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Source: Carolynne Wheeler, 'Original Palestinian scarf faces final wrap-up', *Telegraph in The Age online*, 21/01/08.

Tags: [sexuality](#), [intimacy](#), [food](#)
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One of the things I want there to be in this story is pie. I'll work my way round to it.

I would never dare get our Ian a DVD of *Brokeback Mountain*—he would feel I was taking a liberty. But gifts where the Friends-of-Dorothy subtext is a little more delicately stated are always acceptable, so: '50's musicals; quality documentaries about Nureyev, or flamenco; historical TV series about lost heiresses/doomed wives; and he loves, loves, LOVES the DVD of Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake*.

Glittery things, delicate, sparkly and cute. Little bijou knick-knacks, gilt stuff with cherubs on and random bunches of grapes ("Little cheery bums"). He's created a nest out of this stuff. Cane furniture, silk-embroidered cushions, lacquer screens, gold carpet. He had a friend who used to trawl all the local auction houses and pick stuff out for him, for pennies. A gilt-glaze art-deco coffee set. Crystal decanters in extravagant shapes (on doilies.) He has the most amazing perfume bottle, inherited from an aunt—it's like a grapefruit-sized thistle of cut glass—half-full of Curacao, glistening intensely among the other liqueurs on the sideboard. Once on a shopping trip to Bainbridges to replace a missing bit of chandelier he went straight to the girl at the lighting counter and said, without preamble, 'Do you have any crystal dangles?' Apparently she did.

He is seldom seen without his jewellery, five or so large rings and a cluster of pendants on a chain nestling under his shirt. For a treat he'll lay them all out on a sheet of newspaper on the table and tell us about them. Or maybe we'll watch him clean them using toothpaste and an old toothbrush, a jeweller's secret method, apparently. This gold cross from so-and-so. This jewel here for protection. This signet symbolises faithfulness and that one makes you clever with words. He has square, plump hands; tapering manicured fingers and body hair peeping from under all the edges of his clothing. A bear of a man, much kinder, domestically, than my mother, his sister. You are overloaded with kindness, staying with him. And with alcohol. And with potatoes. And with pie. (And go to bed with five hot water bottles under ten blankets against the bitter Northern nights. And get stared at by umpteen sepia photographs of formidable aunts in gilt frames until you wake up again.)

If I had to sum up the domestic arts of the North I'd say they were making fire, making pie and making something out of nothing. I remember the first time I visited, how the air smelt of coal, and how bright and wet the big sky was. I had nothing to compare it with—I thought the rest of England would be like that too. It isn't. The details are so petty: shoddy goods, savings stamps, milk tokens and subsidised bus fares—but the view is so wide, right across the valley. Our Ian knows this landscape like the inside of his

pocket. He's rolled home drunk across it, had affairs the length and breadth of it, lost money on it, made a living from it, grieved in it and partied hard.

He used to take us driving and each and every landmark on the top of every hill was somewhere he'd been to and could tell you the history of. Every farm, every mill, every pub and club—he'd be friends with the landlord—and every church. He'd be friends with the vicar. This was where their car had come off the bridge and into the mill pond; this was where he'd missed his chance with a most beautiful young man; this is where he met the old slapper who's made his life a misery for all these years—actually one of his biggest cronies and partners-in-crime—"Why, she's had five husbands at least, not to mention concubinage", a woman who looks after him tenderly and has him over for Sunday lunch every week, along with the sixth husband.

In the burning green spring we'd drive up onto the purple moors and watch great big bony orange hares boxing each other, and great dun-coloured hawks swooping about threateningly. We might get as far as Cartaway Heids, nothing but a crossroads in the middle of some fields where local Catholic nobles met their come-uppance from Henry VIII; or Hexham Cathedral, where the ancient pagan symbols carved in the rood screen alarmed him. We might make our way through the tourist shops and tanning studios of Bishop Auckland ("Vertical tanning—I do think that sounds very suggestive"). Or potter about in the Co-op at Anfield Plain among the kettles and toasters and cheap plaid shirts and wrap-around pinnies. And only occasionally would he completely lose patience with our callowness and lack of refinement and sigh, between his teeth—"Oh Lord save me from these nieces! Save me, Lord, from the Southern girls!"

And we might end up for tea at the White Monk Cafe in Blanchland, an ex-monastery in the middle of nowhere; because when you're out and about you HAVE to stop for tea, and when you stop for tea, moderation is not at all the point. 'Will you have soup or a sandwich, sir,' says the girl in the pinny. 'Oh, either or both, pet.' She takes a minute to get to grips with this answer, which means, I think, 'Bring me everything you've got'.

When our Ian makes pie, it's at least a foot across, golden-brown and fragrant. It's full of corned beef, mashed potato, onions and thyme, with an egg to bind it all. People who are easily cowed by food will start by turning their noses up at it, and finish by polishing it off in the kitchen in the middle of the night, kept awake by the hearty aroma. I've our Ian to thank for not being afraid of the concept of Pie—I wish I had something as robust and sustaining to give back to him.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Folake Shoga.