



Source: Richard A. Oppel Jr., 'Shiites push laws on dividing regions, as Iraq begins to control army', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune* online, 08/09/06.

Tags: [Jerusalem](#), [bombings](#), [incarceration](#), [religion](#), [retribution](#)

Writer/s: [Joseph Rabie](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

The room was just as Hollywood said it would be. An inscrutable glass plate the length of one side, facing the spare table, and a grey edge-to-edge carpet that ran all the way up the walls to the ceiling. Who would be behind that one-way glass, deciphering my every gesture? I had a flighty view of Jack Bauer from the series 24 with his boxcar face and king-size colt, his propensity for breaking the fingers of recalcitrant operators from the Evil Axis.

My hands were cuffed and pinned behind the back of my chair. On the way in I beseeched them to allow me to go to the toilet but to no avail, and now I hunched down upon my bloated bladder, pangs of cramp rippling through my abdomen. I had not relieved myself since Jerusalem, I did not know if my jailers were aware of this, that I was in a delicate situation vis-à-vis prolonged interrogation. The man who came in and sat down opposite me was skinny and pallid with a little moustache like someone who had been weaned on artificial light, a dark suit with rectilinear pants, he might have come directly from Wall Street.

'The terrorist bankroller', he said. 'A finger in every pie.' He leant forward. 'You deserve congratulations; you put Clearstream to uses in ways no one ever imagined. Scandalous. People like you endanger global banking. The death of banking is the death of civilisation.' I tried to reassure him, in no way would I ever contribute to any terrorist enterprise: I was a bona-fide business man registered with the Ramallah Chamber of Commerce. He should consider me an ally; business people were Palestine's rampart against fanaticism, hope packaged in the form of a mundane, middle class. And, I had American associates, I told him, 'go ask Senator Friskwater of Illinois what a pleasure doing business with me is'. He himself had said so. The senator, my interrogator told me, was a stalwart on the House Committee for Homeland Security, he was gunning for Guantanamo, making sure that people like me were put in our places.

Finally it was over: I was allowed to separate myself from my piss and I was separated from all of my possessions. I was handed glaringly orange fatigues, stiffly folded and vacuum-packed in plastic. I was led through endless corridors, up and down stairs, then chained, face downwards in a Hummer vehicle which took some time to reach a suburban destination. I could tell by the rhythm of stopping and starting at traffic lights. Finally I found myself in a clean, square cinderblock cell with a linoleum floor, two low bunks and a stainless steel toilet seat in lieu of a bedside table.

I slept. It was night when I was woken by a great commotion, a man in the throes of a struggling fit fell to the floor, bundled in by a bevy of guards who slammed the door. He leaped onto my bed, lifted and pinned me against the wall, his wild beard in my face. 'Who are you?'; a question answered with as much aplomb as such

circumstances offered. Now he was crying, beard and tears wiped my face, itself long unshaven. 'Brother', he said, 'bless the Prophet, you are from Jerusalem! I have been sent by my sheikh, my lord, Sayyed Nasrallah himself to avenge the despoiling of Beirut upon New York.' And: 'Does my sheikh, my emir not say "If the Jews all gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of going after them worldwide"? I pushed him away and said, 'Your purity is delusion, you would wipe Israel off the map, even though that would devastate Palestine too'. His fury became unbounded, he was screeching, 'Are you the infidels' henchman?'. It was as if I were teetering before the intake of a screaming jet turbine; I was about to be sucked in and liquefied. 'Allah Akbar', I muttered, stumbling. I had been released. He backed off uttering, 'Tomorrow is gigantic'.

It was morning. On my back on my bunk I thought to myself: One cannot escape or override the human condition. One can only look for the humanity which hides in its loopholes, like moisture in shadow. I would survive by being a student of the human condition.

My companion was up and pacing, impatient for my attention. 'Help me up', he said, and he climbed upon my shoulders stooped over the toilet, to peer through the high window. With great agitation, elation, he cried, 'I see the twin towers, I see where they were', he leaped down and said 'See, brother!' and I climbed up onto his shoulders, but all I saw was a neat well-watered lawn, a precinct chain-link fence, nondescript warehouses, but no Manhattan skyline. Yet he had seen, I could see by the frenzy in his eyes.

It was morning and we were led out into the courtyard for exercise. We walked in a dumb circle within granite walls, roughly hewn blocks imprisoned within lines of mortar, so grey and dull, so divorced from the golden illumination dancing upon Jerusalem stone. My companion had left the round, was swooping around, arms outstretched to the very tips of his flattened hands as if he were an aeroplane. As he came by I could hear him mumbling, 'Jihad! Jihad!'. Presently he reached cruising speed, and tearing helter-skelter across the yard he ran headlong into the granite wall. He tipped backwards like a playing card, a sharp crack as his skull encountered polished concrete. I rushed up, his nose, cheekbone, jaws and forehead were shattered, rivulets of blood were meshing his matted hair. A dark pond spread a fathomless halo around his head. I was pushed away by the guards, who lifted him without the necessary precaution for someone who might have broken their neck. A detail of prisoners came in with mops and a bucket. All traces of the event were made to disappear.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Joseph Rabie.*