



Source: David Nason, 'Growing fat with Saddam', *The Australian online*, 29/10/05.

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On the way to the car, one of the dishevelled and bewildered leans into Margaret's view, clutching a bible and, wild-eyed, asks, 'Are you going to vote Labor next time? Remember Gough?' A young driver, tailgating, eager to pass, pounding the steering wheel in time to the music, buzzing with the energy of horsepower potential, ducks on the inside, speeds up and cuts her off. Dogs bark at a stranger in the street. Doors slam like minds, as neighbours retreat into the safety of the familiar. If you look like a terrorist, will you be shot too or maybe deported? What about a tsunami, what about a hurricane or an earthquake? The experiences and stories mount up with overwhelming levels of ignorance, inactivity and blame with responses that are becoming a blind eye turning.

Margaret heads for refuge from the lava flow of confusion and political depression, to the place she hopes she will find sense and meaning, a place for expression and soul-healing; her comforting-because-constant-and-predictable friend, George.

George is a painter, recently arrived at this passion. He is actually something else but really likes what is happening to his mind and body now that he has taken up pushing paint around a 2D surface. George is bigger, bolder and louder than most and has opinions on everything. In his mid-50s, emotionally and fiscally fractured from a recent divorce, George had decided to branch out into ventures that will 'develop his creative forces' rather than 'pander to another's whims and fantasies'. He explained to Margaret that he is on a trajectory of his own, finding out who he is and what life is all about, without heading for the meditation health farms of the over 40s. Margaret knows George is in his self-centred phase (had he ever left it, she often wonders), where he can talk about himself, his art and his cooking for hours on end, fascinated with his own abilities and new revelations of the self that he finds with every creation.

Arriving at George's apartment, Margaret hesitates and is ready to turn back, back to her dark listing of things that are wrong with the world; her own frustrations at the lack of action in which she currently feels embroiled. No, head in, see what George is up to, forget about the world and listen to someone who is focussed on the good things. What good things?

George appears in the doorway, responding to the newly installed bell chimes. He is covered in the smears and smells of oil paint, even his hair is streaked with cadmium and zinc. Beaming with a welcoming hello, he sweeps them both up the stairs to the sounds of 'I like to be in A-mer-ica' blasting from the CD player in the upstairs studio/living room.

Chatting is easy for George. He is gregarious and can pontificate on and shift between all sorts of topics.

Margaret can't get a word in for a while and when she does, it is a bumbling sort of question, 'So, what do you think of Howard's latest announcement on the terrorism laws?' George doesn't have too many grey areas when it comes to politics and he supports the right wing clarity of right and wrong. 'If they look like they are committing a terrorist act and they don't respond to orders to stand still or whatever, then the police or who ever, should shoot, pity if they kill, but they must prevent what might happen. Look at 9/11.' Margaret begins to really wish she weren't there; the words 'might' and 'kill' were in the same sentence. Better to get off politics. 'I'm just overwhelmed by the amount of death in the world and there's nothing I can do about it', she blurts out, trying to articulate what is consuming her from within. 'Nothing you can do about that, Marg', George replied. 'Can't do anything about global warming and the polar bears dying. Look at what happened with the last ice age. It will happen again, no question.' Again, nothing to hang onto here for Margaret. 'What have we got to rely on?' he asks, dragging Margaret back from the precipice of despair, offering her a hand up from the ledge from which she was about to leap. 'Can we rely on anyone outside ourselves?'

'I was relying on you today', Margaret replies. 'I wanted comfort. Actually, I don't know what I wanted' she adds slowly.

'I can't be relied on, just like my shares. I watch them every day. Will I sell, should I buy?'

George had begun playing with what ever money he had left from the rather messy divorce. In the past, when Margaret would ask about particular shares, 'What are they?', 'Do you know anything about how the company operates?', 'That's a company that deals in arms isn't it?', George replied that he didn't care, it was all about profits and selling at the right time. Now she just let the conversation wash over her as she sipped her stronger-than-usual black coffee.

George begins to talk about his latest paintings which adorn the walls of the studio, the sitting room of his apartment. They are uniformly square and flecked with dancing shapes and colours that relate to each other and form patterns that link each canvas. 'The difficulty is not to have it look like wallpaper', he says. 'Often the shapes begin to appear to form familiar patterns, then you've got to break the pattern and create a block for the eye while still maintaining a whole. It's not easy to do but you can see here where I've managed to pull it off. I'm really happy with this piece. There are people interested in buying these works but I'm not ready yet. I will be shortly and then it will be money for jam'.

Margaret felt the sudden need to look at wallpaper.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Patsy Vizents.