



Source: Simon Jenkins, 'The humanitarian urge is morphing into thirst for war', *Guardian Unlimited*, 25/07/06.

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It was a rainy night in the middle of winter and outside she could hear the wind shrieking around the buildings that lined the top of the cliff at Gordons Bay. She forced herself outside and into the car to make the two minute drive to the Clovelly pub. Waves of warm conviviality reached out to her from the bar. Whisky, ordered with club soda, was what she wanted.

Or, it was the first warm night of spring in Vancouver. They walked, the three of them, away from the water, through the park and across the street into the art deco opulence of the bar of the Hotel Sylvia. A *pinot grigio* would be perfect while they gazed again at the view of the bay and decided where to go for dinner.

Or again, it had been another infernal day of New York heat. They took refuge in the air-conditioned depths of the Café Mogador, across the street from the book-lined sublet in St Mark's Place. About to leave for the airport as they arrived with their suitcases, Fiona had pointed across to the shady entrance they had noticed when they came to meet her for a meal the night before: the best place to eat round here, she said. And now a glass of chilled *rosé* before the meal would rinse them both clean of heat and dust.

Or again, they made the short stroll up the hill from Thierry's place on the rue de Belleville to La Cagnotte, the café where the neighbourhood's incipient gentrification was most evident. Les bobos, *ça grouillait*. But the coffee was good here, and cheap, and they liked the non-smiling, but still somehow friendly, proprietor who worked there alone. The caffeine ritual and the tartine with confiture marked the real start of the day.

But these were all yesterdays, alike in the telling even in their differences, just as today will be like them all tomorrow, when she writes that she sat in the small tree-shaded courtyard in Ludwigsburg, while Hedi made tea and coffee as they drank orange juice and ate the *Laugenbroetchen* she had bought fresh from the bakery round the corner.

But between here and there, now and then, a lot can happen.

And happen it does on those nights when she's out like a light in some girl's bed a long while after the final payment falls due. Like the stock market, she lives by faith, by rumour, by word of mouth. A crisis of confidence could force a collapse. The future foreclosed like a bank loan. She's putting her money—what's left of it—where her mouth is: on the surface, on all those tenuous bridges across the pitted landscape charted by Baudelaire: 'the immense depth of thought in vulgar sayings, holes dug by generations of ants'. Afraid of sliding across the endless

surfaces of common sense without ever finding her own foothold in the world or making a footprint on it, she's writing fast on the smell of a shoe-string—and she even has to borrow that—flung out to the far side of reason. Still in all, all stories are inside stories, all words are secondhand, and words are all she has...

Hey you, she says, yes you, I'm talking to you, I'm telling you a story and you mark my words. She flings her fishing line out towards you over the space between, between the frying pan and the fire, between the devil and the deep blue sea, between a rock and a hard place, Buckley's or none.

She was onto a good thing and she was going to stick to it. She was a wild one, a couple of kangaroos out of control in the top paddock, a sandwich short of a picnic, a screw loose—they'd have to round up the posse to hose her down. They all knew there was no smoke without fire and she had been fanning the flames, cooking up trouble, keeping things on the boil.

They wanted her to make a break for it, head her off at the pass, call a halt right there and put their foot down. There would be tears before bed-time. It was the way of the world, the real thing, the genuine article. It would all come out in the wash. They would take her to the cleaners. She would make a clean breast of it and they would make her an example.

Meanwhile back at the ranch, the mob was wild, they were baying for blood, they wanted law and order, they wanted to let off steam, have their say, express themselves: speak English, get a life, get out of here. Go back to where you came from. This was clearing the air, sorting the sheep from the goats. She had pulled the wool over their eyes and they had gone like lambs to the slaughter. It was a red rag to a bull. It was no good crying over spilt milk. A leopard won't change his spots and you can't teach an old dog new tricks. An ostrich puts its head in the sand. Hopes it will all blow over. He keeps his hands clean, has his cake and eats it too. She had other fish to fry, irons in the fire, fingers in the pie. She put her finger on the pulse and pressed the button. She jumped the gun, went ballistic, off the air. She let the cat out of the bag. She put the hard word on all of them. It was a smear and some mud would stick. A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse. It was a sure thing, a going concern, a real winner. They drove it around the block for a bit then jumped ship at the next port. She'd taken them for a ride. It's a dog eat dog world. And that's where they'd gone. They'd gone to the dogs. Just between you and me.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Anna Gibbs.*