



Source: Nada Bakri, 'Invisible Palestinians exist in legal limbo in Lebanon', *New York Times online*, 06/05/07.

Tags: [animals](#), [home](#), [dreams](#), [literature](#), [plants](#), [workplace](#)

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The bed is strewn with books.

She wakes in the early hours of the morning. Many books and catalogues and garden manuals have mysteriously migrated onto the bed during the night. When she went to bed they were lined up in book cases, or stacked in neat piles on the floor and the bedside table. Large books at the bottom, small books at the top, hardcovers in one pile, paper backs in all sorts of other orderly piles. Balance, decorum, a sense of composure.

Now the bed is strewn with words and images: magazines, catalogues, books, seed packets, open, closed, squashed, crumpled, dog-eared. Her reading glasses have fallen and are pinioned between Madame Alfred Carrière and Barbra Streisand, luscious illustrations of roses ancient and modern, demure and overblown. Lulu is curled up tabbily on an article on coloured cauliflowers—purple graffiti and green panther—in *Organic Gardening*. She has been awoken by a dream, by a man shouting at her. Don Burke, who is also her father, looks out from the television, from his perennial show 'Burke's Back Yard,' looks out straight into her eyes and thunders, 'There will be no Formosan lilies in our backyard! No *Lilium formosanum* in our white flower farm, no exotics, no invasive weeds, nothing but California natives!'

She searches in the plethora of paper for the list she started before falling asleep, a list of plants for her envisaged white garden. But Elvis, the king of the cats, has gnawed and shredded the paper and so she must start again. While she searches for a clean piece of paper Elvis stretches and purrs and purrs and stretches, and digs his claws into Perenyi's *Green Thoughts*. Although it is three o'clock in the morning she gets up and gathers several catalogues—*Plants Delight*, and *J.H. Hudson Seedsman*, and *White Flower Farm*, and gardening manuals and her file on lilies. And then she starts a new list (from which the Formosa lily has been excised), on the inside back cover of *Pat Welsh's Southern California Gardening*: *Alyssum*, *Oxalis alba* (non-invasive), *Buddleia asiatica* (white butterfly bush), *Coleonema album* (white breath of heaven), *Erica darleyensis*, Mrs Collier Sweet Pea, *Artemisia stellerana* silver brocade, white *Agrastemma*...

Eventually, overwhelmed by possibilities, she falls asleep. When she wakes in the dawn the bed is strewn with books and magazines and catalogues and lists and cats. Her lover, who is away, is not so tolerant of this incursion of the garden into the bedroom. You might say: but these are merely books, this is not the stuff of gardening, not the humus and blood and bone meal and soil and muck. But he, slyly wise, knows better. She is lonesome when he is gone, but Lulu and Elvis are more tolerant. They prefer catalogues and magazines to books, but in general enjoy every piece of paper. When her loved one is away she gets a lot of gardening done. In bed.

I did not know, when I moved into this house in San Diego, that the garden, even before it became a garden, would seize hold of me, take possession of my body, colonize my mind, lasso and corral every stray thought. I did not know I was about to enter the realm of the obsessed. I unpacked my few old gardening books and started browsing, simultaneously excited and irritated because these were often not much help here in this strange land where I found myself. So I bought a few books and then subscribed to a few magazines, started ordering gardening books from the library and through inter library loan. First how-to books and then garden histories and essays. Soon I had exceeded the extremely generous limit of books allowed by my university library, so I had to start returning books. After a while I requested a lift on the limit. All the books I had were gardening books. At weekends and nights I would go to gardening classes and scribble notes on every piece of paper in my bag: receipts, prescriptions, flyers. In the early morning I would wake and read gardening literature in bed with a pot of tea, and come home from work work and work in the garden, with a torch when the light ran out. And in between the early morning and the evening I would masquerade as one who knows, one who is in command and focused on the job in hand. But all the time, at the back of my mind I would be mulling over what I had read, imagining and planning, thinking about ordering seeds, making trips to the nursery, weighing up the virtues of various mulches. At work I am supposedly one who knows, in my domestic, or gardening world, I do not know, I am pig ignorant. There are glimmers of memorial knowledge, inklings or instincts, some residual understanding like the experience of riding a bicycle, but mostly—particularly as regards the flower garden, and conditions in San Diego—I wallow in ignorance. I enjoy wallowing, like a pig in shit, because my ignorance gives me license to read, and to experiment with all the ingenuousness of the novitiate.

Gardening does this to people, even to sober measured people with clean hands and no history of addiction, people who can write long and convoluted sentences about ideas and unfulfilled desire, like Henry James. He came to gardening rather late in life, in England: 'Little by little even with other cares, the slowly but surely working poison of the garden-mania begins to stir in my long-sluggish veins.' There is a story to be written about gardening and the unconscious, about Freud and Darwin, and Melanie Klein and Gertrud Jekyll, about part objects and deferred pleasure and worms and dreams and displacement and transference. But this is not that story.

When she wakes in the morning the bed is strewn with paper and on every piece of paper the garden is sown.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Lesley Stern.*