



Source: Michael Slackman, 'Letter from Iran: Reformists struggling to return to relevance', *International Herald Tribune* online, 08/07/05

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The cat leapt up onto the rim and began walking around the edge, mesmerised by the water gushing from the tap and filling up the bath. The cat's natural aversion to getting wet was struggling with the fascination of a new experience for this was a young cat, barely twelve weeks old, and this was the first time she had ever seen a bath being filled. A tentative paw reached out towards the warm fountain only to be retracted quickly on contact. It had been a bad day and Nadal was in no mood for a frisky cat just when he badly needed to unwind. Perhaps it was the two cups of strong coffee at breakfast, or an unfriendly astronomical alignment or a chemical misfire in his body but the whole day had been marked by a buzzing in his head that wouldn't go away. The events of the day had been slightly off, likely a poorly tuned instrument.

It was the day after the bombs had gone off in London and the media had been full of it. Bush had been comparing all the do-gooding of the G8 with the evil of the bombers. He made the point that while the G8 was meeting in Scotland solving the problems of the world—poverty, the environment—the bombers were killing innocent people on the streets of London. The contrast could not be starker, he said. Freedom versus Evil. The same old, same old. The hypocrisy made Nadal squirm in the warm bath. The cat flinched. Now they were all onto it. Blair and Howard. The hunt for the terrorists. Bali revisited. The Bulldog spirit. The Hazchem team's rapid response. Terror in London. Could have been a Warren Zevon song. The winning bid to host the 2012 Olympics. London beat Paris. Boom boom.

Nadal slid down into the warm water and let it fill his ears but the buzz was still there, even louder. The cat settled on the rim. Nadal thought about the bank. Now they were charging transaction fees for online banking. He wanted to stop paying his credit card bill just to see what would happen. The bank would pass on the job of chasing the money to a collection agency who would harass him but he didn't care anymore. What could they take away?

He had nothing left to take. They could blacken his name and bankrupt him but what did he care? Today his phone had run out of credit and he needed to top it up but his credit card was overdrawn so he couldn't call anyone. He could receive but not send. He was marooned.

Nadal turned off the tap and allowed the silence to reign. The cat closed its eyes after a few moments. It was all wrong. All slightly off. Nadal couldn't put his finger on the cause of the unease. Yesterday his car wouldn't start so he called roadside assistance but his membership had expired so he had to top it up and pay a call-out fee with the last fifty dollars on his credit card. When the roadside assistance arrived the car started immediately, without any assistance whatsoever. Nadal had no money to buy fuel but at least his car had started. He had no money to buy his wife a birthday present. No money to buy beer to watch the Friday night footy. His landline had been barred to outgoing calls to mobiles. The tax office was calling him daily.

He stepped out of the bath and walked into the bedroom drying himself as he went. His penis was flaccid and his balls were starting to sag. He no longer had confidence in his ability to perform. He turned on the television and there it was again. The ads, the news, the never ending flow of rubbish. He left it on for company and put on his pyjamas. Soon he would be able to sleep and the buzzing would stop for a few hours but he wasn't tired yet. He didn't believe in much anymore. He'd lost interest in almost everything. The cat followed him into the room and jumped up onto the bed. Nadal was numb. Numb and dumb. He was a machine for working, for servicing debt. He had ceased to be alive and had become the walking dead. A zombie wolf without the strength to howl.

He sat on the edge of the bed and gazed at the stupid screen. The cat licked its paws. Night fell.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Boris Kelly.*