

## In the air

Ariel Wagner-Parker

**Lysie Tarama, wife of the Greek prime minister, Yorgos Taramas, suddenly sat bolt upright in bed.**

„Eureka!” she cried. „I’ll organise a conference with the other prime ministers’ wives. That’ll stop the bastards!”

„Stop which bastards?” enquired her husband, sleepily.

„Because if it didn’t, imagine the scandal!”

„Scandal?” Taramas shot up in bed. „During my presidency! What do you mean?”

„The Americans of course. Iraq. The war for God’s sake!” She swung out of bed.

„And just what makes you think you women can stop the war when we, the heads of government, have failed?” A frown of unease creased his brow.

„Because we’ll hold the conference in Baghdad.” She pulled on her dressing gown.

The prime minister leapt out of bed.

„Have you gone bonkers?” he belted. „Do you seriously think we’ll just stand around while you lot swan off to Baghdad? And anyway, you may be totally crazy but the other wives will have more sense!” His uneasiness deepened.

„We’ll see about that, agapi mou!” said Lysie Tarama. And flashing her husband her sweetest smile, she swept from the room.

„Chère amie, just listen. You’re against the war, I’m against the war, I bet you all the wives are, despite what our bloody husbands say. And we’re the only ones who can do anything to stop it.”

Elise Navarin d’Agneau heaved a sigh. She really didn’t want to go to Baghdad at this precise moment: she was passionately involved in a Shakespeare seminar, with her students divided on whether President Bash was closer to Henry V or Richard III ...

„Look at the marches everywhere”, Lysie continued, „but the bastards went ahead just the same. No one listens to the people anymore. So it’s up to us. The religious leaders and the crowned heads won’t go, so we must: the wives of the leaders of the European Union forming a human shield round Baghdad.

They couldn’t risk killing us all and landing themselves in a full-scale international crisis! Chérie, are you still there?”

Elise sighed again. How could she refuse? Her country had stood virtually alone against Bash and PM Blur and her honour required her to do the same. „Well, Lysie”, she heard herself saying, „I’m with you. Shakespeare will still be



Lysie’s elder sister

there when all this is over. What about the other wives?”

„Well, I called Berlin and of course Elsa von Pfifferlingen jumped at the idea. She was going to talk to Elisabeth Sacher-Torte and Bella Zucchini at the opera tomorrow. I’ve got Lisa Bacalhao and the Nordics on board – except PM Liisa Pyttipannu, of course! And I’m seeing Liz Guinness on Saturday in Dublin. Um. Look, will you do Benelux?”

„D’accord, ma chérie. I’m lunching with Betty Kuddel-Fleck on Thursday and I’ll speak to Elisabeth Waterzooi and Lis Gouda in Brussels.”

There was a small silence.

„Which leaves Isabel Paella and Liza Blur,” faltered Lysie.

„It does indeed... Well, once more unto the breach!” said Elise brightly. „I’ll take Liza.”

PM Taramas was on the phone to PM Navarin d’Agneau. „Serious?” he cried, „this is my wife we’re talking about! She’s always serious when it comes to doing something crazy. Something brave and noble, I mean...”

He fingered his collar. „Georges, they’re really going through with it. We’ve got to stop them!”

Georges Navarin gazed through the window at the early spring trees in tremulous bloom. „Cher ami, there are ways. Passports vanish, planes are cancelled, visas delayed. Believe me,” he said soothingly, „there is no need for concern.”

„You don’t know Lysie. And that Elsa von... von... whatshername.”

Navarin d’Agneau felt a stab of unease as the statuesque Elsa arose in his mind.

„Well perhaps I’ll have a word with von Pfifferlingen.” There was a small silence. „But what about Jorge Paella? And Blur himself?”

„Yes. Look, I’ll talk to Paella, if you’ll...”

„They’re serious, Jorge, they’re really going to Baghdad. I’m sure you wouldn’t

# Lysie

want Isabel to join them? Think of the embarrassment, for a pro-war government...” Taramas smirked to himself.

„Isabel is a free woman,” declared PM Paella, „but she knows where her duty lies!” He frowned. „I will however give the necessary instructions, as a precaution.”

„Yes, Isabel, I know Jorge supports the war, but surely you don’t! Your son might have to fight! Why, you bore him in your womb for nine long months, you remember his first smile...”

„Oh, Lysie, I know. I love them both. I have my duty to both...”

Her eye fell on an old photo of Carlito, proud and laughing in his new cowboy suit. She straightened. „But, of course, you’re right. Life is more important than politics. I will go to Baghdad. And maybe I will talk to that judge of ours who keeps trying to prosecute politicians for war crimes...”

„But George, old man, we’re talking about our loved ones,” murmured Navarin, „...and your war,” he added darkly.

„I am confident that my wife would never act in such a way as to be an embarrassment to Her Majesty’s Government!” intoned Blur. „Relax, mon vieux, okay?” he added and in the background Big Ben struck twelve.

Liza Blur had been listening to Elise Navarin for some time.

„So you see, dear friend, we are honour bound to step into the breach. We few, we happy few, we band of sisters!”

„Yes, well... Look, Elise, I know the law; I know this war’s not justified. Either I shut up and smile for the camera, or I do something. Like walk out.” She was pacing up and down. „Look, give me time to think.” She stopped suddenly. „Oh to hell. I’ve thought. I’ll go.”

Things were as ready as they could be: a conference venue had been improvised, transport procured by means both fair and foul, the media discreetly briefed. The leaders of Europe looked on aghast as their wives headed south.

Then Baghdad fell. President Bash went on TV to say they had found no weapons of mass destruction because they’d all been removed to Syria.

Lysie thought swiftly, then got on her mobile phone.

„Elise? Change of venue. We’re going to Damascus! And if we’re too late to save Syria, we’ll go to Teheran, or Riyadh. Or Pyongyang. Or wherever...”