



Source: Mark Baker, 'Stakes go higher in game of nuclear poker', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 14/04/06.

Tags: [discomfort](#), [disease](#)

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My feet are sore and the suitcase is pulling heavily on my arm. I enter the foyer. The couches have long threads like cat scratches. As I walk to the reception desk, my tired toes trip on a skewed marble tile. The glow from a gilt-edged lamp reflects back off a mirror behind the young receptionist. The girl is chewing gum and her bare midriff bulges slightly at the hips over tight blue jeans.

'I haven't made a booking', I say.

'Oh no, we were expecting you. You're dying, you're in room 47. I'll take your bags.'

A crumpled rag lies on the desk,
a varnished timber counter.
The biting smell of methylated spirits lifts from the wood.

I hear footfall to my right. Two figures are coming down a flight of stairs. There's a man and a woman. The woman briskly takes my arm and introduces herself as the matron. 'And this', she says, gesturing roughly with her other hand, 'is Mr. Ali Hurst'. The man is dark, not very tall, his chin is slightly stubbly, his eyes are dark. The matron presses my arm and urges me into a side room. She turns and bustles off up the stairs.

Mr Ali Hurst steps into the doorway. 'Take your clothes off in there and put on the gown', he says. He has a clipped English accent. He shuts the door and I am alone.

A few minutes later the door opposite opens and Mr Ali Hurst tells me 'Come through and pop up there.'

I am lying on the table. He comes over and gently pushes my gown up past my hips. Putting his hand in the crib of my leg, he says, 'and raise your knees please'. He says, 'I'm now going to apply some unguent'.

It's a white bowl. His hands fondle a viscous brown jelly, like meat juice, and a rheumy smell wafts up towards me. I feel his cold slippery fingers press against my perineum. He massages me briefly before I feel a single finger against the rim of my anus.

'We need to stretch you slightly' he says quietly. He inserts his finger, making small circles.

'Breathe out' he says.

As I exhale I feel him slip two fingers into me up to his knuckles. I feel the pressure on the walls of my colon as he pushes them deeper. 'Keep breathing' he says. 'Now I will insert the sterile part'. I feel a small hard cylinder slide inside me. It's a bit cold but not too uncomfortable. There is a tremor in the part. I feel a warm liquid start to flow through.

'I want you to hold the water in as long as you can'.

He moves his hands gently beginning to palpate my stomach, moving from my navel to my pubic bone. I feel full and bloated.

I can't look at him. It all happens in a moment. The pressure in my colon becomes impossible. I feel a small leak trickle between my buttocks and then a rush of liquid and my body pushes, expelling lumps of solid matter.

Mr Ali Hurst is washing his hands in a basin by my head.

'I need to apply some gel to your temples and attach the electrodes. It will help if you bite down on this.' He is fixing a leather-covered bar between my teeth, stretching the corners of my mouth.

'The current will last for a few moments'.

There is a bitter taste in my mouth. His hand is gentle as he places it on mine. 'You are not alone, you know'.

The body arches, straining.

The walls are blue in here.

A pair of large brown eyes in a looming face.

Disturbing echoes.

Who is this man?

I am inside out.

I am warm.

I am sore.

I am aimless.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Clare Grant, Robyn McKenzie and Margaret Trail.