut and I have yet to learn if the Turkish word is a derivation of the English or vice versa, but the results are pretty much the same. After a few shots of rakı, the world seems a friendlier place and one's worries are cast off like old socks.

The ladies thanked him for his chivalrous offer but declined, preferring to return to the *Lorima* and call it a night. Our other male crew member gallantly offered to ferry them back in the dinghy while I vigorously protested, reminding them that the evening had just begun and, if they left now, how would the rest of us get back?

“No problem, efendi!” said the waiter, placing an encouraging hand on my shoulder. “We take you back in the skiff when you want go home!”

Rising from the table, I noticed that during the course of our meal several men had entered the restaurant. Things were looking up; we were no longer the only customers in the place! So, after bidding our friends good night, the old Turkey hand and I sidled up to the bar for more rakı. The solitary lightbulb overhead was now attracting flies, the fly papers that hung in various places from the ceiling festooned with their dead and struggling comrades. By the third or fourth rakı we were feeling no pain. The old Turkey hand and I raised our glasses and toasted to the beginning of a wonderful adventure. Things were looking up indeed!

Just then a lively music sprung from the Wurlitzer, adding ambience to the evening, as the burly gentlemen hovering around the jukebox fed coins into the machine. Feeling a tap on my shoulder, I turned to see that a beefy chap with a bristling moustache and a handsome unibrow was asking me to dance. With no ladies in evidence and unwilling to offend him, I graciously accepted and we stepped out onto the clearing before the bar. Imitating his graceful moves, I circled and snapped my fingers to the beat while his companions clapped and cheered us on. The song ended and I returned to the bar only to have the chap tap me on the shoulder again, asking for another dance. I assented and we returned to the floor, where I tried once again to imitate his charming steps. His companions continued to put coins in the machine and the tireless fellow kept dancing, a glistening sheen of perspiration covering his virile face. After four or five dances I was beginning to tire.

“Why don’t you dance with my friend now? I’m sure he’d be delighted!” I beseeched the tireless lothario. But no, he was adamant that I was to be his dancing partner and, despite my complaints, he insisted that I take the next dance with him, winking at me with a beady eye. The old Turkey hand stood at the bar, glass in hand, chortling to himself, obviously amused by my predicament. What was worse, he was gaining on me with the drinks and the physical strain of the dance was threatening my insobriety! I asked the barkeep to intervene on my behalf.

“That man is the mayor, efendi. He comes here every night to eat and drink and never pays his bill. What can I do?” he replied with a shrug.

Unable to deflect the amorous attentions of the mayor, I decided that the time had come for us to call it a night. I paid the bill and asked the barkeep to have us ferried back to the boat. He informed me that a skiff was tied up at the end of the dock and to go ahead and board, his nephew would row us out in a moment. I climbed aboard and settled into the transom bench, sitting indian style on the stern. The old Turkey

hand climbed in and sat on the bow. A few minutes later, the nephew sprinted down the dock, landing amidships with a single bound. Taking the oars, he began to pull towards the Lorima and I gazed up at a sky filled with countless stars and reflected on the beauty of the moment, the peace and tranquility of a quiet inlet, the still of the night and the presence of a few vessels barely rocking at anchor. This is what we'd travelled half-way around the world to experience.

Observing that the nephew was rowing with great effort, I wondered if he was simply weak or if the boat had such a dirty bottom that it barely moved. Once alongside the Lorima, I was torn from my reverie to see The Old Turkey Hand leap from the skiff to grab hold of the shrouds and pull himself aboard with the nephew clinging to his back like a monkey. A split-second later I was floating in the water, the skiff having sunk like a rock to the bottom. In my reverie, I had failed to notice that the nephew's acrobatic entry at the dock had stove in the floor boards, and we had been taking on water all the way across the bay.

By the time I crawled aboard soaking wet, an ill-tempered crew stood on deck, wakened by the commotion. We discussed what to do with the nephew. I argued that we should take him back in the dinghy, that we owed him at least that! But The Old Turkey Hand insisted we were all too inebriated and should just "Let the bugger swim!"

Eager to get back to bed, the majority agreed, and we laid my clothes out to dry, giving the fellow a blanket for the night.

Rising in a foggy daze the following morning, I saw that the nephew had vanished. No trace of him remained on deck and I wondered if last night's Dance with the Boar had only been a rakı-induced dream whose vague recollection was already beginning to fade. But looking over the side, I saw the skiff lying quietly on the bottom and a new day had begun.



The Turk's skiff lies peacefully on the bottom

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