



Source: Abraham Rabinovich, 'Olmert pledges pullback for peace', *The Australian online*, 10/10/07.

Tags: [animals](#), [death](#), [war](#), [storytelling](#)
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'If the sky cracks open tomorrow, then it is likely that finally it will rain cats and dogs. It is, I suppose, equally possible that the promised pestilence will come to be, in which case I anticipate frogs, scorpions and death adders cascading from black roiling clouds. Shards of lightning will shatter the atmosphere and the noise...well the noise will be deafening. Have you thought about what that means? Consequences. All our actions have consequences...'

The old woman pauses and absent-mindedly contemplates her knotted fingers.

'The earth,' she continues, 'has gone mad, and by mad I mean, mutual assured destruction. Life, having emerged on short, scaly, stumpy legs, or perhaps slithering, in a series of sinuous waving movements from the primeval ooze, is fecund, explosive, unexpected, rich, violent, savage and inexplicable. It is not, however, deliberately cruel. People, on the other hand, despite endless protestations about their capacity for love and compassion, and their ability to learn from past mistakes, are inherently brutal, dishonest, rapacious and venal. On and on they go—raping, maiming and killing—the earth, its creatures and themselves. Thwarted,' she says rolling the feel of the word around in her mouth, 'that's what I am. Opportunities missed. I should have changed the world.'

The younger woman grimaces and turns away from the window. Tomorrow, she thinks, the sky will be blue, the sun will blaze in the sky and the garden will be filled with flowering grevillea, wattles, and bottlebrush. Honeyeaters and wattlebirds, parrots and kookaburras, whip birds and bellbirds and small finches singing from within the greenness. She will dig compost into the garden. Earthworms will sink back into the soil and small unidentifiable scurrying insects, will hurry away into the moist dampness. If there is a serpent in my Eden, she thinks, he will be a big, beautiful, black snake with cream or gold markings, *Morelia spilota*, and he will harm only the rats and small mammals that are his natural prey. The frogs burp contently from the reeds. It's a quietness completed by birdsong, and the wind sighing between the casuarinas.

The man observing the women turns nervously away. He cannot meet either the old woman's rage or the younger woman's acceptance. He is battered into aching dullness. His hands clench and unclench, shoulders knotted. He cannot forget the gunfire, sharp and unmistakeable, the people fleeing, the screaming and the unbearable stench of death. Images of death, brutality and destruction fill his

mouth. He can taste the fear. He can smell the decay. He sees only the betrayal of hope and the stony faces of men, who having lost everything will destroy whatever's left, even if—or particularly when—they regret it later. He knows there are many not only willing, but passionately desirous of bringing the apocalypse into being. He can't watch the television and the newspaper fills him with dread. He can't settle to comfort. Smug politicians scoring points and talking with easy conviction about who has the right to live and die, turn his stomach. Christians all apparently. That's not what he remembers from those Sunday school classes of long ago. There the talk was of salvation, compassion and the forgiveness of sin, of faith, hope and charity, and the meek inheriting the earth. He blinks away tears. He's not sure now that he can encompass his own divide.

From his seat on the floor, the boy observes cautiously. Emotional eddies lift the edge of the curtains and the smell of burnt toast faintly flavours the room. He thinks that if he can just get up and walk out of the room, there will be a new place, somewhere fresh and hopeful. There will be laughter and adventure. He knows that they can fix it. There's going to be a big shift. He's just waiting for it. In all the stories he's read there's that moment when the guide arrives. He'll be dry of wit and austere but with a twinkle in his eye and acutely intelligent. Hidden depths of course. He knows the byways and the back roads and where goodness is. Birds fly to his hand, and he speaks to the wild things. Hidden deep in the forest, and with his small but motley band of friends, the young man will learn the ways of the world: how to fight bravely with sword and stick, how to woo and win, and most importantly, what evil is and how to defeat it. There is of course a quest, a great evil to be vanquished. He will be sorely tested but the hero always wins through, living happily ever after. A surge of energy lifts him up and out onto the road. He runs to the mall, his future dancing before his eyes, and there he finds some mates and smokes some weed.

A cold wind gusts down the road blowing leaves and rubbish before it. It swirls round the eaves of the house where the family sleeps. A woman makes tea watching for the sky to brighten. A man struggles for breath in his narrow bed. Life continues. Life stops. Life goes on either with or without us.

The magpies warble ecstatically at dawn.

She hopes for rain.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Sarah Miller.