



Source: David Johnston, 'Security guards get Iraq immunity', *New York Times*, AP in *The Age online*, 31/10/07.

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After peeling away so many layers, you will come to find that what is there is even smaller than you expected. In your vigour you will forget your own strength, dig nails into dirt or into old wallpaper glue or into your own skin and feel things crumble beneath your touch. You will scrape and scratch until nothing gives way, and scratching the scraping itself will bring you back into your body and into your senses.

Such excavation takes many days, many years—so long now that it is difficult to remember why you began in the first place. Whatever it was that called you to yourself and demanded as its price no less than your fragile skin, you will become lost instead in your long quarrying.

Imagine, then, the surprise of what you find, the small, glittering stone with edges so sharp that they draw blood, your blood. Here is every hardened desire, each sadness, all loss. Did you even know you were saving these things, savouring these things in some dim corner of your body? Did you know that they would somehow become something rare and precious when secreted among the layers of your life, choked and pressured by your dark and airless shame?

Of everything taken away from you by will or by force, it was this perfect stone that you chose to greedily keep, though you hardly remember deciding so. Flushed with loss, you clutched the empty space, breathed your sour sadness into the cracks, held it there with prayers and promises. How could you have known what it would become, this thing that no one wanted, this thing that no one could take away and you couldn't get rid of? Hardened, sharp, it came to rest under your skin, came to seem like the secret at the centre that was keeping you from yourself.

And so you set out to dig into this place at the centre, the place where your body's restlessness started from. Now, here, is the thing you didn't even know you were looking for, the thing you had hidden from yourself. At the centre of your searching, too long latent to be changed into some new or reborn thing, here is the small stone you kept in your heart. Give it now to the sea, or to the air. Give it away, if it can't be taken away. From the centre of yourself, give it away. This time, keep only yourself.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Jacqui Shine.*