



Source: Ewen MacAskill, Simon Tisdall and Robert Tait, 'Lone Jewish MP confronts Ahmadinejad on Holocaust but stresses loyalty to Iran', *Guardian Unlimited*, 28/06/06.

Tags: [animals](#), [husband/wife](#), [water](#)

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Not far from where I live there is a golf course. Laid out like a bright green tablecloth the course swathes a promontory known as Long Reef Headland, on the eastern seaboard of Australia. The blue waves of the Tasman Sea crash over the natural rock reef below and spill out along wide rock shelves studded with glistening rockpools and the pock marks of ancient mollusks. It is an area favoured by rock fishermen for its proximity to a deep channel that yields well-fed yellow tail. The course overlooks the ocean to the south and is a place open to public thoroughfare where local walkers and not so local hackers try their best to stay out of each other's way. I like to walk across the course and up to the headland where people sit to gaze out on the ocean in the hope of spotting a dolphin pod or a whale during the winter migratory season as they head north to warmer waters.

A couple of days ago I was walking across the course at dusk, heading home, lit by the last splash of the sun on the western horizon, when I came upon a not unfamiliar pond. What struck me was the water of the pond, unruffled by even the slightest breath of wind laying as a vast mirror reflecting the fading evening sky. I sat for a moment looking at the pond and a small group of swallows flying close to its surface in a formation only they could understand. I became entranced by these swallows weaving and darting above the mirror of the pond and was soon lost between the water and the sky as the whole world turned upside down and I was looking down at the wispy orange clouds.

Swallows mate for life and will only nest with their loved one but here for every swallow there flew a mirror image partner locked in a dance unrequited by physical touch. Each bird was utterly seduced by its own beauty and if their partner were there flying next to them the other was seemingly unaware of their presence. They were silently feeding off miniscule insects that had over-stayed the day which made the aerial display all the more impressive for its elegant functionalism. I thought about these swallows and how they would soon flock and fly

north perhaps as far the Philippines and Timor before returning to the pond in late spring. Swallows have long been a sign of land to seamen and a swallow tattoo was the right of the sailor who had sailed five thousand nautical miles, a pair of swallow on the chest symbolising the birds that would swoop down and lift up the soul of the drowning sailor. These thoughts played on my mind as I paused for not more than ten minutes to watch.

My eyes followed the contours of the ground as I walked home along the rocky path leading to the street. The street light flickered on as I reached the kerb. A car drove past, then another. The lights of houses spilled out onto garden beds and one or two dogs scurried along with owners in tow. I walked past these homes where children with scrubbed faces sat at dinner tables and old men nestled in front of televisions to watch the evening news. I heard the murmur of voices as neighbours chatted in driveways and the hum of peak hour traffic groaning along the main road.

As I reached my front gate I looked up at the door at the end of the path and saw the cat perched on the step waiting to be let inside. A terrible sadness came over me as I left the darkness of the night and stepped inside closing the door behind me. My wife was in the kitchen sipping red wine and washing vegetables. I put my cold hands on her cheeks and the sadness went deeper but for some reason I smiled in my half smile kind of way and for a moment I saw the swallows in her green eyes. It was a beautiful, searing sadness that comes with the thought of loss and the dimming of the day. The cat rubbed against my leg and I heard the voices of the children coming down the hall. The sadness stayed with me for the rest of the evening until I became unusually tired and fell asleep on the unmade bed. That night I dreamed the sky was below me and I was looking up to the earth above, up into the mirror pond. A single swallow caught by its own reflection.

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