



Source: Michael Slackman and Scott Shane, AP,  
'Zarqawi global strategy revealed', *New York Times* in  
*The Age online*, 12/06/06.

Tags: [storytelling](#), [travel](#)

Writer/s: [Philip Terry](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

In one story a young woman of twenty-five sits on a plinth in a photographic studio, as a make-up artist carefully applies mascara with a silver-handled brush. Draped over her body is a shimmering, gossamer wrap. In another a condemned princess contemplates the midnight flowering of a cactus as she awaits her execution. In another a retired Scandinavian cosmologist spends his time on a remote island, cutting cypress trees for the construction of a wooden church, later to be dedicated to St Helena. In another still a young man meets his death in a crash on the road. In one the phone rings loudly in the empty office. In another a car alarm sounds in the street. While in yet another a patient lying in a hospital bed at dusk listens to a tale of loss and betrayal.

She had heard so many stories that the moment came when she could no longer tell one from the other, nor could she tell whether they were stories about a fleeting acquaintance or a cherished companion, a distant historical personage or a dear relative, a secret enemy, a distant admirer, or herself. She had no choice at such moments but to flee, and at once, slipping into her brightest dress, threw all her possessions into a capacious suitcase, grabbed her purse, her hairbrush, a spare pair of shoes, and was off. She hailed a taxi, jumped on a bus, descended into the underground, took the train, hoisted sail, hopped on the ferry, slid into the hold, rolled herself up in the carpet, climbed into the aircraft and sped off down the runway at the speed of sound dreaming of long flat horizons, giving way to precipitous crags and towering peaks, across a mirror of water.

No sooner does she set foot in her destination than she runs up to people in the street, interrupting their conversations, making them rise from their seats, climb down from the rooftops, open their doors, even get out of

their cars, so that they stare up at her wide-eyed with bemusement, or gaze steely down on her with ire. Good afternoon, she says, Bonjour, Guten tag, Bom dia, Buongiorno. My name is Kate, she adds, feeling a distinct pinching in her sinuses. My name is Jessie, I'm clean. My name is Sally, my name is Barbara, my name is Esther, Marijne, Christine...She spits out endless names, wrapping her tongue around unfamiliar syllables, in the hope of finding out once more who she really is: a recovered addict, a stow-away, a struggling war-widow, an Elle's Angel, a middle-aged teacher from Slough, a research student in art history, an abused housewife, a vagrant, an enchanting heiress. But it is no use.

In the very act of travelling, passing endlessly from one time zone to another, her identity has been slowly but irreversibly sloughed off like an unwanted skin, or slipped off like a jacket, discarded like an old boot and shipped off to a landfill site in Essex, to reveal a nascent shining core beneath that belongs to all and to none of these people. In travelling, she saw, we change, we become other, we metamorphose—into forms more monstrous still than the phantasmagoria of antiquity—just as we do when we listen to stories, and we see that our identity is never fixed, it resides everywhere and nowhere, and is no more in a name, a genealogy or a vocation, than it is in a faded passport we recover from the lost property office, than it is in a cheap paperback we pick up at an airport bookstand, than it is in the trailer to an old and long-forgotten disaster movie seen on TV, or an article read over someone's shoulder in the checkout queue entitled 'A Flair for Publicity'.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a  
story by Philip Terry.*