

Story for performance #987  
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Source: Lawrence Joffe, 'Israel's Entebbe raid hero accused of brutality', *Guardian in The Age online*, 03/03/08.

Tags: [Israel](#), [Jerusalem](#), [South Africa](#), [countryside](#), [travel](#)

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I was up before dawn to catch the hotel shuttle back to the airport. I boarded the first flight to Cape Town, last stop in Africa on the way to the South Pole.

The aircraft rose up above the mine dumps, tons upon tons of detritus, intrusive urban souvenirs to the glitter of gold upon a curving neck, or a coin tucked within a velvet lining in a dark coffer. Below me lay the long suburban trains running under the catenary, the night and morning shifts scarcely crossing haggard eyes. The city receded, and presently we came to the grain fields of the Free State, and onwards over the Great Karoo, as the first rays of the sun slowly washed the grey formlessness from this vast semi-desert region, revealing the high plains traced with the straight lines of endless roads. It was like a bed sheet which had been flattened down by hand, the occasional crease of each distant hilly ridge drawing the driver forwards in the hope that the landscape beyond it would break the monotony of the journey.

Then my fellow passenger spoke, a man in his early fifties who was returning to the city of his birth for the first time in thirty years. He had a need to reminisce. Each of his memories seemed to be geographically keyed: first he was a child, sitting between his parents in a wide American car, returning from a holiday along one of the long straight roads our aircraft appeared to be tracing. His mother was reading *Time* magazine out loud for the benefit of all the passengers. It was 1967, the hippies had squatted on the Spanish Steps in Rome with their drugs and sexual practices flying in the face of decent morals. A few years later, another holiday, this same territory traversed by train, and arrival in Johannesburg, a long hour spent crossing the endless barracks township of Soweto, a city on the outskirts of a city, the wood smoke smudging the meagre winter light. And the intrusion of a sense of dismay, of disarray upon a twelve-year-old mind. A few weeks later, a collision between a white man in a car and a black man on a bicycle, pushed over and bleeding, the latter wanting the police, the former mocking. Apartheid was explained by an elder brother, and in the papers they were talking of the Vietnam protests. Dismay transformed into turmoil. After High School he had gone to Israel with the belief that it was a country of justice: they had been supporting the liberation movements in Africa. Instead he discovered that the Palestinians had been written right out of the history books, and once again departure, gone to live in Europe. He was like a tumbleweed, bundled across the veldt by an unrelenting wind.

Outwardly, my emotions were in check, yet inside I was shattered. Should I tell him that our paths somehow touched? Yet his family remained in Jerusalem where he might come and go as he pleased. My dispossession kept me silent.

The Karoo highlands stepped down through valleys and over mountain ranges. At last we were coming down over vineyards and orchards. In the distance I could see Table Mountain, riding between flatlands and sea like a great ship, Cape Town at its feet. It reminded me of Masada above the Dead Sea, flat-topped also, venerated by the Israelis as the place where their Biblical forebears had preferred killing themselves to arrest by the Romans.

Met at the airport, I was driven to the hostel where I was to be lodged. It was in the Bo-Kaap, also known as the Malay Quarter, low houses in vibrant colours on the long, gracious slope which slipped down Signal Hill to the town centre and its high-rise buildings. Cape Town had been established by the Dutch as a way-station on the route to their colonies in the East Indies, and the ancestors of the Muslim population were Indonesian exiles, political prisoners and slaves, brought to the city by the Dutch occupying power.

After lunch at the hostel, sitting at a table against the wall of the dining room, I decided to take the cableway to the top of Table Mountain. I was directed to a minibus taxi which left the town centre and went roaring up the winding road through the residential quarters, before reaching the lower mountain slopes. My fellow passengers, American tourists, shrieked. There was a short queue up the diagonal stairs leading to the lower cable station. The suspended cabin, full of school kids, both black and white, rose up, ever more steeply, hugging in closer and closer to the vertiginous cliff below the top. I left the upper cable station and went to the edge. Table Mountain and its flanking mountains enclosed the city below like an armchair facing the bay. The muffled roar of traffic, the hustle of a city at work, came to my ears. Beyond the harbour, out at sea, I could see Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela and his companions had been held prisoner.

After a while, I walked across to the thick parapet on the southern side of the cable station. Before me were the succession of mountains marching all the way down to the Cape of Storms at the eninsula's end, plunging abruptly into the sea, the long wrinkles of Atlantic rollers coming in to die upon the rocky shores. A chill wind was blowing. An immense bank of cloud had risen up and was advancing towards me, swallowing up the mountains one by one, as if the polar ice pack had decided to leave Antarctica and was moving north and by-and-by it would engulf all in its passage. A horn sounded, inviting visitors to make their way back to the cableway before the fog closed in upon the summit.

I climbed up onto the parapet. I spread my angel wings, sucked in the chill air, and took flight for heavenly Jerusalem.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Joseph Rabie.*