



Source: Mary Riddell, 'I, too, am horrified by the awful scenes in Lebanon. But wait...', *The Observer* in *Guardian Unlimited*, 30/07/06.

Tags: [intimacy](#), [home](#), [literature](#)

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A ring tone explodes like a heliotrope, one of those flowers you would have taught me the name of as we walked down a suburban street, and I would have forgotten a minute later. J is for jonquil, japonica, jasmine...It's been a week of beer for breakfast and I don't know which room the sound is coming from because I'm sealed in the innermost cabin of an ocean liner with other rooms behind every wall, above the ceiling and beneath the floor. I listen carefully to these zings, this ether of electronic signals followed by the burble of different languages as we move through the dark ocean.

Except, I'm not in an ocean liner at all. I am in a house, in the corner of a house, nesting, gathering together notebooks and a canister of photographs; gathering together anything, really, that could armour me against the horror of a clean slate. An Asterix comic, a Dictaphone, a candle, sheaves of paper, cups of tea, piles of books. I build a fort out of objects. I pick up a pile of photos and begin to shuffle them. But something about them is too intimate and too distant, a blur of past lives. I put them back in the tin and push them away.

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Lying in the sun on the lilac blanket typing out quotes from Proust and Aragon as if we were nineteen, whack whack whack, when the woman next door starts crooning along to 2GB, being transmitted from a computer buried beneath a carpark in Crow's Nest. The sounds plait together: some magpies warble, the woman's cockatoo shrieks and she comes out to coo and fuss over him. I roll a fresh page into the typewriter and you start to dictate.

Lying in the sun with notebooks and I gather up the lilac fringe of the blanket, my fingers remembering the shape of scissors. I write, 'the problems start when the thoughts get too thought about'. You go away and come back. Your feet should be on a warm plinth, dripping out of the shower, come to dry yourself on the lilac blanket warmed in the sun. Wearing pyjamas until one.

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Outside the house we walk along the highway that funnels cars out west. After a few blocks we pass under a bridge and turn down a cycle path. It runs between a canal and a railway line atop a small weed-sprung hill. One of those secrets we'd discovered on previous walks, though we haven't been here for years. Children rattle past us on BMXs with trainer wheels, yelling out to their parents walking behind them.

Looking at the canal I feel a wave of sadness. The plight of objects, the ubiquity of stuff. Measuring my words, I say, I

want to write things that make people feel less ashamed of being human. It's a suburban sadness, an amorphous sadness followed by something between desperation and nausea. I want to take out my Boggle game and shake out a word other than disgust or fear. It seems something could be made of all this. I know epiphanies are daggy but I feel filleted and put back together. We are two people talking under trees which sift the first sunlight of Spring across the cycle path.

Haberfield is nowhere and by Ashfield I'm freaking out. I only realised how divided Sydney was after an old flatmate, who'd travelled everywhere, told me, half-jokingly, she felt like she never needed to leave Sydney. I knew what she meant. The train station was a minute's walk away. We could wave a finger over the Cityrail ticket machine, pick an unfamiliar name and in a few minutes we'd be barrelling out into the suburbs. In half an hour or an hour we'd emerge from a subway into a place that was more like Lebanon or Vietnam than the blocks of crumbling terraces we called home.

I can't get my breathing right—too much is going out or coming in, or something. In the Asian grocer the lights are harsh and the packaging is bright. We catch the bus home. I run a bath. We check emails. 'Who is sexier?' the flashing banner asks, an animation shivering a picture of Brad Pitt into a picture of George Clooney, and back again. 'Answer for a free iPod!'

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Then, this morning, the most intense desire upon walking out the back door and smelling the guts of the morning. It is the smell of the cleanest skeleton in the museum, the smell of something so refined it contains nothing, it is all medium. A smell that allows everything in because it is unencumbered, contains no distracting elements. Information, it says, is as clean as eggs, and we're swimming in it: our ticking brains gleaming the way behind us, our fingers cutting and pasting the way in front. I feel all the locks would unlock at my touch, all the knots would loosen with a brush of my arm, as I move carefully though the trappings of air.

Or, is it pure distraction, tearing apart anything that would define it? The first scuds of clouds are fixed in the planeless sky directly above the backyard. The smell of the air squeeegees away the grime and dead insects that are familiar and known to me, and replaces them with something so crystalline it seems able to bear the future.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Tim Wright.*