



Source: Martin Chulov, 'Palestinians vote in cliffhanger poll', *The Australian online*, 26/01/06.

Tags: [film](#), [countryside](#), [corporeality](#), [water](#)
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The screen is speckled black, the black of exposed film—swarming with grain. The sound: of muffled breathing, deep and even.

Fade up from black: dim, blue-grey light. Underwater.

Her hand grips the steel chain, the skin a pale yellowy-green colour. Her wrist and arm is clothed in the black, tight neoprene of a wet suit. Her knuckles, white.

She tilts her line of vision up to the silver-mirror, mercury-like underside of the water's surface. She hears her own breathing, loud and reverberant under the rubber hood and face mask. She tastes her own breath in the respirator that fills her mouth: dry and salty.

The movement of the sea swells her gently up and down, toward and away from the sky and air. Looking down, bubbles fill her vision, released from the other divers descending below her. The chain is visible for about three meters, curving off gradually to the sea floor. She can just make out the tops of their heads and shoulders before they move out of the range of visibility. With her right hand grasping the chain, her left one fumbles to find the pressure gauge. Reading it, she sees the needle indicating that the reserve air has already been used.

From above, a thudding, drumming sound, like a distant engine.

She looks up. Heavy rain is penetrating the sea surface, breaking up the light, darkening the visibility.

She hears her breathing quicken, becoming more irregular as she intermittently holds her breath. Her taste becomes bitter. The sea seems bloated around her as it fills with more water.

She watches as she moves her left hand, then her right hand, one below the other. She descends. Sharp focus on her hands and the links of the chain only. The mid and background are out of focus. She has a sense she has moved downward two to three metres.

Behind her eyes and in her sinus, the pressure peaks. A shrill, white-noise pans from the left to the right side of her head. Her vision blurs, becoming grainy. She needs to stretch her jaw to help equalise. She holds her nose through the face-mask and blows. The pressure doesn't ease.

As the high-pitched sound builds, the image fades to black.

Fade up to bright daylight, a densely wooded, eucalypt forest. White, harsh, midday light shoots through the tree canopy.

The track in front of her is narrow and overgrown, suggesting it is rarely used. The high-pitched sounds of cicadas continue, building to a squealing climax and gradually dropping off. The rhythm of this peak and decay follows her along the track, as she walks through the

envelope of sounds.

She notices the dense, green-grey bushes and dry, yellowed grasses, hears the screeching of cat birds, the reply of whip birds, the rustle of goanna belly on bark.

The crackle and snapping of leaves and sticks under her feet gets louder. She hears foot fall, clumping through undergrowth, off to one side of the track.

She stops. Listens.

Echo and silence.

Nothing, except everything else.

Insects sound louder. And more persistent. Deafening, maddening, penetrating: drowning out the sound of her fear. But she can taste it, sour and resentful. Moving faster along the track now, its overgrown branches making it difficult to move freely, scratching her arms and legs. Thorn bills and wrens dart out of the scrub, disturbed by her movement.

The track runs out, over-grown by noxious plants. She faces a sandstone cliff-wall, blackened by antediluvian water stains and sticky moss. There is a steel ladder bolted onto the rock, precarious with some of the fixing points rusted through.

Her breathing hits panic pitch. It blinds her. She grabs the bottom rungs and hauls herself up, balancing her weight over the swinging rails. She can't look down or up. Focus on her hands gripping the steel rungs, the cool, old smell of the wet rock and the acrid tones of rusting metal.

Extreme close up. Her vision is fixed five inches in front of her, as she passes hand over hand up the ladder. She reaches the top and hikes herself onto the smooth, carved rock ledge, the top of a dried waterfall. She groans from deep down inside.

From nearby, a motor sound in the distance. A shift in tone as gears are being changed.

Following the track at the top of the cliff, the bush thins and she can see a patch of glinting silver in the burning light. She sees it is road barrier just above her at the top of a shallow embankment. Struggling up, she crawls out onto a roadside. It is a corner. Falling off behind her and steep on the other side, the road disappears around a hairpin bend.

Another engine sound, the shifting of gears.

A car comes around the corner, fast, in second gear. The sound of breaks. The driver sees her, kneeling on all fours on the gravel.

The car passes.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Virginia Hilyard.