



Source: Rory Carroll, 'At first there is a glimmer of hope, then dread sets in', *Guardian Unlimited*, 30/05/07.

Tags: [intimacy](#), [plants](#), [streets](#)

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They patted me up through the layers, soft pats and nudges that pushed me upwards. It felt good, all that rustling and flapping. It was loud, and Damn it was bright, and then the layers scratched and slapped and I got shoved through. I'm always proud that I landed on my back, my eyes wide open to a black sky, with the steam rising up and snow flakes coming down. Like they say, things move quick at the start. And Make Life Simple is what I've heard them say.

The landscape was all shades of one colour, lakes, holes and hills the same. 'A landscape for love declarations' is what the sign said there in the new lands. But I hadn't learned to read yet so I took the first tourist bus out of there. Maybe I'll be more clever about it next time.

The rest of this comes in bits. I kept moving, and fast. Different buildings, doorways and TVs all the time. Whole new skies, new faces. Pretty quick I got a reputation for a natural talent where I couldn't tell people apart much. That's not hard to explain when you know that I did it all in reverse, starting from the new lands and moving to the old ones, always older. And that's where it got crowded and really crowded.

This is how it works: the numbers come up in red LEDs and they're supposed to match the number on your scrap of paper, or at least that might happen sometime. Everyone gets a scrap of paper at the door machine, and it gets well-rolled and greasy before your number ticks over in the system. And it's crammed, and some digits never come up at all.

I fell in love in that queue—he had a number not unlike mine and we went for it. This part's in bits too. When I moved in we celebrated at the airport early in the morning with glasses of vodka, or maybe it was something cheaper, anyway we smashed those glasses to get started. Because it had been a long journey I was allowed to get straight in the bath. Or it could have been three of us in the bath, with a party going on in the next room. There was some invented game involving

bed-diving and near misses, cause we weren't afraid for our bodies back then. That kind of carry-on. The plants grew up quickly in that apartment; up between the floorboards and along the walls. The ceiling was broken in patches, which was nice for sunlight. The fruit off those trees tasted really good to start with, we'd cut it up finely into fruit salad and feed it to each other. They were happy mornings—when the gypsy neighbour from across the street played accordion to the rubbish truck driver with love in his eye, and his gypsy daughter played using both hands to squirt pretty designs from a choco-sauce bottle onto an abandoned couch. There was a granddad too, or maybe just some old guy they kept around. He'd come up to me when I left the house and ask me to set his big old watch. I'd check my phone and set it exact. It was pretty clear on the first day that that watch didn't work, probably never had, but I set it every day for him anyway. His only advice was keep moving or the quiet gets you. He was right—love was giving bad signs and the fruit season was over, so I burned the trees and moved on.

People have told me the next part's a dark patch. Me and friends I barely knew spent nights ripping strips off billboards and arranging the colours into a plan. It went well till a guy fell off a building into a street party and no one noticed him on the ground till the next day and everyone claimed he was only sleeping. They'd thought he'd only been sleeping. I guess no one saw him land.

But I was lucky. I walked all the way to the sea and got there before dawn. Later I found a place to sleep and it was really okay. Someone had burst a door-sized hole right through the brick wall of the main room, like they were so happy to be home. I stayed and never cleaned up the rubble, it was the only entrance I ever used and it was beautiful. I met that guy much much later and he was the one—I'll take him back to the new lands one day. And I told him, don't worry, I'll get better at this as we go along.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Kate McIntosh.*