



Source: AFP, Reuters, 'I'm not paid enough to face Hamas: Wolfensohn', *The Australian online*, 03/05/06.
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Keith had escaped from talking to his relatives. He was crouching with Roger, scrutinizing some lavender that maintained a foothold near the sandy place at the back of his mother's garden, when his older brother ambushed them. Mark had hardly spoken to Keith in ten years.

Mark said, 'Hey, your Latino friend has the right idea, checking out the babes next door.'

It was true, in a sense. Leo, with his usual gift for working a room (in this case a lawn scattered with cousins and second cousins), had already spoken to everyone and proceeded to strike up conversation with a twenty-something bombshell across the fence.

'Leo isn't into babes,' Keith replied, retreating toward a display of hors d'oeuvres emerging alongside the patio.

'He's probably complimenting her friends on their summer wardrobe,' Roger added. He was Keith's other partner, the eldest of the triad. He caught up with Keith presently beside trays of fruit and mini quiches.

'Why did you say that?' Keith hissed. 'My family doesn't need its stereotypes reinforced.'

'Your brother is funny,' grinned Roger. 'I can't see the truth in anything you've told me about him. Besides, he's hot, in a daddy bear kind of way.'

He was teasing, of course. Keith, not in the mood, snapped, 'Did you hear how he described the man we love?'

Jess was helping her mother transfer hot plates of sausage rolls and shrimp souvlaki to the patio. Returning to the kitchen and finding it empty, she stood for a moment wondering, then proceeded to the quiet hallway. Christine stood alone there.

'What's wrong, Ma? You should keep busy.'

'Your father's at it,' Christine moaned. 'He must have sneaked some alcohol. The oldest surviving member of your family, and look what an example he's setting.'

'Ma, I'm old enough now, we're all old enough—'

'Jessica, please remind me again: why are we here? What are we doing?'

It had once been her Gran's house, but the garden figured most importantly in Jess's memories. Playing badminton with her brothers and Grampa. Gran crushing leaves from the herb garden for her to smell, telling her the names: rose geranium, lemon balm, apple mint. Tie-dying t-shirts. In the sand pit, digging canyons for her Barbies with Amazon robes Jess made herself. Twigs and string for bows and arrows. She had never actually gone as far as cutting off a doll's breast.

Gran had passed the place to one of her daughters. Now Lynn and her sister were dead of the same cancer, and the place passed to Lisa, eldest of the next generation, who used to tell her little cousins scary stories learned at camp.

'I'm okay with this,' Jess decided. 'I'm glad the garden stays with someone who loved it. I hope Lisa can handle it.'

Christine was thinking about something else. 'It's time we left,' she said.

Jess replied, 'You go ahead and take Dad if you have to.'

I'm going to talk to Uncle Keith. I can't believe nobody ever invited his partners before. Leo is so nice, and Roger is funny!'

Outside, Anthony saw Lisa break off from some nameless second cousins. He intercepted her.

'Sis, remind me why we're doing this.'

'I'm doing it, Tony. You tried to talk me out of it, remember? Now look, I want to see what people brought so I can thank them.'

It was true she didn't know much about gardening. It hardly seemed fair to the others, like Jess with her photography of flowers and insects. Lisa had lived in an apartment twenty years, but was determined to pick up Gran and Lynn's tradition. The garden would become a family place. Maybe she was losing her mind, noticing children after so long not wanting any. Gran had loved them, but of her four, Lynn never married, and Keith went the other way. Five grandchildren, and only one married. One great grandchild, little Madison, tore around like a dandelion seed, many adults to indulge her. Children notice those with the greatest sense of kindness. Maddy had locked into a toddling, giggling orbit around Leo. Lisa watched hungrily, not for the responsibility, but the simple way of being and seeing she remembered as Gran's first grandchild. Her eyes had opened to beauty at the elbow of a woman who knew more than you could read in books, with infinite patience to impart it.

Lisa had invited everyone to bring something for the garden. It could embody a memory of Gran, or not. She hoped that by gathering their collective memories, she could learn to make it thrive. These items were now assembled in a row below the patio. Uncle Mark and Aunt Christine had bought new garden furniture, very generous. Keith's contribution was a rose bush. Gran had loved roses best of all. This one was named Lady Emma Hamilton, possibly referring to a golden mutt that had died when Lisa was little. The gift from Jess and her brothers was a stone sundial, undoubtedly chosen by Jess who loved the herb garden.

'She's handy with tools and plants, too,' Lisa reflected. 'I wonder if she would help me here sometimes.'

Tony said, 'Why have you gotten nostalgic about people we've hardly seen for 15 years? You can't become Gran.'

Maddy tired of playing tag with Leo and wandered to the back. The soil became suddenly sandy, but children had always played there without appreciation of the oddity. Maddy had an instinct for interesting things to do, and the sandy place drew her.

She noticed a grown-up hunkered down alone, sitting quietly. This surprised and stopped her.

'Do you like bugs?' he asked.

Maddy nodded.

'Come look at these.'

She went and squatted beside him. Some black ants were struggling to haul a large fly up a sandy slope. They would get so far and then grains would give way under one or the other. Once their prize started sliding it dragged them all down. Undeterred, they simply continued their very difficult movement, labouring together.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Van Waffle.