



Source: Michael R. Gordon, 'Sectarian fears percolate in an Iraqi town', *New York Times online*, 22/06/07.

Tags: [corporeality](#), [discomfort](#), [sexuality](#)
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Tina knocked on the door of the semi-detached house and let herself in. She could see Brian sitting, head in hand, at the little kitchen table at the end of the long, dim hallway, and thought she caught a glimpse of saggy cock and balls as he pulled together a colourless flannel bathrobe.

'Make us a cuppa, would you, love,' he greeted her, mournfully.

She put the kettle on, and the light. 'No use sitting in here in the dark, Brian.' Close to, Tina could see the dark, liquid stains at his breast. 'Poor dear, is it hurting?'

'I don't even know any more, love. It's embarrassing, is what it is. The bloke from the welfare was in the other day. He said he couldn't do anything for me. He was sorry, he said, but lactation issues weren't in his bailiwick.'

'Bailiwick?'

'Bailiwick.'

'Incredible. Has anyone else come up with anything? You know, useful?'

'There's a woman over at the hospital who says she could admit me there. For observation. Apparently there's another bloke with lactation issues, and some poor bugger who's got his period. Got the rag on. Imagine. Bet he's used up his vocabulary. Though I'll admit to a few bad words myself.'

'Are you going to take her up on it?'

'I dunno. This is bad enough, without being a lab rat. Don't you think? It's not like she says there's a cure, or anything. And I'm not like John. Don't need the straightjacket.'

'Oh no. What's happened to him?'

'Teething. And he's fifty if he's a day. Bloody awful. Had to have himself committed. Last time he nearly went mad from sheer pain. Scratched his own face to pieces. Stitches and all. It started again—he said he thought he was growing a tusk, packed a little bag and took himself off to the loony bin. He seemed quite chirpy, all things considered. He told me he reckoned everything'd gone bonkers, so it seemed like just the place to be.'

'And no trouble having it paid for?'

'Nope. As he said, if you show up at their door swearing black and blue that you're cutting a third set of teeth, chances are they'll think you're mental. I suppose I could show up and tell them my breast milk's come on. As long as you'd promise to come and have tea at visiting hours.'

'Of course I would. You're not serious, are you?'

'Not really. I just wish I knew that this was going to end. The bloke from the welfare did say he'd put in a good word at the job centre, so I can keep on the dole for now, but who knows how long that'll last. I don't much feel like going down there myself: I have to tape the breast pads

on, it's very uncomfortable. And I have to express all the time, or it gets too bloody painful. It sounds a bit stupid, but I wish there was something I could do with it—shame for it to go to waste. Can't really walk up to the young mothers in the park and say 'Hello, love, I've got some perfectly good breast milk you can have—made it myself.'

'Be a bit weird, wouldn't it,' said Tina, failing to suppress a laugh. Dismay and then relief sped across Brian's jowly face, and he started to laugh, too. 'That'll be good for you, a good laugh,' sputtered Tina, as they subsided.

'Yes, thanks, Teen,' chuckled Brian.

After a little while, Brian's head sank back in his hand. 'You can't help being pretty dark, though,' he said. 'I mean, you've got to wonder. Is it just a handful of middle-aged blokes in Sydney, or is it something else? Some radiation, or a chemical in the air. Something to do with climate change. Or, or, some bloody garden fertilizer got in the DNA. Who knows. Don't much feel like the cutting edge of evolution, but.'

'I can't believe how well you're coping, really. Shall I make another cuppa?'

'Thanks, Teen. But, now, why do you think no one's taken more of an interest? I mean, it's got to be a bloody scientific marvel. They should get all of us together, we could make a show: Come and see Amazing Milk Man, and the Incredible Menstruating Man. At least we could make a bob or two. But there's just the woman at the hospital. Wants to keep an eye on me.'

'I don't know, Brian. I've tried to interest a couple of journalist mates, but it doesn't seem to take hold. Of course, if it was contagious they'd be all over it. I'm sorry, dear, but they just think it's weird.'

'Can't blame 'em for that. It is weird. Thanks for trying, anyway, Teen.'

'Oh, no worries, Brian,' gathering up her keys. 'Listen, I've finished my tea, so I'm going to have to run. But I'll pop by tomorrow, if you like.'

'Thanks, love. See you then.'

'Bye.'

Tina walked down the front steps and along the footpath to her car, parked a little way up the street. Inside, she flipped open a snazzy-looking phone and made a call. 'Ah ha, nuh, ah ha, yep,' and hung up.

Tina shot her cuff to check the time, the stainless steel of the watch set off against her tanned, increasingly hairy wrist. She took a second to consider a sinewy tendon in her forearm, before starting the car. Pulling out into the street, she felt a newly familiar sensation, a tightening in her groin as she hit the accelerator. 'Poor bugger,' she said aloud, as Brian's house shrank in her rear-view mirror.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Frazer Ward.