

Story for performance #959
webcast from Sydney at 07:59PM, 04 Feb 08



Source: AFP, 'Societe Generale on trial in French-Israel scam', *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 04/02/08.

Tags: [animals](#), [child/parent](#), [food](#), [violence](#)
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Rose Budd's parents always knew their daughter would go far but they could not have known in what direction. Had they the capacity for self reflection and insight perhaps none of this would have happened, but even the irony of naming their prickly child Rose Budd was lost on them. Her first articulations, the manner in which she moved, the determination with which she gained new skills, all pointed to a child of great will. Like many parents, Mr and Mrs Budd were overwhelmed by feelings of awe for their child, rendering them incapable of objective responses to their daughter's behaviour.

As soon as Rose Budd was able to engage in the intricacies of power, the great food wars began. At meal-times, food flew, splattered, crashed and plopped. The child would consent to consume nothing. She was coaxed, commanded, bribed and enticed with sweet inducements, and when these failed, penalties and deprivations followed. Her crazed parents tried everything, but the pattern was soon entrenched. Successful professionals in their field, they were helpless in this role.

Rose was the only girl, the youngest, not pretty, trailing brothers who would eat anything. 'To eat or not to eat' was her supreme bargaining chip. In notorious battles she assumed a control that spilled over into all her dealings with the family. Her parents were relatively easy to subdue, but her brothers fought back with ferocity and had the advantage of numbers. She hastily acquired physical tactics to equal theirs, but also recognised a strategic dominance that allowed her to sidestep the need for violence. On the sly she ate what she needed.

Though not as soon as the family would have liked, Rose was enrolled at school. Her parents hoped for the civilising effects of education, her brothers for her comeuppance. Even here, Rose Budd stood out from her peers, not just in her physical proportions, for it must be said that she had grown into a substantial, vigorous girl, but in her unyielding determination.

School years were characterised by a resistance that had her classmates agog. With childlike perceptiveness, they saw her given name was ill-suited and called her Buddy with a certain vindictive irony. There were awful consequences for one boy who was not able to resist pressing home the point. Rose's brutal revenge was exacting. Since then even the most hardened teachers said a few 'Hail Marys' whenever her name was called from the roll.

Years continued with a sameness interrupted only by periods of suspension. At Friday assemblies, Headmaster would say with uncanny regularity, 'There is always one who goes too far!' his ferrety face turned towards Rose, easily spotted in the crowd.

Mr and Mrs Budd soon excelled in deflecting complaints and avoiding school meetings. They looked for fault in one another, in their exasperating sons, in their daughter's classmates, teachers, but eventually, like flipping on a light switch, all became clear. They accepted things as they were. Beautiful to them, their daughter was destined to a life of being misunderstood.

Rose wheeled through adolescence like a bird of prey,

circling, diving, pouncing with such accuracy that all in her range raised their heads at their peril. Indeed she began to see herself like this. Feeling no affinity with homo sapiens; her true allegiances lay with other members of the animal kingdom. Sometimes she believed herself an eagle: wild, gliding far above the pettiness of people. Or a tiger, untamed and muscular, clearly a species endangered. Her dreams were of fins circling bowls of thickened blood on laden tables, fat Chinese mouths opening and shutting in a deluge of excess, or of ospreys with barn-door wings falling from the sky like rocks, choked with poisoned baits. She dreamed her foetal self curled inside the husk of a tiger, the power removed, the guts dried and crushed to a fine powder to fuel virility in weak men.

And so we are brought to this particular Sunday lunch when the family sits down to feast on blooded duck.

At each end of the table sit her parents, her brothers, their various wives and children dotted around the perimeter. Soon enough the talk is swirling around the subject of the roasted animal. Her parents are disinclined to modern trends, but even more remarkably, their children continue to be drawn to the ceremony of this weekly meal. In the cut of meat there is occasional variation. Today, a plump roast duck lies on the serving dish. The father lifts the carving knife and steel, vigorously sharpening the blade with the flare of a soldier in a time before gunpowder and nuclear warheads. He lays the steel down, takes the carving fork and slices off the breast meat, wings and thighs of the bird. Vegetables are always the same and, since Rose declared herself a vegetarian, her mother fishes around the roasted meat to serve her daughter pumpkin, potatoes, beans and cauliflower au gratin.

Rose rarely speaks at these gatherings, but picks at her food while her mother, who fails still to grasp the nature of things, urges her to eat. Neither does Rose listen to the rowdy conversation at the table, so it is surprising that she picks up the following:

Middle brother's wife: 'What sort of bag?'

Elder brother: 'Hessian. The duck's in a hessian bag.'

Younger brother: 'And you beat the crap out of it?'

Father: 'Language, my boy!'

Younger brother's wife: 'While the duck's alive?'

Elder brother: 'Of course it's alive, or the blood wouldn't flow, would it?'

Younger brother's child: 'Aw, yuk!!'

Middle brother's wife (who, unlike the other wives can hold her own with the men): 'And then what?'

'You drain the blood to make the sauce. The French love it!'

Canard à la Rouennaise—duck in blood sauce. Those of the family still alive don't talk about it much, but they will never, as long as they live, forget the moment Rose Budd raised the knife.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Karen Atkinson.