



Source: AFP, AP, 'Iran threatens Gulf oil supplies', *The Australian online*, 05/06/06.

Tags: [countryside](#), [discomfort](#), [food](#), [sex](#), [workplace](#)
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A square of yellow light cast from outside through the open doorway onto the floor of the hut, illuminated an otherwise dark interior. As they entered there was a strong, dank and acrid smell: wood smoke and human grease from many years, congealed and concentrated in the cool, shut-up, airless space.

Now lying down on one of the bunks, she saw the lines of light strafing the cool shade of the hut's interior, catching jostling motes of dust as they moved through its path. The light penetrated from outside through the cracks between the rough cut timbers of the hut walls. There were no windows. It was a musterer's hut. Basic.

It was hot outside, the air buzzing with insects, in the blazing, never-ending mid-afternoon. It was a relief to get out of the sun. They had been walking all day, since early morning.

A relief to lie down and to cool down. After a while the sweat as it dried tightened the skin on her legs, arms, face. Her own smell, sweet and salty and pungent, became noticeable as it cooled. Smells mingled as the temperature inside moderated, warmed slightly. Her skin became scratchy.

A drink of water. A cup of tea perhaps.

It was day three. They had made their destination for the night. It was relax time. A relief in some ways, a trial in others. At least when you were walking you didn't have to talk. Now, who was going to do what had to be negotiated. Who wanted to do what. Why had she said yes? She didn't know these people. And didn't really want to know them. They worked together. Staff bonding. It was easy enough to get on at work—when you knew what you were doing, what had to be done. You just did your work. You didn't really have to get personal. And then tonight, sitting around, chatting, making fun, again. It wasn't bad, it was just dull and slightly distasteful. Although it had come to seem a bit dangerous to her, or at least ill-considered. When all they really had in common was work. The attrition of time, hours to be filled up, meant that things were shared—stories and attitudes and experiences traded. Too much information. She didn't want to trade. She wanted to keep herself to herself. And that became the problem. It meant she wasn't getting on with the others. She was a bitch.

Day three was mid-way.

Allan was outside, boiling a billy on the gas tripod. 'Cup of tea?' his voice interrupted her reverie.

She got up and went outside—with her tin mug, and a tea bag, from the top pocket of her pack. Allan was okay, she thought, sitting down on a log, squeezing herself into the thin bit of shade cast by the small eave at the front of the hut. Straightforward, if a bit dumb. She put the cup of tea

down by her side. I guess the problem is that the others are arseholes, really. Small a. Little niggles in their personalities at work, she could cope with, but on this trip, they became magnified, clarified, with the fuller picture. What had irritated in passing at work now joined up with other facts about them and their lives, who they were, their habits. She could feel dislike growing, becoming a problem. Work, she feared was going to be a problem after this. She wished she hadn't come.

Geoff, the good bloke, who wasn't really—an ebullient pillar of mediocrity, bigoted and egotistical. Angela, bubbly, generous and sympathetic, but from the stories she told about other people in fact bitter and judgemental, not to be trusted. Rodney, an aggrieved victim of the women in his life...into self-improvement, and into telling you all about it as part of the cure. Being in nature, seemed to mean that the veils of normal civility no longer held sway—self-disclosure was the rule of thumb of their exchanges. The sad thing was there was nothing of interest to disclose. It was all small chips. That was the sad thing. They were in fact boring. And so was she. And she was bored.

'Where are the others?', she asked Allan.

'They've gone off to climb something. They didn't think you would be interested. I said we'd cook dinner.'

A fly landed in her cup of tea, its wings stuck to the surface of the liquid. She flicked it out.

'You should come and look at this,' said Allan.

'What is it?' she said, as she got up and went over to where Allan was now standing with a stick in hand.

'It's a lizard that has just dropped its tail'.

'Did you frighten it?'

'No, I did not,' said Allan, offended.

'So, why has it dropped its tail?'

'Don't know,' said Allan.

'Do you want a root?' she said.

Allan, looked at her.

'I don't think that would be a good idea, really', he replied.

'What are we supposed to be cooking, then?'

'I'm not sure. I guess we make it up.'

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Robyn McKenzie.