



Source: Damien McElroy, 'US and Iran step up angry exchanges', *Telegraph London*, Reuters, AP in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 16/01/07.

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It was mid-winter. Round about the time when everyone talked about the weather and little else. About how it wasn't behaving right. Warm and windy where it should be cold. Freezing snow where it should be mild.

A young couple were on their honeymoon, touring the coast of the Pacific Northwest. They'd been out of the UK seven nights and married for eight. Weather reports in the papers told of gales back home. Locally (PST time) the talk was of harsh weather to come.

Today George and Grace had got up early and made for the hills. George carried the provisions and led the way. Grace had the guidebook in her knapsack, and liked to read from it whenever they stopped for a rest.

'Friendly Cove. The whites named the area and its people Nootka, though the locals now say that Nootka was just a word of warning to the ships so they would avoid hitting the offshore rocks.'

'How', asked George, 'did a word like nootka get understood by the settlers as a word of warning?'

'I expect they used a lot of gestures, arm signals and the like', said Grace.

She twiddled absent-mindedly with her scarf as she read. Behind her, George demonstrated a range of arm movements that might be used to indicate danger.

'They give things such beautiful names', said Grace. 'Listen: Gold River, Telegraph Cove, Radar Hill. Singing Pass. Tooth Rock.'

She jumped a few pages.

'Cape Disappointment. Cape Falcon. Cape Flattery. Cape Foulweather.'

George came to the fallen log and squashed up beside her.

'They sound good. Where are they?'

Grace shrugged.

'I don't know. They could be anywhere. I'm just flicking through the index at random.'

George grabbed her arm so suddenly she yelped.

'Don't move!' he hissed. He nodded towards a fallen trunk at the edge of the clearing. A large ball of brown fur scuttled away.

'What was that?'

'A beaver. I'm pretty sure that was a beaver.'

'I missed it.'

Grace closed the book and stared thoughtfully at its creased blue cover.

'Do you think we'll get to see all those places before we die? It's terrible to think of dying without having seen everything, without having experienced everything.'

They continued on their way up the hill, following the soft needle-coated path as it switch-backed towards the summit. Their plan was to reach the top in time for the sunset.

They were late back. The restaurant and bar at the hotel

were closed. They were starving and too tired to venture out again. They agreed to order room service. It didn't matter if they overspent one night out of the fourteen they were away.

They pigged out on double salmon burgers, fries and champagne, sitting side by side on the enormous bed. Afterwards George elaborated on his plans while Grace lay curled up in his arms. They'd ditch the hotel and get a Pass to the Wilderness. They'd hire camping gear and head off inland to the vast reaches of the interior, away from the tourists. Regulations seemed to vary but, in general, they should bury their shit at least eight inches into the ground. They were not to wash in rivers. They mustn't burn rubbish.

'Is this what makes a man and a woman stay in love?'

Grace reached for her glass but it was empty. She was a bit drunk.

'How are we going to stay in love? What are we going to do with all that time that we've got together?'

George was a bit drunk too. He closed the travel guide and placed it carefully on the bedside table. Grace's questions were interrupting the flow of his thoughts. Now he was wondering if maybe it was wasteful to abandon the hotel room when it was all paid for. They had the best vantage point from here. They could see the ocean, the city and the mountains.

What were they going to do with all the time they had together? Maybe they'd have lots of different jobs. Maybe they'd live in lots of different cities. Maybe they'd have to nurse each other through lots of illnesses. Maybe she'd be pregnant more times than they'd have children. Maybe she'd have miscarriages. Maybe he'd hit the bottle. Maybe they would fail where others had succeeded. Maybe they would succeed where others had failed.

The heating in the room was on full. But neither of them wanted to move from their cosy position to turn it down.

'What time shall we get up and head for the wilderness?' Grace asked sleepily.

George mumbled a reply about maybe the weather taking a turn for the worse.

It wasn't long before they were both fast asleep, dressed in their clothes, on top of the bed.

Outside it was very cold. It never usually snowed in these parts. But it would tonight. The eighth night since their arrival. The ninth night since their marriage. It would snow all night long while George and Grace slept. Soon it would cover the pavements where they'd walked downtown and it would cover the hikes in the hills. A blanket of white snow would cover their wrong turns and their false starts. Snow would fall to cover their failures and successes of the last few days. Just like the snow would continue to fall in the coming years. Snow would cover their failures and their successes in the future. It would fall gently down on their joys and despair.

The snow would continue to fall all night long on those places they would never visit.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Cathy Naden.*