

Submitted to Writer's HQ weekly Friday Flash forum.

No sleep for three days.

Bless you, strong Greek coffee.

I feel like a goatherder on an ancient Geek island, on slopes of olive and cypress and brown earth tending manic goats feeding on crazy berries and staying awake all night.

Oh, that the catalyst for my wakefulness was so benign.

Oh, to sip strong coffee with Enlightenment scholars, discoursing on political economies with Hume and Adam Smith.

Or sip with leather-faced ancients in the Old Town.

I drink coffee because I must.

I must stay awake because terror is destroying me.

Coffee, 'the bitter invention of Satan' is my salve, but it is the devil's breath I fear, hot and fiery upon my unprotected back.

I know this can't go on.

It started with my innocuous social media post, expressing empathy with a youthful celebrity.

"You look tired" is all I wrote, but it unleashed a torrent of bile.

The initial response was borne stoically. Derision at my lack of followers, personal attacks on my parenthood, illiterate grammar free tirades. All bearable. If you walk bareheaded in the Sahara, you expect to get burned.

Then it changed.

Some-how they had excavated a personal photo online. Just me with a child, cropped from a larger group at a wedding. Skilfully done. The photo was authentic; the narrative false and splenetic, spewing forth allegations of something altogether evil and illegal. That was two months ago.

Three days ago, the landline trilled. A clear message. They wanted blood. My blood.

I have not slept since.

Today a letter arrived. Second class postage.

They know where I live.

The goats did not want to sleep.

I do. It is more than I can bear alone in this house.

The coffee pot is empty, cold grounds layering the bottom.

I pray for a time machine.

I would visit those crazy, internet-free party-loving goats.

And stay.