

Story for performance #982
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Source: Richard Kerbaj and Milanda Rout, 'Saudis move to stem uni radicals', *The Australian online*, 27/02/08.

Tags: [sex](#), [animals](#), [violence](#)

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The sunrise came on all golden and it revealed the village spread out asleep on an incline that followed a shallow valley down to salt water. This little world was wrapped in a rilled meadow that loomed lightly wooded in the southeast where a modest hilltop fell gently away to become swampy near the harbour strand. The garden plots were rich with alluvial soil. And a healthy creek chattered amidst the cottages before seeping northwest into russet sedge and bullrushes.

Tame lambs nibbled there on the seagrass. They had the dark green taste of the deep ocean in them. A taste subtle but distinctive. Wealthy people came from other villages, paid proper money, and carried the lambs away on their shoulders. This was food made for legends. Just off from the shore, ankle deep in the estuary, there were fat molluscs drifting on the mudflats and slow fishes you could take with a cast net.

Back up the hill in a stable, a horse decided to whinny.

The strengthening sun brought a tag-along breeze. As Rangi turned his face to enjoy it, he saw everything undulate when the blue-crested stalks of native grass tumbled tall down the hill. A flock of parrots acknowledged the show, screeching and then applauding—two hundred wings flapping—the birds all taking off in a quick contest of colour.

Rangi and The Perfect World—this brief, privileged communion.

In the bracken ferns—out of nowhere—a possum uttered a sharp protest.

The village bore Rangi's family name. That's how much he belonged here.

Already the cows were complaining—udders overdue—a full half-hour after daybreak. 'Tell it to the Marines!' That's what he muttered at them. He'd heard that on a video. You say it to someone, it lets them know you just don't give a shit and you're hard underneath, you're not someone to mess with.

When he picked up the milk pail, it clanked like it always does. And it clanked straightaway a second time. Like an echo. Another metallic whack. It must have been a kink in the handle, but it was odd how he didn't feel it give. Things made of metal, they can have a mind of their own.

Another bunch of birds tore the air then. The forest was all attitude this morning.

The cows were pressing forward—their slow

swaggering gait. They were churning their milk even before they could give it. He got them lined up in the race. They knew it's just a matter of one beast at a time. Dumb animal forbearance. Rangi's learned all this too. Twenty cows every morning.

But there's been plenty to dream on. Lately there's been the girl from the fishing sloop. Rangi lying down with her. Lying down with her once a week. Or him and her squatting. Quiet in the woodshed. Wanting to yelp. Needing absolute quiet. But always, there's some noise breaking through.

Isn't it time she came back again?

Right now, Rangi's thinking of her, while he's stiffening on the teats.

The cows looking twitchy. Ears going every which way.

Rangi and the girl—they've stitched the village full of secrets. All the places where they've done it. This last full year so urgent. At first it was the woodshed. But all these pleasures on offer, better to scatter them about. Why not put all his secrets all over the village?

Rangi's always felt calm joy in the village. Now he can put ardour in it too.

Let's face it, he can't be the first one. Think about everyone who's ever daydreamed in the village. They must have considered all the possible places. All the places where you can bend down and gulp quiet all over each other moaning. Rangi is sure his grandfather did it. And every other man in the family. Special trysts—all of them secret. And now this girl from the fishing sloop. So exciting because she's from elsewhere. Rangi thinks his grandfather never took a foreign girl. That dark smell in her skin. The gloss in her hair.

Another set of noises. Something not right. This perfect morning. Now a memory flashing: those pictures on TV—the clear sky, the towers, those wrong planes in the air. Here now, with the forest behind him: a noise not quite right.

These men running through the village! Eight, nine, ten of these men! Altogether moving like one large animal on the loose. Coming in here, in the place of his family name! This sudden commotion. The men running hugger mugger. Their machetes all gleaming. The squeak of their gaitered boots.

The parrots all whirling. The horse repeating that whinny.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ross Gibson.