



Excerpts from
brookings: the noun:
new poems

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Brookings Follows Us Home



Diary Poem: Uses of brookings: the noun

I have placed on the cover of my new book a woman.

I've just written an *Eleanor and Hillary* again, one

where Eleanor not-jealous of Julia reflects on

how Julia now works for the Brookings Institution.

Eleanor then

tells Hillary she's always thought there could be a noun

'brookings' meaning activities that the covert rightwing

make seem smoother and more inarguable than

their lethal ones: a good anti-racist position, anti-pollution,

anti-gender/cross-gender discrimination, and

of course pro-educating women. 'Who wouldn't belong?'

she asks, 'when you can brook forever?' Since then,

those lines from Longfellow about a virgin:

'Standing with reluctant feet/ where the brook

and river meet' snag distractingly my brain, like

rough fingernails snaring on satin. The river beyond soft



brooking glints a deadly global thing. I searched up the poem
by Longfellow, 'Maidenhood': stiff second person: 'Then
why pause with indecision/ When bright angels in thy vision/
Beckon thee to fields Elysian?' Then not quite so tinny,
since terror trickles in tune on stones.

And any water-words seem toylike drones:

'Seest thou shadows sailing by, /As the dove, with startled eye/
Sees the falcon's shadow fly?' The Eleanor and Hillary
was called *Concrete*, after her invested-in Swiss-French firm
building bunkers for Daesh in Syria, but aquiline
shadows also flitting on the water are the ones
like the Japanese toylike car company's million
dollars of vehicles to the Jihad, the U.S. Investment firm
employing General Petraeus which gives Al-Queda arms
and funds, or the Caterpillar of building machines
that cocooned the Daesh complexes underground.
Eleanor also might say that global capitalism
needs wars and displaced populations to starve down



the cost of labour, thin out the opposition. The stream,
she'd think, takes odd twists and odder turns,
as it harmonises pebbles. These new Democrats
being globalist need the wars but Donald Trump
being nationalist-industrialist slows them down,
blames Obama and the Bushes for Middle East
expensive crusades for resources, all the markets
of reconstruction, says 'Let them pay for their own
damage: I didn't do it.' And indeed he did not, thinks
Eleanor, in depression. 'Deep and still, that gliding stream/
Beautiful to thee must seem,/As the river of a dream',
acknowledges Longfellow to the maiden.

I have placed on the cover of my new book a woman
in ancient gentle stone (really concrete), paying attention
to a child showing a drone like a garden plaything. Drones
in the sky focus on them. This is our discourse, our diction,
with brookings sleek as pebbles in our mouth for elocution.
I have placed on our cover the woman, child and stones.



On the edge of Lake Geneva

Jorge Luis Borges woke up on a bench on the blue pure grace
of the edge of Lake Geneva next to the containedly baffled face
of an Australian critic who had last talked with Kenneth Slessor.

'Why', the critic asked, 'Are you interested in Australia?'

Borges fixed his no-longer blind eyes even more awake
by focusing on Mont Blanc like a white virgin or a cupcake:
when you regain your vision, everything is pure.

He said, 'In one's sleep one always obsesses. Here,
again, the Nobel Prize was haunting me. All of my
conservative supporters told me I would win it. Every
year, it came and went without me. My work
was a whole issue of *Encounter*, before the CIA
scandal overwhelmed that publication. Pinochet
giving me an award was never sufficient reason
for me to be overlooked on literary merit. Murnane
being put forward by the *New York Times* to attain



the Nobel makes me live it all again'. The critic at last understood this morning-cold meeting, and the past made sense of the present. He soothed, 'Murnane was championed decades ago by Salusinszky. Salusinszky is a professional conservative but he does not need Murnane to be so. Although I've seen how often the Avante-Garde and experimental become toys of the rightwing, as kaleidoscopic shopfronts. That is not so in this case.' Borges' hand still had somewhat the blind man's small agitation on his cane. But in this white and azure lucent ecstasy he was eager to explain: 'It was the Peronistas who contorted me right-wing. For a while I was not a democrat but in the Eighties, when all the charming delirium of *Encounter* had gone, and Vietnam's labyrinthine diction, and the Six Day War's seduction, I was convinced by democracy again.' The critic gave the thin smile he used while his mind turned the handle of his own



trinket machine of quotations: ' You likened, I remember,
The Falklands War to two bald men fighting over
a comb. ' Borges gave a thinner smile: 'Yes, I do not mean
democracy as an excuse for war. If I sat here again
as a ghost with a ghost's compulsion to recant, I would
tell you I regret my saying that Lorca was not as good
as his reputation because he was left-wing. Such were ever
things one said to please professors in Geneva.'

'You were here as a child,' the critic remembered, however
added, 'Of course one is always a child in Geneva.'

Recruited, he thought, for some Devil's prize or passion, to want
rewards as conflicting and compulsive as the shop-front
with its disparate dazzling toys, and all the while the lake
its meltwater too cold for corruption seemed to take
all calmness for itself from human need. Borges said,
'This was the right place to die. If I wrote one of my early
stories, in it the boy I was would stumble on my grave. I
did indeed make sure there were carvings from Old Norse



and Old English on it to intrigue him. What is worse,
my friend, than the snowblind purity of our words that blend
fiction and reality becoming either one at the end,
forever?' 'There is a softness in the experimental, too
pure to be political, that conservatives encourage, it's true,'
said the critic, 'Slessor told me that he turned time back,
indeed turned his back on time, chose a new hundredth yacht,
to write *Beach Burial*, which once did not exist. If you and I
could journey back so, would you still want the Nobel?
I am clever about fundings and committees. Well?
It might simplify your sleep, scatter it safely dystopic,
not so singularly obsessed.' Borges looked at the critic,
said, 'You will remember more than me my work,
but one story was I think, *The Secret Miracle*?' 'In which,'
said the critic, 'a man before a firing squad receives
the reprieve of a whole year without time? If one grieves
for humanity, the remedy is secret. You explained before
that living in a dictatorship taught you to write in metaphor.'



'There are endless routes in the labyrinth, but none',
said Borges, 'in art can be controlled or won. In art alone
reality is conserved in its confusion. The Nobel Prize
then would have tolerated values I despise
now because of aging, but I only wanted to receive
its respite from torture then when I could believe
that art itself was mercy: that I could impinge on reality,
like a Peronista, a muddled-meddling red Lorca, that was why
they should have given it to me then, when it was real, open,
this lake of yearning. Now I have what it would have given,
the passivity in regret, the strange blessing to be jealous.'
The critic nodded: 'A gaucho in love on the Pampas.
Home from the labyrinth, the lake. But why then am I with you?'
Alps rippled heavens, lake white with merging blue.
Borges said, 'To tell me a story that will fix me back in living,
about a thing that once had every meaning.'
Their eyes met, as Borges could use his, understood.
The critic's fluxed, lake-mutable as a fiction, grey



as God. He began: 'It was a lake-calm day in Sydney
and there was no firing squad...'



White Helmets

Words are white helmets in this brookings stage, in which savagery hides in brook-like charm, fluffy clouds of equality, seeming humanity. 'Humane', it is said the White Helmets stage atrocities and rescue in the name of human rights, are really part of ISIS. It is claimed they kidnap and murder children, for false flags.

To fight the Syrian Government, they perform mostly their own filming but a doco praising them won an Academy Award. Denmark has refrained at last from funding them because of their terrorist association. They are supported still by many countries classing them 'moderates', by think-tanks of Democrats and apparently George Clooney. They are a soothing concept.

My George and Clare if in Syria could try to retrieve, desperate, a child from them in Idlib before it dies, too, of chlorine poignantly on YouTube, and indeed maybe

I will write this for you some time. But, at the moment,



we are at the initial stage in brooking: shallow wetness
ripples bare on our glittering feet. We can't even yet
glimpse ocean beyond the cloud-world's rim, since every
word forms a cloud to save us, a white helmet.



The round, pretty eyes of the Hebrides: Two:

Mirrors and Smoke

Mary Anne MacLeod woke up outside the Oval Office in a filmy Washington dawn. Her son Donald frowned nearby reading *Fear* she had lent him by Bob Woodward. She talked directly these days with Donald. They'd become easier with each other, their explanations intersecting in a soft and delicate rhythm that was always reminding her of the tide in the Hebrides intermingling with the shore. For a long time of course their discourses before had been polite and parallel but at last now it was possible to offer word by word for acceptance, brick by brick a tower. She said, 'Of course the book is a CIA strategy, however what concerned me most was that peculiar portion about you never entering the Oval Office alone at daybreak because you were afraid of all the ghosts of former Presidents. If that were so, dear, I could speak to them.' Donald asked with a filial indignation:



'You know, don't you? You don't really think that of me?
I just don't go in alone but with someone the Neocons
wouldn't like to lose as well on a fatal morning.'
She said 'Yes, that's why you always were so fine
at the Military Academy. I knew you'd like turning stress
into strategy and popularity. You'd moonlight in Manhattan,
but it was just to escape empty time.' That odd man Bolton
had arrived without a greeting. Donald and Mary Anne
took him into the Oval Office. It was still all golden sudden
intersecting horizons, like a Hebridean morning on
the sea. Bolton nodded to Mary Anne bruskiy, himself
feeling unusual in this place: whoever else Trump brought in
he thought, was going to be a circus, anyway. Bolton
said, 'It's confirmed the Russians just supplied three
S-300 Air Defence Systems in battalions to Syria because
of the Israelis, British and French playing mirrors and smoke
with bombing to down the monitor plane full of Russian
military techs. I've accused the Russians of Escalation.'



But I don't like being set up for Suez Mark Two by that gang of amateur chessmen.' ' President Eisenhower' explained Donald to his mother, 'at Suez wouldn't have that done to him. I admire Eisenhower.' Who was not at that hour in the room. She asked, 'And Monroe, I believe?' 'Yes, the Monroe doctrine was just to keep the British out of our neighbourhood. It wasn't until Teddy Roosevelt that it was turned to war.' Donald thought: Bolton's bloodlust is tempered by his need for isolation. 'Globalism feeds on military spending', he told Bolton, sat at the old desk with its new picture of Ivanka. Mary Anne dusted that with her trim white Island fingers. She asked, 'Why is it that men trust no one but their sons-in-law, not their sons? Like you, with Jared Kushner?' He considered: 'Their daughter would not choose a betrayer, of either their close plans or of their brains. And she knows I love the devout ones, the Ministers like your father. And any massacre in Gaza was not with Jared's consent.' Bolton exclaimed 'Patagonia!'



and paced the floor like a President, arms locked behind his back.

Trump explained, 'He is referring to despair. There is a theory the Israelis are using the post-Falklands War British power over Argentina to colonise Patagonia, build an escape-country of frozen milk and frozen honey if there is too much danger where they awkwardly are. That would explain the risky desperation, the disregard for earthly opinion. But I think their Russian plane plan was a weird one, even for them. I've no carriers in the area, though, and don't intend to send one. Do you know, Mother, one real problem?' Mary Anne said, 'Well, I do remember that one of the places for Israel originally was to be Patagonia. And also I think Kenya?' She found it hard to imagine.

As usual, Donald meant something else, and she was as patient as if on her birth Isle of Lewis, plaiting wild fleece. It was such an ease, such a comfort now when they spoke together. Word by word, their diction soothed her fingers. He said, 'The Russian systems are analogue and no one here



learns it. All our systems are based now on transistors.

Even if we capture something from them, we can't use it.'

Bolton muttered, 'And India has just bought S-400s from them.

So much for the plan to link Japan, India and Australia

to out-manoeuvre China. Not to mention the oil India

is buying from Iran.' Morning-tea light quickened, thickened

about them. Gold interns brought in trays of cookies, cloudy coffee.

Bolton seemed suspicious. Mary Anne laughed 'Biscuits!', with relief.

Trump said, 'If I lose in the Mid-Terms, Britain will attack Syria

again, despite Russia having signed with Turkey to knock out

some CIA ex-headchoppers in Idlib. And if it isn't Syria, then

the false flag will be Ukraine. I'm relying on Russia not to bite.'

He bit a chocolate wheatmeal like a cunning provocation. She

thought: he has a German bite, untidy and open like his father,

asked him, 'Was it after all New York Military Academy

that made you want to be President, and not some

Dare-to-Dream money fantasy that came with built-in failure?'

Bolton thought of Eisenhower, said, 'Of course, perhaps they



voted for a soldier', puzzled, as he himself was not one:
soldiers spoke a socialist language: resource, tariff, priority,
to be not the believer but escaper. He said, 'I still would not
have voted for you. I believed in Iraq and the Bushes.' Trump
laughed with the gentle expression of his mother at the biscuits.
Would Ivanka or young Kushner be Ambassador to Patagonia?
Mirrors, yes, and smoke. This fear was sometimes better
pleasure than lost night life in New York.



Mockingbird, mockingbird

Cord Meyer and Allen Dulles began CIA Operation Mockingbird in 1950, hiring journalists from Corporate Media including CBS, The NY Times, American ABC, NBC, Newsweek, and Associated Press, employing about 3,000 CIA agents and over 400 journalists. Philip Graham of the Washington Post quotes a CIA operative: 'You can get a journalist cheaper than a good call girl, for a couple hundred dollars a month'. In 1976, a new policy was announced: the CIA 'maintains covert relationships with about 50 American journalists or employees of U.S. media organizations. They are part of a network of several hundred foreign individuals around the world who provide intelligence for the CIA and at times attempt to influence foreign opinion through the use of covert propaganda. These individuals provide the CIA with direct access to a large number of foreign newspapers and periodicals, scores of press services and news agencies, radio and television stations... and other foreign media outlets.' Mockingbird was streamlined because it had been outsourced successfully offshore.

CIA motto:.' The Work of a Nation. The Center of Intelligence.; .' Unofficial motto: ' And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free..' (John 8:32)

Mockingbird, mockingbird, you echoed me in the night,
with nothing but your own mirror-light: 'I am the Work
of a Nation. The Centre of Intelligence.' I scoffed:
'The official motto. Tell me the unofficial, something like
Work shall set you free - or was that Auschwitz?' The bird's
cry blinded like a mirror: 'It was about truth, truth,
not work, from John 8:32: *And you shall know the truth
and the truth shall make you free.*' Tell me, mockingbird,



mockingbird, tell me,
you are wedge-tailed, winged grey, bosomed white,
your round eyes, indelible pupils, freeze fierce, paranoid,
claws gripping the branch eternal but elegantly relaxed,
you are said to sing on graves, you are said to be sacred:
as dangerous as an albatross to murder, mockingbird,

mockingbird, tell me of your loyalty,
true beyond all truth in self. I know that you will answer me,

mocking to the last, will answer
only what you hear from me, that your call will sound as free
as my own ghost in the dark.



History's Actors

'People like you are still living in what we call the reality-based community. You believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality. That's not the way the world really works anymore. We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you are studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors, and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'

Should I have put it in quotes like that? When it was quoted in *New York Times* by a journo called Suskind criticising Bush-Iraq, he just said it was an adviser to Bush, didn't name Karl Rove and Rove always denies it, although in a pop song and all over the internet now and forever

he is accused of being the utterer. It almost sounds too well-composed, too
clever

for someone to say on the spot. Rove said the words made no sense, but they do to a student of the actors. *King Lear* is in the news again:

a libel case, but seeing a video: Cordelia in the arms of the King,

death-limp, death-unreachable, I remembered what can be spoken,

what can't, and never the same time. When I sat for for the HSC one question

was how would you do a *Lear* stage production and I wrote that incest

or the urge for it should be shown, as in '*I will punish home*',

and it went over well: I came second in the state, but at Uni later

the same observation produced shudders and great changing-of-subject.

I gave up on it until you and here. What did Lear want from Cordelia?



Nothing reality-based, at least not hers. Over-praise is a thing beloved of history's actors, their lubrication. In being judicious she was resisting spin-control, of course, but her uneasiness is as profound as the womb: every court is a harem and every seraglio a slaughterhouse at last. The intention to murder softens the speech into phrases: as in '*War on Terror*' there is cleanliness, protection: the *White Helmets*. It is not Orwellian deception so much as hunger. Both the beast and the abattoir worker are crazed for reassurance. King Lear suggesting to Cordelia that they both watch in quietness superior to court politics was at best useless, and at worst the recipe for their annihilation. How many versions of Yemen will the Mainstream flow past you, according to the current, and the current status of the Saudis, whose mercenaries slaughter that country and starve it for oil? The war on terror is against Jihadis trained by the West and placed wherever the oil and the trade routes need a battle. The oil and the trade routes and the water. In the recent King Lear filmed in Britain, the victims were already on stage, stacked in blood, and Hopkins



carried in only the broken rope that hanged her.

We are the brook and they are the river,

according to what Rove denies he said.

King Lear in the grey poor video made here

staggers onstage, weighed real with his dead.



'What Did They Do with the Bits?'

Princess Diana woke up in Theme Park Nirvana, drowsy and pretty next to Mother Teresa and flushed with curiosity. The Park was closed for repairs but people came, went, happily through the wide side gate. She and Teresa watched and waved to them. In life, much as she loved her, she had suspected at times that Teresa was a star-fucker, but now she knew that not to be the case: star-fuckers always pick the wrong people they think stars and Teresa had picked right ones. She could discuss anything with her, and now was fascinated with the death of Dodi's cousin Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Consul in Turkey. She explained: 'Dodi's mother was the sister of the Arms Dealer Adnan Khashoggi, and Adnan was Jamal's Uncle. Jamal was involved with a lot of arms and CIA stuff before he went home to the *Washington Post*. Why do you think the CIA didn't warn him the Saudis would snuff him at the Consulate?' She had merry eyes, as if she drew Teresa's attention to an enticing chessboard. Or maybe



Monopoly - she'd taught it to Teresa. Teresa said: 'They may not have thought the Saudis would be so obvious. But the Saudis would have been the priority to please because of the Crown Prince working with Israel against Iran and everybody wants the Yemen oil...' Diana interrupted: 'But the Crown Prince's a fruitcake, bumps off and tortures all his rellies. And the CIA has another Prince they want to replace him with. And of course that is meant to embarrass Trump. So poor old Jamal was strangled and dismembered. The Turks probably think the U.S. will soften sanctions and that Russia will support them because the Russians always adore an opportunity. What did they do with the bits, do you think, the Saudis?' Teresa was a bit behind on that story: 'I thought they found him in a well?' 'No, that was phony. The Turks are drip-feeding the news cycle for concessions. Now they say he was dissolved in acid, but I don't know if the Saudis would do that - they're into public display,



if only among themselves. The Prince surely would have wanted the writing-hand for a souvenir.' Teresa was tuned in to Diana's relish for lateral facts. She asked, 'What music do you think the surgeon they flew in to cut up the body was listening to? On the tape apparently he told the team he always puts on earphones when he is dissecting. I thought there was a problem for strict sects in liking music?' 'They're not all that strict in private, apparently. The scotch in the royal safes is Johnny Walker. Dodi can tell you anything about them.' Teresa became uneasy. She did not like to think of Diana's dying, although Diana would speculate enthusiastically about it, as on any other thing. She knew, however, the topic saddened Teresa, and anyway Teresa had known too much in general of death. Her affection for Diana was a desert thirst for water. More than distraction, here the workings of the world were precious breath.



Rope

They threatened and promised so much,
and why when I was contained, numberless,
and posed no threat?

We'll talk soon of Elbridge Colby.

But I ask you to hold this rope,
as no postmodernist conceit.

My weight will rip inside your armpits
and I'll sway like a corpse

back and forth on blind depths
too lightless even for black, too deaf
for wet echo. There'll

be a time when you let go,
in pain beyond a choice. But

the rope is not suicidal. I can fly
here evenly for a time. I will list
some faces of suicides: Grace

or Joan Maas perhaps who at first



thought writing was a brook
to refresh and for respite. But
this is not the end of *Childe Roland*.
There is one of you, not a mass
in gloating darkness on a mountain.
Have you heard of Elbridge Colby?
We will move from my state,
as I do in truth to survive,
to the personal and worldly.
Tacitly condoned by the *New York Times*,
Democratic Party, Colby who was 'Joint
Under Secretary in charge of strategy
and developing the force', has written
for the Council of Foreign Relations
that the War on Terrorism is gone
and that we will go nuclear again
against Russia and China. The Council
know they can contain anything.



Hold the rope.

I will fall from my state

without numbers without hope

without promise without threat

to the personal and worldly.

We can talk about Elbridge Colby.



George Jeffreys: 24:

George Jeffreys Woke Up in Damascus

George Jeffreys woke up in Damascus, braced for the scent
of jasmine,
fighting the smell of the jasmine, which even in autumn
fountained through the room like the water in the courtyard,
pinnacling and diamonding, reminding him of dying
voluptuousness. A nurse he and Clare had earlier grown
to love and who had died in Indonesia by firing squad
always wore such jasmine: autumnal and evanescent,
and it hovered in the Thirroul summer garden
the weeks of her death and of those of conceiving Corbyn.
Corbyn next to him now was almost walking,
his small legs braced in his sleep as if the horizons
presented by action were as solid as the movement
of jasmine in the nostrils, hyper-sensual and commanding.
And Clare braced her knees in the middle against George
as if he personified the power and seductive irritation



of every fragrant phantom in the air, and in her breathing.

*

George:

This part of Damascus had not been flattened by Isil or Israeli firepower and Clare and I had judged that it was safe for us to bring Corbyn, as long as the Russian air defences provoked by the Israeli stategem that brought down the Russian ilyushin-20 surveillance aircraft stayed in place. We were there for Emily-Nahida.*

Emily-Nahida was a three-year-old Druze child whose father had died in a car accident in Mt Druitt and whose mother had brought her on holiday to her grandparents in Al-Safa. Where she and her grandmother were kidnapped with a group of other women and children by Isil. Emily-Nahida had then been transferred to the White Helmets in Idlib. The White Helmets were supposedly a peaceful NGO protesting against Syrian Army atrocities, but were really a Western-funded propaganda wing of Isil, staging false-flag atrocities themselves.

Emily-Nahida, who had the Mt Druitt delicate bloneness which often camouflaged migrant children, was to be the star of an expert White Helmets video in which she succumbed slowly and horribly to poisoned gas. This state-of-the-art snuff movie was to be produced when Russian and Syrian forces tried to regain control of Idlib. Luckily for Emily-Nahida, the Russians did an interim deal with Turkey to remove Isil forces from Idlib, and most of Isil bussed themselves out to American-controlled areas where they felt safe. Many of their White Helmets were to become priority migrants to Western counties, but that is another story for me to tell you later. Emily-Nahida was returned to live with the other hostages in Al-Safa.

'She was considered useful for bargaining', concluded Clare, returning to me the cell-phone I had been given by my drinking buddy in Langley.

I said, 'He has just sent me new batteries for it. He is definitely not the anti-Russian CIA faction, although he's paranoid that all the CIA equipment has been programmed against him by the Chinese.'



(*stategem: *George is deliberately using the alternate earlier English spelling of 'stratagem' to express derision for a national tactic and its results - Author's note*)

Clare said: 'Who did, after all, manufacture it'. The American companies had long ago disappeared in busy tides of globalisation. To be fair to him, I have noticed that the satellites the phone finds first are Chinese.

When Clare and I arrived in Damascus, the Al-Safa Druze villagers were pressuring the Syrian Army to free the Druze hostages from Isis, and the Syrian Army people were working out a strategy to do this before they creamed the remaining Isis in those strange, desolate volcanic hills. In Mt Druitt, the rest of Emily-Nahida's family had approached our Prisoners of Conscience organisation, which was fast becoming the only NGO not funded by the Company, to retrieve Emily-Nahida. We had experienced some success recently restoring kidnapped children, so here we were - and with Corbyn.

I had always known Damascus was called 'The City of Jasmine', but the perfume of it that day was beyond charm or tourism and seemed pungent with ghosts, sexual spasm and resurrection. Clare tuned in to me as wryly as usual: 'And of course the Druze do believe humans reincarnate as humans, don't they, darling?' She seemed to be asking the back of Corbyn's head, which her lips were brushing, but he looked at me, already knowing I was a collector of esoteric soul-facts, and that her questions to him could involve triangulation.

*

Clare Collins sat in a Damascene courtyard on a stone couch
with her fingers trailing in a jasmine-strewn fountain almost
asleep in that air as white-dense as an orchard. Corbyn walked
a step or two between her and George, at a scrambling pace



so that he fell onto them, not the earth. She nearly thought explicitly of her younger brother and sisters as they learnt to walk, stumbling to her, years before she was nine, remote, jealous, possessive enough to kill them, but it did no good to Corbyn or any else she loved if she was not incarnate. She thought: *the multitudinous seas incarnadine* from Macbeth, but the poet George was quoting was Qabbani, that great national writer of Syria, who seemed always in grief for his wife, an Iraqi killed in an explosion in Beirut, and for all Arab loss. George said, 'He called Damascus in his will the womb that taught him poetry, taught him creativity and granted to him the alphabet of jasmine.' 'It is an easy place to think of wombs' said Clare: 'the jasmine smell is somehow menstrual, but none the worse for that.' 'No, probably,' said George, 'that makes it rather better: reassuring and natural. It has an airless heaviness otherwise.' Corbyn on his lap stood and walked in one place to practise, his grip tight on George's neck. Their friend at the courtyard gate,



Kirill - a Russian policeman and some interesting sort of almost-secret agent - came in, carrying chocolates: rich ones from Moscow, dark with liqueurs and citrus. Knowing he was assessing strategy in Damascus, Clare had asked him to find out about the lost Druze child Emily-Nahida. He seemed still slight, quiet, diffident. He said, 'It looks as if the White Helmet Film director couldn't shelter with the U.S. forces, as he'd done something bad to American nurses in Baghdad a few years ago and also filmed it - that always a mistake - and someone's brother was a General. So he took the child to Al-Safa caves again, and is staying with her. He has her separate from the other hostages, for a trading purpose.'

'What on earth does he want?' asked Clare, but George was more informed on the male creative ego, asked, 'Where did this man learn his craft? The Australian Film and Television School perhaps?'

Kirill nodded, impressed by George's genius:



'He says he is tired of directing propaganda snuff
and still wants a real job, like he was taught.'

Clare said, 'I knew some of those people decades
ago, when I lived with Reilly' - a television journalist

George especially detested but with that odd
condescending element of charity men have,

Clare thought, when defeated rivals survive.

She said, 'I'll phone around from here. But

someone should go to Al-Safa.' Kirill offered:

'George can come with me if he likes on the bus.

The Syrian Army are talking with villagers about
freeing the hostages soon, and I am to observe.'

George agreed, and that to listen on buses was
an agreeable, efficient espionage. So he gave

Clare Corbyn. And on George's mouth her mouth
brushed as mournful, dry, indelible as jasmine.

*



George:

On the bus, I had half-dozed while listening to conversations, a blurred picture of Clare spread on a bed filling my closed eyes with a cruciform whiteness - why was it always still at first the Maria Cross position? My sleep-brain put a scarlet labial line in the middle of the white, and the image was something like we'd seen once at a London exhibition for Turner's nude female drawings, where it seems a relief to him that the short dash of colour between the heaving elements is at last explicitly sexual.

The volcanic plains outside the bus window had no such vaginal, volcanic declivity - although I'd read that a couple of centuries ago, a lava crater had still bubbled here. The rocks sprawled to the horizon and were not yet smooth: they were large dark grey chips with axe-edges. There were no visible people except for occasional Syrian Army tanks and a few stubborn wandering Bedouins.

Kirill was talking to an old man about reincarnation. The Druze didn't usually like to discuss the topic, as it was sacred for the community elders, and the younger Druze - like those Clare and I knew in Mt Druitt - were embarrassed as well as intrigued by it. Kirill was easy to confide in, though - his refined deference would have made him a monk in another Russian century - and the Druze man was disturbed by a recent occurrence. Since I, like him, was old, and had accepting eyes, he included me as well in his confiding.

Kirill had asked him if he knew of Emily-Nahida. He had heard of her, as her mother had sought for information widely. All had expected her to be suffocated by the White Helmets in Idlib as propaganda against the Syrian Army when they and the Russians arrived, but the unexpected new arrangement with the Turks had changed predictions.

I said, 'When it's available, the Russians will always prefer a Golden Bridge. That's what Kutuzov called his allowing Napoleon's French to retreat from Moscow. Kutuzov preferred a decimated France as his direct enemy rather than a triumphant sea power like Britain.' Kirill laughed with enthusiasm: 'And my friend George here is always quoting A.J.P. Taylor: that, of course, in politics the impossible always happens. But you must tell him more about Emily-Nahida and reincarnation?'



'Her mother said that when Emily-Nahida's father died in the car accident, she felt his spirit pass into the child in her womb. That as Emily-Nahida began to walk and talk, she knew things that only he would be able to remember. She asked to return to Al-Safa, and that is why her mother brought her. Her mother told everyone that is why Emily-Nahida must not die. God would not inflict such a double grief on her, especially as Emily-Nahida must have come to Al-Safa for a reason.'

As a maternal PR exercise for retaining public interest in an individual kidnapped child, it seemed to me quite admirable. And it might be true. When Clare was first pregnant, we discussed which of our lost relatives might be reincarnated in the baby, as the horror of it seemed to make a live birth more reassuringly likely.

And, fortunately, Corbyn was just Corbyn.

At our destination, I phoned Clare and she told us to go straight to a cave in the hills, before the As-Suwayda Syrian Army offensive against Isil began the next day. Before that, the Syrian Army had negotiated the freedom of the remaining hostages, but the Snuff Director was something of an independent agent, and might still have immediate artistic ambitions.

Clare insisted: 'You must free Emily-Nahida now!'

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Clare felt guilty she wasn't with George on the mountain.

The reason wasn't Corbyn - she would have taken Corbyn -

like any Vietcong warrior bringing grandma and the baby -

but as a woman she'd have lacked any authority

with headchoppers and anyway she must work really

all the phones here to save Emily-Nahida. Her first

efforts with old media news people were wrong-track



but she tried her friend Olivia who was Indigenous and worked for ASIO because Rupert Murdoch as a newsman helped her family in prison. Olivia - admitted Clare, bemusedly - was always a good writer.

Now Olivia checked files and informed her that the Snuff Director seemed to be on staff, but no one could quite work out what he did:

'The Helmets aren't really us: they're DFAT, sort of: but he may have been teaching propaganda videos in some course or other. He was born in Australia. The Americans aren't keen on him because of that Iraq mess with their nurses, but we could use more good footage of the Isil retreat.

If they're airlifted here, we should recognise faces.

I think you can offer him that work, say we said it.

You need to hurry, though. Kirill is quite right that the Syrian/Russian Offence will start there very soon.'

She was cautious about Emily-Nahida: that problem that the child's people knew her Government opposed



the Syrian 'Regime' that tried to free her. But she google-earthed the cave and the location, said, 'Tell George that there's likely to be rain.'

She gave Clare the last cellphone number they had for the Snuff Director. Clare rang him at once and he answered in his dead volcanic inlet.

The Syrians were already extricating the other hostages nearby and there was temporary peace. He liked the idea of returning to the Australians, would see George. Phoning George with all this, she said, 'Don't take Kirill. The last thing the Director needs to see now's a premature Russian.'

George agreed. Kirill told some Syrian Army men to leave George near the caves. The Snuff Director greeted him with the charm of an ambitious actor.

Emily-Nahida was undrugged and excited. She had been pretending she believed this would be a normal movie and she would be the star. She thought that this was what her father would tell her



to act out to stay alive. Perhaps panic, George thought
and panic-courage in the loved do reincarnate one.

He could see an older parent in her eyes. She
walked to George at once and stood behind him.

He put his hand behind his back and her fingers
squeezed his fingers. Clare was back on the cell phone
of the Director, since the Russians had established good
communications for tomorrow's fight. The Director
was chubby and quite handsome: Orson Welles.

George told him: 'You can leave with me and the baby.'

Clare confirmed the ASIO offer, read the Director
his old payroll number. He seemed relieved: the new job
appealed to him, and the extrication. George phoned
a Turkish diplomat to come and get them. On

the Director's phone, George said to Clare, 'It's wet.'

She said, 'The whole place reeks of rain on jasmine.'

But pain in chestbones forced out their

'I love you's at the same time: no inflection.

*



George:

I had met Assad a few times when he was an eye doctor in London, before his older brother died and he returned to Syria. He was an easy conversationalist then and I found him so now. I had stayed overnight in

Al-Safa at Emily-Nahida's request to see the ceremony in which she and her grandmother joined the other freed hostages meeting Assad. Isil had been driven out of the area.

Assad asked the Druze to support him but all in the room were aware of the invincible and inevitable Druze neutrality.

Assad recognised me from London and we talked about eye surgery for the poor. He seemed to accept it as the compliment it was when I said, 'I've always thought in other circumstances you might have been another Fred Hollows.'

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Emily-Nahida ran in delight
from camera to camera, to star
in all the photographs. Later, when
George googled them for Clare,
she laughed: 'She is actually the most
photogenic child I've ever seen.'
They woke in each other's arms.



Outside, drop by drop
by drop and star by star by star,
universal as white phosphorus, wild rain
turned once again to jasmine on Damascus.



Brookings Follows Us Home

Brookings follows us home, the gentle creature.

He will return tomorrow to the wild.

There is a basket here for him. In his slumber,

he likes to hear Sixties music, childmusic

with a comfort like the sea. For me,

now, that music has ambivalence. Brookings

forages with flowers in his fur: wildflower,

and has receptive language, so the words

are familiar, drowse him away:

If you are going to San Francisco, be

sure to wear some flowers in your hair...

They used it in *Forrest Gump*, where

it was made to seem ridiculous, left wing.

For years now, there has been that thing

that Jim Morrison of *The Doors* had a father,

a Rear Admiral, who invented the Gulf of Tonkin

incident so President Johnson could escalate,



in 1965, his Vietnam conflict, that gangs
of inexperienced folk singers and hippies then
arrived, all children of the Military,
in Los Angeles to stage a Counter-Culture,
with drugs supplied by the Company
to detract from straightforward protest
against the Vietnam War. And because
they were descended often from British
or American Establishments, there was quite
a bit of Satanism, paedophilia, ritual death.
And addled ambivalence of the sort in
Projects MKUltra, Mockingbird, or just
the Western Military Family. Wee Brookings
curls up with his claws under his mouth,
his sleeping eyes seem rainpools under bushes,
with the burnt milk smell of a baby. I
too am comforted still by the music's softness.
The names may mean nothing to you but
I was thinking the other day how Tina Date,



the Australian folksinger, went to the U.S.,
had a relationship with Phil Ochs, the anti-
Vietnam singer who was so wary of deception,
wrote with daring irony: *Love me, I'm
a liberal*. Ochs hanged himself or was hanged
at the last, saying his name was John Train,
saying he was always CIA from inception,
and that the CIA's Train had killed Phil Ochs
in a hotel room. There has been indeed some
biographical etymologising about that, but
there was and is a real John Train, of course,
who was part of Project Mockingbird, used CIA
Funds to create the *Paris Review* for the Congress
for Cultural Freedom, just as they did *Encounter*.
One toke over the line, Sweet Jesus...
the songs are so soothing to Brookings, and to me.
Real John Train then trained the Mujahadein
rebels in Afghanistan against the Russians,
thus creating Al-Qaeda, and now awards



a Civil Courage Prize in America
for 'steadfast resistance to evil at great
personal risk.' They love these prizes so much
to give and to receive, to organise. Like Jessica,
in *The Merchant of Venice*, I am always sad
when I hear sweet music. I am so wan in the heart
that I stroke the unconscious Brookings.
He wakes up, endures another cuddle, then
ambles back to the bush with that to-and-fro rhythm
of a child in panic or a lullaby.

