



Source: Peter Fray, 'Life in rocket range puts town on edge', *The Age online*, 22/12/07.

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1. Chosen

To stay chosen isn't the easiest of things, he thinks, breathless, flailing to his usual stance on the cliff top: head falling forwards, feet planted, arms spread in a crossbow. Downswop of eagle's wings. His loose clothes flap around him, slightly Chinese, via Maunakea Market. His back is a bent steel rod. Two steps away, the volcanic rocks snaggle down to a green glass sea.

He imagines he is Christ of the Islands, overstaying his allotted hour, peering through salt sweat tears and a broken forelock (where the base of a beer bottle clipped him last night). He surveys the blustery landscape. Rotates a gingerly 360 degrees.

Where are the faithful when you need them, who'd pledged wives children storehouses fishing hooks barbecues stockmarkets SUVs, all that had made existence bearable before they'd embraced him? Who'd promised obedience in the form of love and love in the form of resolution? Who'd sworn to follow through?

Every winter solstice, they'd gathered here on the volcanic cliff top before sunrise. They'd welcomed with chants and yogic poses the darkness slit into pink-tinged day. They'd leaned peering over the edge.

Let no evil word leave thy mouth unhindered if evil intent be the engine that drives it. Let no evil intent form in the white mists of your beleaguered passions, let no passion simmer unexamined, for therein evil may brew.

There's a stiff clean wind gusting in from the sea.

There's a man, grimy grey from head to bare feet, creaking a supermarket trolley up the laden path. Head thrown back, wild-eyed, his lips pursing, gaping, cupping. His caved chest ballooning then emptying of the insensible air.

He lets that man slide bedraggled from his field of vision. He has given ten years of his life to this struggle. Would he give it all away now, so close to the end, to silvermesh heels, to ruin or prize?

A tall elderly woman stoops gracefully, dead centre of the field behind him. She scoops dog turd into a black plastic bag. A dog launches itself, legs unfurled, after a whirling stick.

2. Two

She likes a grand entrance, always has, something she's trained for her whole life. Likes peering into any passing plate glass window, running an appraising hand over the curves of her own thickening rump, waist, hip. Words race her wandering hand as she twists back for a second look. Stump, vase, daddy cool.

She's proud of her secondhand chic, her sundressed ravish from Kuta. In a world where not much makes sense, you might as well take whatever's going. You might as well make the most. Fake the feelings, make the words beguile, and swerve, and shiver, and run. Say the words anyone would want to hear. Cricket, single red rose, cat.

For the word is a creature of air and spirit, brought forth from the deep recesses, begot in the narrow place where mind meets body, therein resides your susceptible soul.

She clicks her silver heels to the edge of the pavement, waiting for the lights to change. The lunchtime traffic of pedestrians parts around her like the sea, snags a half smile, a pair of pursed lips in the corner of her slanted eye. She was born for this, the indulgent male gaze, the female's begrudge.

Even the grimy grey man, winter coat flapping bejewelled by this morning's sunshower, can't help it. He turns as she nimbly passes, swivelling her ample hip around his cart. He stops mid-crossing, raises one thin arm after her. Points a quavering finger to the sky.

The living word exposed to evil so issued will smite and sunder all that is admirable and true!

Her back is a bridge, built for a growing load. A sickness arises from just below her navel, travels the distance through duodenum and stomach juices, up her oesophagus past her lungs to her throat. She presses the nausea back with a scented tissue to her lips.

She's early. She'll dally a while beside someone's hedge, peer into someone's half-curtained window. They polish their furniture in this neighbourhood. The man with the shopping trolley passes her, motoring forward, now uninterested, and she pretends not to look.

She is sure he'll be there to meet her, before her heels have lifted from the first paving stone past his front gate. Tea for two, and now for three. Conscience, invisible worm, Cheshire.

3. Stay

Would she choose to stay, had she not been chosen? To stay sidelined, mother martyr, no substitute. Believe it or not, once swept off her feet. The children have long gone, and the kitchen sink gleams unsuspecting, and the polish has worn out its usefulness. Roses in a tubular vase have bust their buds, spent petals curling, more darkened than red. Who put them there? Did she?

She gazes out towards the cliff tops, hazy through her gauze undercurtains. It's winter. In Hawai'i, that means trade winds, sunshowers, and big waves. What she hates is the straitjacket of the seasons, of platitudes, of tea and sympathy. Of being reduced to cliché. 'Hey!' 'Hey there.' 'How are you?' 'Happy holidays!' 'So nice to see you.'

When the children ring, from New Mexico, from Hong Kong, from Sydney, she can't help it. Her voice droops. 'How are you?' they ask. 'I am nothing. Nothing!' 'Are you tired?' they ask. 'Yes I'm tired, I'm tired of living.'

For now comes the evil time of greed and untrammelled passion. The evil word will rain fresh-brewed and molten upon auspicious and blighted alike. Now comes the time of drift and murk and black dissolve. Now comes the time.

She tweaks the curtain netting apart. A lean shadow pauses, raising both arms to the heavens for an instant. Then it passes beyond the star jasmine hedge, bent heaving at something. Some burden. Another shadow pauses by the gate.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Beth Yahp.