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Writer/s: [Kristin Hannaford](#)

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The Wind Carver

Today as we sit here looking out at the sea, our legs braced against the breakwater, he has made me a Zephyr. A parting gift, he says, as he whispers the breeze against my neck, as he lifts the hair from my shoulders and exhales.

Was it so long ago that we had first met? Perhaps, yes, it was.

I had taken refuge from the heat of the day under a market umbrella, a stall which sold jewellery carved from bone. Creamy white patterns of fish and exotic animals were tied with leather thong and lay suspended from the rack. Across the black fabric table pendants were as delicious as pieces of white chocolate, smooth and cool. Under the umbrella the noise and bustle of the market faded, I watched the passage of legs and shoes, and wondered if I could face the hassle of the vegetable stalls.

My fingers stroked the circular shapes of bone carving, and I turned to find a man smiling at me from the back of his Ute. *Viento* he said, and nodded toward the necklace I was holding, *it is the wind*. The most delicately carved bone pendant curved, laced, intertwined and rippled in my palm. The piece was exquisite, unlike anything I had seen.

I didn't realise at the time, but in purchasing the piece I had entered into a contract. He was to become my lover, my translator of the elements. In bed at night he would speak the languages of winds as he traced swirls and whorls with his fingers over the length of my back. *Shamal, Meltemi, Coromell, Boreas*. His tongue was thick with meaning, as if by speaking he could make me understand the complex and extraordinary patterns of air. *Papagayo, Pampero, Maestro* he would moan and quake. Once, he climaxed and yelled *Cockeyed Bob!* and collapsed on the pillow beside me. As he reclined, I watched in disbelief through the window as leaves, dust and dirt spiralled in the backyard. While he slept, I crept out to the lounge room and as the kettle boiled consulted the dictionary to decipher the terms of our lovemaking.

During our lovemaking I felt it was perhaps the only time I ever truly understood him. He was a quiet man, speaking only when necessary and even then only if it related to the weather. Through him I began to understand the meaning of ordinary words I had never comprehended:

barometric pressure, south easterly, coriolis. We climbed mountains together, and as we contemplated the vista he would sweep his arm across the sky and show me vertical anabatic winds, air lifting as he held me close to the clouds. I realise now, that this light and breezy period, was of course only temporary. It couldn't last. It was the proverbial calm before the storm.

At night, as we watched the evening news he grew increasingly frustrated. He would stride towards the television, and as the weather forecast spoke only of dry winds and dust storms he would shape his fingers across the screen, as if by the secret movement of his hands he could shape barometric pressure across continents. He began to sleep only in the spare room and we spent our evenings separately, at night I listened to him cursing me in a variety of names which blew winds off deserts. Names which sheared sands off dunes and hurled them at the sky, words which raised temperatures and prevented sleep. Never had I understood him so completely.

I returned home one day to find he had carved the wind into the slab of redgum behind our bed. I searched the wood for even currents and flows, gentle breezes and calm air that might embrace our sleep, sweet breath that might once again kiss against my body. Yet as I surveyed the reddened wood, all I found were sharp escalations of force, damaging and uncomfortable squalls. *Bayamo? Abroholos? Borasco?* I questioned him in his own language, spat at him winds which were dark and violent. I felt the extremities of fury whirl and dull my senses, I delivered him his tempest.

He turned from the wall and looked at me. A slow smile expanded and grew full in the silence of the room. Was this what it was like in the eye of a cyclone? Still air so heavy you cannot breathe? Like a young schoolgirl I was disarmed by his ever increasing grin. Burrowing his hands deep into my shirt, between my breasts, he clasped his hands on the bone carved pendant and lifted it before my eyes. The bone was smooth. Clean. Gone were the curlicues and circles, willy willys, and waves. All the beautiful patterning of air gone. We made love one last time that night, and as I fully came to understand him, to understand the ever variable currents of his mind, I knew that he was leaving me.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Kristin Hannaford.