

Innocents Abroad: Beatrice Yell

Whispers. Audible through the canvas annexe of our VW Combi van. I lay rigid in the dark. Why hadn't we parked somewhere else? Not near a building site with workmen staring at us. Nobody listened to me. I'd had a premonition, stronger than any previous ones. They'd all turned out to be warnings, not taken lightly. The whispers grew fainter. Then silence. I was so tense when the other girl in the annexe suddenly screamed. I catapulted into the van.

She followed and told us, 'A hand grabbed my ankle!'

'Please, please can we go now?', I said.

'No, they're still nearby. We have to stay here'.

So, all six of us young women sat in the van, in a foreign country, to wait until daylight. One prayed aloud. I was numb with fear.

Suddenly we heard loud coughing and we peered out at a small man. He gestured us to go. But nobody moved. With his arms he frantically signalled we should leave. Still, nobody moved. Then he pulled out a long, curved knife, which alarmed everyone. Those men had knives too, he indicated. We all freaked out. I realised we could probably lose our lives, fighting off those rough workmen. Would our bodies ever be found? And would our families ever know?

Suddenly we all galvanised into action. With his help, we hurled the stretchers and the annexe into the van. We jumped in. Someone shouted *take off*. As we drove to the roadway, we met the truck coming back, full of men in high spirits. We had left with only moments to spare. As we passed, one man grabbed the breast of the girl driving, through the open window. We drove to the nearest town to the police station. After reporting the incident in every language we knew, we tried to sleep on the canvas and tent poles in the van outside the station.

In the morning we drove till we came to a deserted beach and unpacked and repacked the van. After the trauma, we found we were missing

– one tent peg!