



Source: AFP, 'UN ceremony wipes Israel from the map', *The Australian online*, 20/01/06.

Tags: [countryside](#), [corporeality](#), [intimacy](#), [sex](#), [world events](#)

Writer/s: [Margaret Morgan](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

A flap opened. A hand slipped out, feeling its way through a darkness thick with the creaking of insects. Legs emerged, long, bent into obtuse angles, small stones and twigs embedded in the flesh, grunting audible from the torso still within, curses under the grunts, would that anyone else were awake to hear them. Another hand appeared, there was a heave and lurch into the night, the tent swaying in precarious balance with the thrust of her efforts, ropes slackening and snapping taut, poles swaying like the masts of a nineteenth century ship.

She stood, at last, outside, upright. Standing without collapsing the accommodation was, she felt, the greatest achievement of her evening. God, she hated camping. At least the mosquitoes weren't biting at this time of year and she had to concede that the sound of the owls was indeed haunting and beautiful and somewhat disarming. But she could have heard them from the comfort of her own goddamn home. Whose idea was this anyway? She could hear him still breathing. Soundly. She paused, a blackness in the black still air, hating The Great Outdoors, hating her naiveté for having thought it might do her good, hating her sense of obligation, her ready agreement. That was what had got her into all her troubles in the first place. Obligation. Duty.

And where did he put her hiking boots? She squinted, as if better to focus the pitch of the dark. Taking a stab at the direction of the outhouse, she stumbled along, unused to the soft and giving earth underfoot, regretting the lack of shoes, muttering, arms partially outstretched, a reluctant dancer in the dark, and, upon finally turning a bend and seeing among the cluster of park rangers' huts, a room still illuminated, she lowered his super-practical, super-bright flashlight—'make a good weapon too' he had added, in his cheerily unthinking way, as they had packed that morning. In that moment she forgot that she held it in her hand, and let slip its dead weight, packed as it was with six D-sized batteries, onto her shoeless foot. 'Fuck!' rang through the forest and through the settlement she approached. The crickets were still. It's just a toe, she reminded herself, involuntarily touching the rough raised lines along her thigh. This was nothing, she thought, but its very inconsequentiality inflamed her all the more. She should have more control. She should be better at this. She should be better at coping. She'd done her share, that's for sure. But this was different, and she so, so wanted to embrace the difference, wanted it to be normal, wanted everything to be normal.

She stood at the door of the hut, face half turned from the light, the flickering color of CNN—civilization of sorts just a short walk from the trees—listening to fragments of the late night reports, the updates, the abstractions, the generalities. Al Jazeera had aired another bin Laden tape; another suicide attack in Tel Aviv; the administration justifying wiretaps to track dirty numbers linked to Al Qaeda. At this hour she was usually in the blogosphere. She missed her home. As she listened to the drone, she sucked on the ends of her braid, a habit from childhood to which she'd found herself returning: it had started when she'd come home, when she'd let her hair grow. The braid went into her mouth, her mouth an o to take in its tip, the tip swelling with spittle, like a scribe's brush dipped in ink. If only she could write the words. She stood there, ungainly, sucking, the ends of her braid a sodden

rope.

'Whatcha do?' The ranger had looked up from the screen and was eyeing her skeptically.

'Huh?' she said meeting his gaze, her ruminations scurrying to the nether edges of her consciousness. She had forgotten how her frame filled the door, and how inadequately dressed she was for the company of a stranger. He motioned floor-ward with his hand, her gaze following his, down her person. She saw the purple stub of her right big toe. Her gaze telescoped away from the throbbing digit, a deep space, a kind of darkness like the night, opening up within herself. She saw a small, distinct pool of bloody ooze on the threshold.

'I stubbed my toe.'

'I can see that.'

'Sorry. I've made a mess on your floor.'

He threw her the paper towel. He watched her bend down. After wiping up she held the dirty paper between the tips of her fingers, waiting for him to offer her a trash can.

A pause.

'Can't sleep. Thought maybe I could get a drink, a beer or something here.' She knew the rules. She knew his reply would be in the negative.

'Nope. Nothin' here m'am. Gotta bring in what ya' need and take out all your trash.—You did remember to hang your food, didn't you?'

'Yes, yes.' She wasn't an idiot.

He stared at her long legs, the scarred flesh, at the sodden rope of her braid.

'Well, good night now.'

'Um, which way's the bathroom?'

He smirked, he had her figured out, he thought.

She hobbled away. When she returned to the tent, she leaned into it, more awkward than ever, dreading her re-entry, when two hands reached out for hers, glowing white in the night, like zombie hands from a horror movie grave. They pulled her inward. 'Watch my foot!' she snapped, wanting to make it his fault. But he said nothing, only held her, over his body, stroking her back with his hands.

He turned her, grazed her skin, from face to navel to the flaps of her cunt, running his tongue along the furrows of her body, whole, still whole, stroking her as if to tally the completeness of it all, and all the while pulling on the thick braid, amazed at its wetness.

'Still sucking, huh?'

She breathed. She smiled in the dark, his lewdness so sweet.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Margaret Morgan.*