



Source: Paul McGeough and agencies, 'Sadr City vigilantes execute accused insurgents', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 15/03/06.

Tags: [fortune](#), [husband/wife](#), [seasons](#), [plants](#), [sex](#)

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## MORNING

Max and Allie had so little money that Max had taken to driving to work along a route which allowed him to avoid the bridge toll. When he was invited for drinks at the pub he faked an excuse so that he wouldn't have to shout. He gave everything he earned to the family and never bought anything of value for himself to the point where he had almost forgotten what he once regarded as small luxuries, like dark chocolate marzipan, which he remembered. His business was not going well despite giving the appearance that it was. Max was widely admired by his peers and respected by his staff for his good humour, honesty and thoroughness but Max was cursed and would always struggle with money: he knew and accepted that. The origins of the curse, he believed, could be traced back to his first wife but that was another story and he didn't want to think about it. He had concluded long ago that he probably deserved the curse anyway, so he just went on with life, with it as a fellow traveler. Max and his curse. Morning Max. Morning curse. Max aka Dorian Gray. Max and his creditors. Morning Max. Morning Creditors. Max could not foresee a future without them, which forced him to find the joy in life from simpler pleasures. His dick, for example. His dick had provided him with simple pleasures for years but, he had to admit, it was a double-edged sword because it was largely responsible for the curse. Nevertheless, Max still relied on his dick as a means of escape from his creditors but not with as much confidence as he had done in his earlier years.

Max's dick was the problem with Allie and Stella. Allie knew his dick to the point of disinterest and Stella didn't know it at all but Allie suspected she might, at some point. Max was adamant that it would never happen, unless the three of them did it together, a prospect which had gained the status of much more than simple pleasure in Max's mind and that of his dick. During the time the three of them had spent together in those early days the crackle of expectation had been unbearable but unrequited. Stella had sent them her black and pink lace knickers in the mail but Max had kept it a secret for months before telling Allie and when he did she misinterpreted it and assumed that they had been destined for Max only. So it was all mixed up and confused and a big point of contention.

The morning was bright and blue with not a wisp of cloud or a breath of wind. As Max ran past the ocean pool he caught a snatch of conversation taking place between the human walruses that gathered there every morning to swim. Something about the navy and Warrant Officers. Max loved the walruses and admired their sheer grit to

shock themselves to life every morning in winter. He ran on and on and his legs relaxed into the steady rhythm of the runner as he shifted his stride to accommodate the hard wet sand along the water's edge. The world was an empty place, a simpler place at this time of day. As he ran he thought about the solstice and the party he had organised.

## AFTERNOON

Pruning a grapevine was one of Max's new found joys. It was especially so if the task was done in a bath of afternoon sun. The aim was to cut back the laterals so the leader canes could develop over time to self-supporting wood without destroying the pergola trellis and lifting the guttering. The blood red leaves scattered on the grey stone ground or hung precariously to the last vestiges of life on the vine as the setting sun illuminated them, exposing the veins. Max worked along each main cane trimming the unwanted runners which were neatly clipped into fifty centimetre lengths and thrown equally neatly into a growing pile.

Once the pruning was complete Max bundled the cut canes and placed them on a slatted wooden bench to dry. He was planning to use them for the solstice and he wondered if nine days would be enough time for them to dry, fit to burn. Max was cautiously optimistic given the paucity of local rainfall. He swept the crimson, papery leaves into a corner where he could scoop them up and layer them onto the damp compost beneath the pines at the back of the yard.

Next he took two large, metal pots which had been zinc coated in Vietnam, he surmised, and lay some white quartz river stones into the bottoms. The bases had been drilled for drainage. He mixed together some topsoil, river sand and worm castings and shoveled it into the cavernous pots in which he intended to grow two fine persimmon trees. He suggested to Allie that they could eat under the stars with the children on the night of the solstice and he could light a fire of grape wood and charcoal. He looked at her as she stood in the kitchen talking to him and wondered why they communicated so clumsily. Missed words, misinterpretations, guardedness, false starts, fading syllables all of which conspired to create a vast canyon of static between them at times. Words were not their best means of communication. Like animals in a confined space, they did much better with facial gestures, physical affection and distance, and, of course, raw sex.

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