



Source: Edmund Blair, 'Tehran says all UK captives can go home', AFP, Reuters in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 05/04/07.

Tags: [New Zealand](#), [child/parent](#), [travel](#)

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Hello. (the telephone call). How are you?

I'm old, dear.

Oh. Yes.

I'm forgetting people's names. I've always been bad at it. But now, I see a face and their name jumps right out of my mind. Like a slippery fish.

Hello.

Yes, I'm tired dear. How are you, there?

Tell me about There.

Her voice cracks upwards. Down the telephone I see her sitting on the modest velvet couch, three of her fat cats in doorways, two dozen ornaments above her head on shelves, the television faintly on. Coronation Street at 6.30 p.m. There, in Tahuna-Nui, New Zealand sits my ancestor at tea time.

* * *

Years before this phone call.

I am a friendly child with a magnetic chess board on my lap, taking a plane There. To New Zealand my family home. I am punch drunk because I just had a Qantas solo flyer's pin attached to my lapel by a hostess who smelt like musk and airplanes and lipstick. And I am sitting next to a man drinking whiskey and dry. I finger the deep of my Ancestors, piled up one upon another in a velvet box.

Hello. Do you know how to play chess?

My travel companion looks heavy and sleepy but to my surprise he wrenches his head off the backrest and pins me with a smile.

I am a champion player, he says.

Because here, I unveil the box of Ancestors proudly and unfold the cardboard base, I have a Magnetic Chess Board. See. You can take this Knight and you can spin him along like a coin and then he whoomps into place.

Line em all up, he instructs.

We play a slow laughing game over the Tasman Sea to There. An incomplete game with very few rules because I am much more interested in the figures, Knight, Castle, King, than in their strategic moves. A Pawn was a derisible figure to me then and I learnt they could be sacrificed.

We picked them off the board and dropped them into the deep black box. One by one.

* * *

There is a gift that I made for a friend of mine who is English.

She married a New Zealander and they both worked as hard as dogs in London. It was their lifelong dream to slow down, to have a child and move to New Zealand to escape the bitter toil of England and to claim more space and more land.

For my friend's wedding I made her a velvet jewel box that had, woven into the lid, a honeymoon photo of my grandparents, standing outside a tin shed in Danneberg, New Zealand, squinting into the sun. Their first home. My grandmother was Northern English and she married my grandfather who was a New Zealander and a Commonwealth soldier stationed on the White Cliffs of Dover. And He proposed and He won and brought her out to a small island to make a life.

A couple of years on, here and now and my friends have acted on that dream, foreshadowed by a box and they have moved to New Zealand to claim more space and more land with one small girl child.

We keep in touch by telephone and photos.

* * *

Hello. (cracking morning voice)

Hello. It's Tiger. (midnight warm voice)

It's me. I just woke up. (silence) What can you see out your window?

I can see the Thames and it will be 20 degrees today because it is Spring. (Hard G on Spring-g. like an accent from Coronation Street). What can you see out your window?

I can see my garden growing and the autumn is making my avocado tree shed burnt leaves and I am not sure if it is getting enough water. (rising)

There. Oh. (silence that cannot be anything but telephone silence)

What is happening on your Easter?

I am working. I'm tired tonight. (midnight warmth turns bed-ish). And you?

I am spending time on the garden. I am worried. (rising)

Can you feel me rub your feet? (humming a deep laugh)

No. You are there. You fool. (hard as nails, Australian fullstop)

You are worried? It will only be 20 days then a day on the plane and I'll be There.

Okay. (sounds like two dry beats—Oh. Kay.)

What is the sea temperature? Here it is 6 degrees.

Twenty-two degrees at the beach. Warm as bathwater. My grandmother says she feels old and is forgetting everyone's names. (telephone silence)

Oh.

Night night Tiger. Sleep tight.

Yup. You step into...(finish. shut lid)

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Caitlin Newton-Broad.