



Source: Bill Ickes, 'Iraqi Sunni groups urge 'no' vote in referendum', *The Age online*, 10/10/05.

Tags: [disenchantment](#), [husband/wife](#), [child/parent](#), [retribution](#), [plants](#)

Writer/s: [Miriam Taylor Gomez](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

Beryl could think of no other flower which excited her as much as did the hydrangea. Its viridescent leaves gave way more than twice a year to rambunctious heads of single petalled flowers. The flowers could be white, pink, chartreuse, or even blue verging on aquamarine. It all depended on how one treated them. A little tin can, from a baked beans dinner, buried near the root system could turn the chartreuse glow to an intense sky blue.

As a cut flower, they were the perfect choice. Once severed from the plant, which showed no resentment, the clusters of flowers stood solidly in a vase, compensating for their lack of perfume by their lovely loyalty. 'Hydrangeas are very dependable,' thought Beryl, 'like me.'

Beryl knew she had been a good mother to her boys and a good wife to Vern. Sometimes, she thought Vern could not care less if she lived or died. Life for Vern seemed to be something of an encumbrance, to get through as quickly as possible with little fuss.

'Stop fussing!' he would say, 'Stop fussing for Christ's sake!' as she searched the cupboards for the right bottle of sauce to compliment his midday meal.

'I put it here yesterday, I'm certain of it. You haven't moved it, have you, Vern?'

'Moved what?' said Vern angrily.

'You know, the thing, the bottle of thingamy,' said Beryl.

'What's a bloody thingamy!' Vern shouted.

'Mind your language, Vernon. You know what I am talking about,' said Beryl.

'Oh, for Christ's sake! Stop fussing, will you?' said Vern, muttering under his breath, 'Stupid bloody woman.'

Beryl had found the bottle and plonked it on the table next to Vern's steaming plate. 'Don't think I didn't hear that,' Beryl said quietly, wiping her forehead with her apron, in the muggy heat of a midsummer's day.

Chewing the sausage and vegetables, placed into her mouth in a modest portion as her mother had taught her, Beryl contemplated the man sitting opposite her. Vern never seemed to get anywhere in life. They still did not own their house and they sold their car years ago. He had worked and kept them in money, but he never paid any attention to the boys. When they were younger, Vern was forever scolding them for harmless acts like bouncing their tennis balls against the side of the house.

Now that the boys were men, married and responsible, Vern still had difficulty speaking to them. So Beryl would fill in the gaps. She was terrified by their silences.

Now, sitting opposite this red-faced, thick-bespectacled man, she could understand why the boys had had nothing to say. She had nothing to say to him. Chewing and swallowing, Beryl experienced an uncomfortable notion. 'Who is this man?'

'I'm going outside to do the lawn,' said Beryl suddenly.

'What's wrong with you?' said Vern in a tone of concern,

because Beryl, without fail, always waited for him to finish his dinner.

'You sick?' he added warily, immediately considering the consequences of Beryl's being ill. He would have more work to do. Maybe the boys' wives would come and lend him a hand.

'No,' replied Beryl who was propelling herself on her sturdy legs, towards the back of the house.

She removed her house slippers on the back landing and stepped into her gardening shoes. She felt lighter today. She had done something different, leaving Vern like that at the table, just like that.

The dark green clumps of summer clover writhed as she cast her eye across the lawn of carefully mown couch grass.

'I don't hate you, clover,' said Beryl as she knelt down on the grass, 'It's just that you can't stay there. You have to come out. Wrecking my nice lawn.' Her mother had taught her that uprooting was better than all the poisons in the world. And her mother was always right. Her mother had been right about Vern. Why hadn't she listened all those years ago? She hadn't. You never do when you are young, especially if you are desperate to get away. A young policeman and a dying dairy farm. A cocktail for change, as you might say.

Cocktails. Beryl had never tasted one. She had always wanted to, like the women in the movies, but it was not a Beryl sort of thing to do. Vern drank. He liked rum. There was nothing seductive about it, like the ads on television suggested. It just left a feeling of disgust. Like the feeling she had for clover. Vern, and clover, well, they were simply repulsive, a nuisance, a weed, to be gotten rid of as neatly as possible.

With thoughts of cocktails, Beryl reminded herself to make the special formula. She was careful to handle the Hortico Bindii and Clover Killer carefully as it said in the instructions on the ridged brown glass bottle. Thick rubber gloves. Try not to breathe it in. Try not to splash it on exposed skin. The hydrangea blue egg cup. Just the right size for the small measure of poison that she daily added to Vernon's cups of tea. He drank five cups a day, too many she thought for any man, but he liked his tea. One blue egg cup held enough weed killer for five cups. She liked that hydrangea blue egg cup. Fine china.

The clover patch was gone, and the wilting weeds were piled on her right side. All at once, Beryl was aware that Vern would be waiting for his cup of tea.

'It's time!' came a booming voice. Beryl shook herself and thought 'Oh Lord, the madwoman next door and she will keep me here for hours.'

'I have a lot more to do before the sun fries eggs on me, dear, so cheerio!' said Beryl raising her voice, then she scuttled into the wet-soil-smelling laundry under the house. The hydrangea blue egg cup was waiting for her on the cool shaded shelves next to the Bindii killer.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Miriam Taylor.*