



Source: Martin Chulov, 'Tehran is still a threat: Israel', *The Australian online*, 06/12/07.

Tags: [art](#), [child/parent](#), [husband/wife](#), [travel](#)
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My mother is a ceramicist: she works with sand-grey clay and grit-white tiles, building colour from glaze. With worn brushes, she paints soft hues onto the bisque—pastel and faded. It's not until the kiln has cooled and my mother props open the lid that the truer colours are finally revealed—flaming red, burnt sunshine and fiesta turquoise. She lifts each tile, running her hands over the smooth lines of glaze as though she can feel the colours through her fingertips.

When she met my stepfather, she stole pebbles from his driveway and carried them in her pockets like lucky charms. When he delivered dahlias for her housewarming party, she coveted them, gripping them tightly in her leather-worn, soft hands. She told me she had trouble controlling herself, she wanted to squeeze the bright flowers in her fists; so when everyone was dancing, she took them downstairs and ate them.

'You did what?' I asked.

'I ate them.' I tried to imagine this—her teeth ripping into the colourful tendrils, the empty stems left over.

'Why?'

'I wanted to feel them close to my heart.'

My stepfather is a carpenter who gave up his wood for her tiles. He worked for her, buying clay, ordering glazes, shipping her hand-made ceramics to foreign cities. He was not an adventurous man: he was afraid to leave their island-house and when she started travelling, he told her he'd rather wait beside the fire for her return than journey with her. To be fair to him, it was a striking fireplace. My mother had tiled it with mosaics in the shape of a woman who wore blue robes and smiled with gentle beauty.

But of course my mother began venturing further and further away until one day she woke up on the other side of the earth. She called me on the phone, her voice bubble-gum sweet and giddy. 'I'm leaving your stepfather.'

'Don't be ridiculous.'

'I'm turning sixty next month. I only have another good twenty years in me and by God, I want to feel alive.'

Of course everyone has the right to be happy and everyone has the right to leave but I don't trust my mother. Her passion is contagious, causing static over the phone line and I want to hang up. Her gulping eagerness reminds me of pebbles and dahlias. We're both afraid of each other but she can't stop talking and I can't stop listening.

It was my cousin Rose's wedding. Two plane rides and three hours in a rental car and my mother arrived twenty minutes before the ceremony. At dinner, a man swept into the chair beside her and their conversation lasted for three and a half hours. When he asked her to dance, she was already standing. It's not the man, I realise—with the phone cradled between my head and my neck—she'll never see him again; she's dancing with something else, something bigger and much more familiar. I picture her following the lead of a large bird, a mythological bird. It has the body of a flamingo and the bill of a toucan. Its feathers are bower-bird blue-black and there's strength in its wingspan. This creature is dancing my mother into the tango and she's enthralled. Her eyes are moist and I can see the gold caps on her back teeth—her smile is that open and wide.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Shady Cosgrove.