

Published in Print version Pure Slush Anthology - 25 miles from here or Anywhere but here.

Beneath the stars I am small.

Within the grand scheme, I am but the tiniest cog.

If I should die in the remoteness of this foreign place, I should be smiling.

My destiny would be fulfilled.

But not today. Not yet.

Say it quickly enough and two thousand miles can sound like it is at the end of the street.

Think about being in a plane at 30,000 feet hurtling through unbreathable air at 500 miles per hour for four hours and it sounds a lot closer. Comparatively speaking, right next door.

It is a yearning deep in my heart which in turn wrenches a keening cry from my soul; a longing and a passion for a place burned into every fibre. It twists in serpentine fashion until in my head the swirling kaleidoscope comes to rest. This unwanted but admittedly prolonged and unfulfilled hunger and desire leads down a deep well of even deeper dis-satisfaction. Not just a hankering or a yen or even a pining – these words carry insufficient weight here. It is not an unrealistic yearning or even a longing heavy with sadness. There is a little sadness, but that is outweighed by hope and joy. These are merely ripples of past experiences in this place which roll meaningfully up upon the bank. It's not that my home isn't home and full of great memories of things past and anticipations of things to come. It is just that this other place means as much to me as home, feels like home, but for different reasons.

In ancient times it took more than ten years for an ancient warrior to return to the island. Some dispute that he ever landed there at all. For me, when I return it will be with deep thanks in my heart and perhaps without full reason a knowledge that she welcomes me back.

Ah Corfu, Jewel of the Ionian, how I long for you. Named after the nymph Corkira, kidnapped by Poseidon so the tale goes and transported to Corfu. The symbol of Corfu might be said to be my symbol - the rudderless trireme seeking a welcoming shore.

There are days, almost every day to be truthful, when I try to articulate that which I feel in my heart and head in the faint hope that it will draw me that bit closer to the island. Yet, the words to convey that message never properly come. Too often the words emerge sounding like travel brochure filler. Corfu - endless natural beauty, song, church and music as much cosmopolitan as its villages are traditional. Long long ago, when youthful optimism sat easily upon my shoulders and horizons were infinity, Corfu captured my heart like the sirens who ensnare unwary sailors, clenching me to her bosom in a grip which could never be broken. Even though the same sun and moon shine over all the Greek islands the sun seems to shine brighter over Corfu; dazzling reflections in glass and sea and marble. The moonshine which traces a path across the bay straight as Eros' arrow to my table in some rooftop restaurant illuminates the communion of a lover and his love with stunning, ethereal clarity. To its deepest depths my soul is warmed and in no more than the single beat of a desperate heart Corfu is transformed into the molten heart of my ikegai – that which brings joy to my everyday life, my thoughts and builds inexorably towards a fulfilled life.

Two thousand miles with no immediate hope or means of travel might as well be half a million miles without a rocket, and as angry as it makes me (with myself) the separation is often more than I can bear. A balladeer sings of 'lovers who walk all alone', and in my despair at our separation I can all too easily imagine I am that lover. My head is full of dreams, full of longing and full of wonderful memories occasionally tinged with sadness.

Pantokrator, brown and forbidding standing tallest amongst mountains carpeted in green, an army of tall, straight pinnacles of Cypress marching up and down its slopes. Clear turquoise sea breaking upon rocky headlands which protect private coves and sandy beaches accessible only by small boat which is moored off-shore, demanding a cool swim through clear water to shore. Stepping over slick and shiny pebbles, feeling sand push between toes, sun beating on drops of sea water streaming down my back.

Thousands of years of conquest and liberation have laid down layer upon layer of history which demands to be re-discovered and appreciated. The Ionian has seen life blossom since prehistoric times and latterly its situation on the trade and conquest routes to and from the Balkans, Italy and the Levant, ensured that Man would tread upon these lands – sometimes with love and sometimes with anger in their hearts. Myceneans, Romans, Byzantines, Ottoman Turks, Venetians, French, Russians, the British and the Greeks left their legacies as I hope to leave mine.

When I am there.

Which I am not.

Yearning. I am.

Planning. I am.

Scheming. I am.

Plotting my return. Every moment of every day.

I look down at the boarding pass and ticket which I have printed off.

Not long now my love.

Not long now.