



Source: James Robinson, 'As Lebanon sinks into crisis, a new dispute grows—over bias', *The Observer* in *Guardian Unlimited*, 23/07/06.

Tags: Lebanon, bombings, animals, film, architecture  
Writer/s: Clare Grant

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

She is wrapped in brocade. A gold base, I think, but there is also bronze and deeper gold and some burgundy-deep glints. It seems to go from head to foot. Orange streaks that shade into red as the light moves across her. Her head turns, sharp. Spikey eyes flick upwards and then sweep the ground around, and stop for a moment. She is stamping on something. A small thing down there. Removes it to her pocket? Is it simply in her way? Or just a dangerous distraction in a world that is about to collapse, finally? The lips are set. The chin lifts. There is a swish as her arm shoots up towards the sky and she calls. She sends one great call into the empty space and a piercing sound fills this cavernous silent broken city square. The echoes are like cries of warning or cries of shock and defiance, cries of regret and fear and searing rage. They bounce across each other, through the shadows and against the broken doorways, up through the hollows of the buildings and out into the open air.

Her feet are planted wide, in an ocean of rubble. She has found the steady flat patches of ground in amongst the chaos of broken glass and splintered metal, cracked wood. Dust falls all around and the throat is dry—how does she create those sounds from so deep in the chest in these twisting dusty eddies of rubble and powdered paint and splintered clothes, cracked fridges and leaking gas and who knows what else she can taste as her breath returns?

It's all a strange dusty beige here. It should be brighter, you'd think, after the fierce blinding noise and the crumbling of the walls. Huge massed blocks of concrete thudding deep into the bitumen, pitching bricks, snapping metal as it goes and smashing through the daily life of kettles boiling and children dressing. They have all left. The bright sheets falling over the edges of broken walls, these false windows, are dusted-over dull and hanging down, unmoving, through the gaping holes. It's all brown, grey and beige. And the abandoned clothes, soft furnishings, all smothered in debris. In behind that pile up there, dark still shapes, heavy and quiet. Impossible to read. There is no life there. Not even any paper blowing. And still no sound, unless she moves a foot, dislodging a small chunk of a bedroom wall maybe or the edge of a kitchen bench maybe. No life here—not even death, it seems, unless it is deep down under the grey dirt and dust piles. There should be dogs, voices, shouts, even screaming. There should be cars and trucks and horns and bells and greetings and heels and leather slapping along the ground.

Impossible to tell when she must have arrived, or from where she has come. The cameras have all just gone, the rubble's been picked over and captured, the deep stillness made deeper in the stillness of the hundreds of photos.

Agile legs have darted across this space, twisting and turning to get the single best shot before anyone else can get it—to send off the one key shot of the stepping-stone edges zigzagging up to the grey clouds. Send off pictures of the new Dresden, the new Manhattan, Madrid, London, the new Baghdad, the new Gaza, in this place we are allowed to look into for this brief time, as it dies.

Longer legs are able to dart to places in the piles of junk and rubbish that the shorter ones must miss out on in this tiny gap of time we are permitted in this place. Herded in to bear witness here. Mouths lean close into microphones and voices try to encompass it all, the breath of the reporters coming fast and ragged. They fight to maintain the steady voice that will travel as far as the cosy winter living rooms at the other end of the world while their nostrils fill with dry muck and their throats rasp from Adam's apple up to under the ears. The burning reaches down into the chest and the lungs. Still, muted, sometimes lilting and steady the snippets of words flicker back and forth from all the different directions in a muffled jagged surround-sound.

The heavy sharp voice cuts its command across the barren space. Time to get out. That's enough. Many eyes fly to the skies and equipment is heaved onto backs. You hear quick voices, see a fast hand gesture or two and then we all move back. Some shoulders twist for final pictures and maybe someone stumbles on a fragile ankle, maybe a couple linger, daring to look with the naked eye, with no frames and no editing pen at the back of the mind and nothing to protect the flesh from the enormity of what has happened.

Maybe someone else noticed her. I just look back again once from the end of the street and there she is.

And there's a strange new sound. My heart flutters and my spine seems to collapse as some new thing rushes down out of the sky. One part of my mind knows it can only mean quick oblivion, it's the only possibility, I have been too slow to go, but my eyes are seeing such vivid movement and shimmering bronze light that it can only be something alive, writhing and flashing in the light. A bird. An eagle? A hawk? What bird can be here?

Her arm shoots up again and it lands softly for a moment, waiting. In her hand something. A side dish for its beak before it is gone again, on the prowl. When I look back again there is just one soldier coming towards me, gesturing me to go now and I stumble towards the dark outline of a rumbling truck.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Clare Grant.*