



Source: Mussab Al-Khairalla and Alastair Macdonald, 'Maliki feels Shiite fury over bomb slaughter', Reuters, *New York Times* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 28/11/06.

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I was being interrogated again. I told them that there had been a misunderstanding, that though through their eyes my banking methods might appear dubious, they must concede that doing business in occupied Ramallah makes necessary the invention of creative solutions.

Senator Friskwater of Illinois had come all the way to Jerusalem to do business with me, I told them. I had taken the good man on a guided tour of the Old City, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the market, he had purchased pious olive wood carvings as a gift for his congregation. He really appreciated the visit—'from his heart', he said. I had avoided the Danish Tea House, though. I thought that he might be incommoded by the acrid smell of the Hashish. And business had been profitable for all, a triangular financial affair I had conjured linking a Russian oil merchant who, despite confinement north of the polar circle still had loads of tricks up his sleeves, a deceased Angolan diamond runner whose accounts had fallen into the public domain, and a defrocked Anglican priest thrown in as a decoy.

My interrogator's bleached blue eyes focused a thousand miles beyond my head. His dry, tufty blond hair crusty with salt, he had been out yachting in the morning and the wild sea breeze had been imprisoned in his locks. 'Never ever heard of you', he said. 'The senator, he said so.' He leaned towards me. 'Nothing in the world will make you correct your attitude, my friend. You're Guantanamo meat. That is what he says, the senator'.

Thus I left New York in the falling evening, when the light on the horizon goes the palest yellow beyond the immense reach of the Hudson River stretching into the continent, as vast as a lake to my desert eyes. And Manhattan, pink and mauve in the deep pockets of shadow tucked below the skyscrapers. Of this I saw nothing, handcuffed as I was against the steel bulwark of the aircraft. This is the Hercules, four turboprops and fifty years of good and loyal services to the military of the world, the free half in any event, the other half being supplied with Antonovs. And as my spine from sternum to scull galloped to their shaking roar, I thought of other Hercules, those used by the Israelis gone to rescue their people held hostage by Idi Amin in Entebbe. No one was going to come rescue me, certainly not Idi, wherever he was, engineering rancour for business deals unravelled by events beyond our control.

We were travelling southwards. I imagined the great sprawl of metropolitan light through Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, the generals being chauffeured home from their offices in the Pentagon would be snarled in traffic jams, the cocktail parties in the hotel reception rooms would be uniting politicians and lobbyists in an endless pas-de-deux of influence and licking of chops. The night turning black dark we would slip by not too far from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where Abraham Lincoln had declared in his address: 'Four score

and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal', and had vowed in the name of God that 'government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth'. And I, in that aeroplane, felt myself deprived of all nationhood, of all personhood, deprived of God, borne off to abandonment at the ends of the earth.

Sometime around midnight we landed in Miami. The loading bay door was lowered, a blast of humid, hot air punched through the interior of the aircraft. I could see that a storm had passed by, glowering orange clouds reverberating with lightning, the glistening tarmac had already dried in patches. The pilot and copilot walked to the rear, examining everything but ignoring me, I heard them muttering that the hurricane was well on its way to the Gulf of Mexico, there was no danger, but we were in for a roller-coaster ride.

In a great brouhaha forklifts brought in case upon case of merchandise, crates of ammunition, cartons marked 'overalls' with an 'x' in the checkbox next to 'orange', electronic consumer goods marked 'Army Store', and meat, beef, lamb and pork, in refrigerated pallets parked six inches before my nose, and the temperature dropped and soon it would be hellishly cold with only my flimsy overalls to shield me, and more cartons, Macdonalds, hamburgers, chips, happy meals and salads, and finally a mountain of crates containing bottles of Coca-cola and beer, and once the aircraft roared down the runway and leapt into flight all those thousands of bottles would vibrate in unison, each chink and chime of glass on glass would combine ten thousand fold into a monstrous commotion until I felt that the ringing between my ears would make my head implode.

We were in the air again, undoubtedly heading eastwards to skirt around the storm. I imagined Miami slipping under the wings, Miami vice cruising along the flashy boulevards, Miami bad boys tooling their speedboats down the waterways, Miami crime scene investigation picking up the pieces. The broad beach was slipping under the wings, the crashing storm-driven sea, and by-and-by the plane was swinging and yawing as if space at the edge of the great hurricane had come undone, and I was vomiting my guts and shouting out for help as my innards splurged and soaked me. No one came. And as I swooned, my mind locked upon the hurricane above, how the planet choking on exhaust fumes was heating up, how the Gulf Stream flowing from tropical Mexico along the coast of America below me all the way to the North Pole would soon start to stutter and stagnate, would stop moving, an ice age would come and everything would be frozen and die, and I would be put out of my misery.

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