

Story for performance #60
webcast from Paris at 09:01PM, 19 Aug 05



Source: James Bennet, 'For the Palestinians, bitterness and sympathy', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune online*, 19/08/05.

Tags: [disenchantment](#), [countryside](#), [sexuality](#)

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"So who's ya whitey woman, eh?" she breathed into his fine-boned ear. Shirly swung her easy big black body, pressed into his side. Above them bright white stars twinkled in a velvet black sky, just as they had in his childhood roamings on the veldt. A rickety wooden church hall thumped faintly behind them. Steaming bodies, loud electric rhythms, sweat, and a gathering tension rolled in and out of its unhinged doors.

'We met in Sydney. She's the one with a car and a job.' Noorim was unsure of his territory here. He could see beer cans, unwashed men with fists clenching, could hear shouting and swearing and dancing. His grandmother who had sent him to Sanskrit school in Durban would never have approved of such a crowd. 'Common, dirty kaffirs,' she would have muttered under her breath.

'Besides, where I come from it was impossible for me to mix with white women, so this is a novelty!' He watched the big black woman, her bosoms heaving with suppressed laughter, as she called out to her friend across the room.

'Hey, Nance, come 'ere! Come feel 'is fancy afro!' Hey, black boy beauty, we's gunna feel ya up, mmmmm!' Their abandoned laughter swirling around him, he was mesmerized as Shirly and Nance both ran their fingers through his tightly curled, carefully combed up afro hair. Their own tight black curls matched his, of course, but theirs had not been bought. He wasn't sure whether their laughter mocked or admired. In Sydney, heads had always turned to admire his trendy hair, smooth copper skin, full mouth, wide nostrils. American R & R servicemen had just begun arriving in numbers at that time, but Noorim striding down a Kings Cross street in black leather pants, coloured poncho and that carefully combed afro was a head turner. Now, in this little borderland town beside the great brown sluggish snake of a river, the great lumbering heart of Australia's south, he was something else. He was 'black pride' come to town. And his only liability was the white woman who had driven him here in her little white car.

He lifted another can to his shapely lips, gulped as he had never gulped before. And Shirly gently laid him down by the fire, sliding her hands down inside his shirt. 'Mmm ..baby..' he murmured. 'Ooo, mamma.'

Under them, the wet brown dirt was prickled around with spikes of grass. Shirly and Nance embraced their dirt, their country, mothered and smothered him, rolled lusciously between fire, stars, air, noise and man-smell until their shrieks streaked the air and their quarry shrunk beneath them.

The white girl stood apart, saw them, glowed silently at them like the campfire. Huge burning eucalyptus logs sputtered and spat at her, sparks flying with the

changeable winds. Whichever side of the fire she stood on, flames came at her along with muttered words. 'White slut' drifted on a balmy breeze, but black eyes slid away like shadows. She sidled away herself, retreated into the wooden hall, hoping to wait out the night.

To someone she said, 'I'll have to stay here, drive him back, otherwise how will he get back to Melbourne. He's got a fashion shoot next week. It's his first big job. Ads all over the billboards. He'll make a fortune!' But her words drifted into the air like sparks rising.

Inside the hall, she saw suddenly that there were men, hordes of men. Local men were moving slowly from one end of the hall while the visiting Islanders, seasonal fruit pickers, were moving from the other. All had fists clenched, teeth gritted, some had beer bottles in hand. Terrified, she swung around to a woman on the step behind her.

'Is anyone going to stop them?' Her sensible words sounded like so much flummery. She blushed uselessly in the harsh glare of the naked light bulbs.

'Naw, this 'appens ivery year. They'll 'ave their punch up, then it'll be all over. Cops never come out this far. Why don't you git off then?' A malignant grin was directed at her foot on the step, she sagged slightly and disappeared into the dark.

Some men saw her, yelled out 'Heh, whitey!' She ran, fled. Stumbled through long grass, scratchy bushes, slipped in a large depression in the ground. She felt like a fragile animal in flight. Their words shouted behind her like spears flying. She reached the car, flung herself inside, started the engine. As it coughed into life, she swung the steering wheel round looking for a road. They had parked the car round back of the hall, to be nearer the action, the fire, the river, the people. Now she couldn't find a way out.

Hot tears streaked her face. As she shrieked the car into third gear, a man suddenly loomed up in front of the windscreen, brandishing a boomerang. Drunkenly he yelled 'Git outa here ya cunt, git outa my country!' She swerved.

She saw ghosts in the rickety wooden hall. Her grandparents. They intoned "...and the sins of the fathers were visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation..." She gunned the accelerator.

It was a black night. There was no moon. Shirly lay on the ground exhausted from her romantic fireside activity, rolled her eyes to the black heavens and sang 'Take me home mamma, it's a long long way from ma home'.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by M. G. White.