



Source: 'Shelling scare disrupts ceremony', *New York Times* in *The Age online*, 24/11/05.

Tags: [animals](#), [intimacy](#), [literature](#)

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Crick struggled not to say something. He looked at the sea. He was learning to hold his tongue—park it quietly on the curb outside the conversation. He'd been wrong too often: savage, like a chariot from Ben Hur carving through a dinner party. Now he was going to be a nicer person. Glancing down, he saw a half rotted condom in the dusty grass. It looked delicate, like bird bones. The picnic was well underway. He rolled over to talk to Jenni.

Jenni was just getting the first line of a novel in her head: 'I became a tourist in my own lifetime.' That was a good start. She gazed absently at Crick's lips as they bounced around. She was getting the next bit: 'although not as in the days of the P & O Line.' Damn, Crick's voice was filtering through her creative spurt.

'I mean you'd think he invented the news himself!'

Before Jenni could tell Crick she didn't know what he was talking about a child in a black dress bumped a pink mediball against Clarke Carson's face. Clarke stood up: loomed in fact, and pulled a face at the little girl running bawling towards her mother and a tattooed man holding a plastic bag.

Clarke Carson was a person Fiona couldn't see, well not when she wasn't looking at him directly. She just could never remember what he looked like, even though she'd slept with him. She fixed her gaze deliberately on him now, trying to memorise every feature so she'd never forget again—sandy hair, freckles, banana yellow eyes, ears like Kerry Stokes...She'd asked her friend, Chestor, who also slept with him, if he had the same problem. Chestor said no.

She rolled over to talk to Elle about her trip to Cairns. Elle was going on though, about the arts—every artist/writer should get a stipend from the state at least as big as the dole, like in New Zealand, or Ireland, or America, where even George Bush had contemplated subsidies for verse writers, as well as farmers. Fiona could get tired of writers she thought, but just then a quote from some book came uninvited into her head—'They all looked at me, shaking their heads, their mouths full of cherry stones.' She lay back on the rug. Where had that come from? Why would writing never leave her alone? Turning sideways, she could see at least 50 dogs in the park. One was nearly as big as a horse. She turned back to the sky and watched baroque, Vienna coffee clouds rolling over and over and over.

Bim, who'd been talking to Alliana, poured himself another glass of red and picked up a copy of *Spectrum*. There was a review of a book about Sterne—a disreputable type, the reviewer said. It was the only thing in *Spectrum* worth reading. Bim would have liked to get back to London for the Sunday papers. He thought he knew a lot about Australia—more than any native whiteman. He liked to show off to his friends. So now was the time to launch into a history of the park—back as far as the fifties. 'Wirth's Circus used to come here then but the elephant ploughed up the grass; and there were tram sheds over there and later, a bowling alley. They had a black chimpanzee rolling a golden ball down the lanes at the opening. It was the place to be in the sixties.'

'Like being in America', said a local.

'It's like being in America now' someone said.

Fiona was raising everyone up into the sky—Crick, Elle, Joan, Tom, Camelia, Alliana, Jenni, Fay Allure and Chestor—swigging macchiatos, flat whites, or chinottos. But Clarke Carson was not there. He simply would not rise from the rug. She screwed up her eyes to levitate him. Only neon shapes—like artworks in the Biennale—floated up.

Just then a huge black poodle leapt over the sea wall and everyone jumped up. It swam to the Point and disappeared from view. A voice was heard, screaming—'Pluto. Pluto!'

'Do sharks eat dogs?' Fay Allure worried. 'Nah, only people and pussies.' Crick could not resist...He was again looking out to sea—at the sea rolling and rolling in its inimitable way. Somehow he knew that one day, sure as eggs, he would drown in it.

Fiona looked down towards Clarke Carson. He wasn't there. But he was there. He had just disappeared among the squares and zigzags of the picnic blanket—like one of those magic eye pictures in the Sunday colour supplement. She looked skywards again—the cafe was gone, in its place, a hanging rock, huge and towering, like a ragged mark.

Alliana drew her scarf over her face.

'Looks like rain...'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Loma Bridge.*