



Source: James Bennet, 'With Israeli departure, Gaza's dreamers emerge', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune* online, 15/08/05.

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The day wanes. August 15, the anniversary of VP day, the end of fighting in the Pacific. It must have sounded so quiet when peace was declared. I am too young for direct memory of it—but the second-hand memories seem direct. The jerky films of celebration showing young women loudly carousing with unknown young men in uniforms, returned from Palestine and jungles closer to home. Or the television face of Betty Churcher as she remembered being swept away by the euphoria of the time, swept away by a stranger in naval garb. Her celebration was one of liberation, she was young and she was alive.

Sixty years later, I decide to raise a glass to the end of the war in solitude. I sit on the bench looking out over the limestone wall and my potted garden, looking west into the setting sun of the day. A celebratory cabernet joins me on the bench. Waves battle out the pounding boom on the shoreline and sea air spumes its way to me through the chill evening. Outside the wall, I can hear preparations for night. The bustling of neighbours bringing their children into the warm glow of kitchens and sitting rooms of the home. Animals and children are being fed, the smell of cooking evoking sensate memories of Italy. Mothers are settling the day's affairs, checking the list of things 'to do' and preparing the next list for the next tomorrow. Fathers are settling into the evening with lounging possibilities. The day is ending. For me, here on this bench, all is right with the world. Stars are just beginning to push through the grey sheet of twilight.

I look straight up to see the scorpion making its way towards the long flat horizon in the west. It's not hard to find the scorpion, recognise the pattern of bright dots that draw familiar shapes of familiar emblems, totems of family, marching onwards like an army, steadily chasing the infidel out of the area, chasing them out of their homes and into the night. The head moves like a battering

ram against the black heavenly walls of shapes and mythological creatures. I've watched the scorpion wrap its tail around others, pushing them further and further towards the horizon and off the edge. No celebrations there, no victory statement of heroism and gallantry, no commiserations being heaped on the vanquished, just moved to a different place in the sky.

What comes and chases the scorpion? It is the warrior, the marksman with the bow and arrow. A fighter and a defender, blindly optimistic and careless, irresponsible and superficial, tactless and restless, Sagittarius chases the scorpion. This game has gone on forever across the night sky; across the hemispheres.

I remember lying on the seaside grass in Genoa in August 1973 after a perilous journey through mad Italian streets. The cool night was settling in and I was transfixed by the recognition of stars chasing stars across the sky. Even when I was in Italy, Sagittarius still chased Scorpio across the horizon, but the sky held no crux of deliverance, no direction home southwards. The summer of 1973, the summer of love. The journey was hot and the road was menacing. How brave I was and how ready to take on new adventures. My companion and I had just completed long hours on the road, riding the bike through streets so narrow you could almost touch the walls, heat-crazed Italians blasting their way through crevices in traffic jams, shouting and laughing at the same time. We had negotiated our way through northern valleys and towns, not stopping, following our navigational maps south east to Genoa and to rest. We now lay, our helmets to the side and our hair trailing out over the cool green grass, the smell of our exhausted bodies perfumed the air and we just lay there, watching the sky, pointing out our recognisable totems.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Patsy Vizents.*