



Source: Parisa Hafezi, Reuters, 'Tehran throws down nuclear gauntlet', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 10/01/06.

Tags: corporeality, art, chance, sewing/weaving, streets

Writer/s: Annemaree Dalziel

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

She thought about buttons. Which side of a shirt has the buttons and which has the button holes? She wasn't ambidextrous, but could mime right over left just as easily as left over right.

She vaguely remembered a character in a book whose hands flew off a borrowed shirt as he tried to button it. Looking for a button, he had found a hole. Concealed gender was revealed in this simple act. Was it Huck Finn, or maybe Tom Sawyer? Whichever, he gave away his disguise when his host asked her guest with the shirt to thread a needle. The trick is to slide the eye of the needle over the stationary thread. He tried to push the soft, swaying thread towards the shrinking eye. He stood revealed as a boy in skirts.

So, she thought, shirt buttons are a trap. She was planning to buy buttons today for her new shirt, so this was not idle speculation. Perhaps her new garment was really a blouse? This made her uncomfortable: What a girly word 'blouse' is: the sort of word mothers and aunts and grandmothers insist that you wear to church, or a very little boy would wear as part of his sailor suit. A shirt, on the other hand, is a masculine word, worn by men and borrowed for breakfast by a lover.

Perhaps girls who borrow their brothers' shirts lose the distinction between gendered button holes, adept at closing either. This way, that way, who cares?

That resolved she dyed her hair for the party and while it dried she walked the dog. Their familiar path led along the harbour and round the zoo. She listened carefully for cries from the animals, as she had since the days of endless rain. The animals had wailed in concert at sunset, as though their longing for a distant home was falling from the sky. Today was sunny but she simply didn't believe that a blue sky banished yearning. So she listened, as though her own vague disquiet about where she belonged was somehow satisfied by this odd act of identification.

She jumped on her bike and rode towards the city. She was in search of a bead shop so she might put spherical buttons on her blouse. That word 'blouse' again. Call it a bodice. Yes, that worked. Twelve beads and her bodice would close. She could forget her white coat, its starch, her instruments and note books. She could forget about her student badge, the grubby marks that told the world she had only one coat and hadn't had it laundered. She could go to the party wearing a fanciful new bodice, buttoned like a boy.

She crossed the bridge and headed east. Carried forward by a surge of the traffic she missed her turn. She made her way back and nipped around the corner. She wondered if this was a legal turn? A little guiltily she headed east. The traffic moved slowly.

When she saw the car turning across the traffic it was

already too late, but she swerved anyway.

Time dissolved.

She saw herself as another, that peculiar disintegration and observation of self that is reserved for dreams and extreme experience. She watched as she flew through the air. She was embarrassed that here, in this coolest of streets, she was aping TV Superman. She giggled at this wanton display of dagginess. She was enjoying the flight. She gasped as the side of a bus rushed towards her.

She would be told many months later that this accident had been awful, traumatic, that she had screamed and screamed. She would never recall more than curious fragments of memory: her irritation as someone in casualty cut off her favourite overalls; her laugh as her lack of underwear became apparent; her long blue hair falling as her helmet was removed; and the shocked whisper, 'She's a doctor!'

Most of all she would recall blinding flashes of pain that heralded oblivion, before the arrival of the next curious fragment of memory. She used to wonder what these meant and if her recall of the events of that day would return. Would she ever know the faces of those who helped her, the places they took her, the things they did to rebuild her shattered leg.

But all these events and faces were to remain hidden from her. When she realised that the back of her foot now twisted 15 degrees or so inwards, she teased her surgeon about it. He gave her such a look she felt ashamed. She had no memory of the drama he had faced, the intensity of her injury so she had to imagine it, and to try to give thanks to all those who had helped her.

Her recovery was slow, plagued by a mind that could only flit, never settle. She deferred finishing her medical studies. Later she would realise that a chance moment in traffic had shattered her being. Recovering that was harder than healing.

She fell in with groups of artists. She studied art, cultures, languages. She saw exhibitions and performances that puzzled and excited her. Drawn to the fragments of cloth discarded by dressmakers and tailors she began to piece together little collages that made sense to her. She learnt to make patterns, so she could create shapes, the peculiar garments running through her mind. Performers and artists liked the clothes she was making so she began to work with them to create clothes, exhibitions, theatre, performance.

After seven years and six deferrals she realised that she had made a decision. She had learnt to cut, sew and reconnect fragments with the expertise of a surgeon, but she would not return to an operating theatre as a doctor.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Annemaree Dalziel.*