



Source: Greg Myre, 'Militant leaders die in Israeli air strike', *New York Times* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 03/11/05.

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He had a floating sensation as he pushed himself up, away, and onto one elbow, out of the flat position facing the ceiling. The ceiling's plane appeared to move towards the wall and down, making a new sense of order. The sunlight softly followed his line of vision to reveal the oatmeal cream wall surrounding the window opposite. He was encompassed by a huge soft bathing of light and warmth.

The window framed a new angle and an expanding sensation. He could see the upstretching rust leaves of the autumn lime trees heralding a deep icy-blue sky. From within his cream cocoon he watched as a light wind encouraged a handful of leaves to the ground, as if a small hand had gathered them up and then tossed them into the air. Slowly they tumbled over each other, ducking aside, then folding over until they each fell out of the frame.

He pushed into his elbow to lean out and follow them further, hoping to see them to their final landing, but the pain pulled him back sharply, and suddenly, taking away his breath and making him push air out through pursed lips in short fast blows. The sharp blows fought with the stabs of the pain until gradually there was a sympathetic rhythm and each began to ease off. It was as if there were a competition between the pain and the breath at the start, but then both elements thought better of it and gave up. Neither winning. Yet.

He was on his back again as the ceiling came into focus, released from the pain. Lying horizontal gave long periods of relief until the relief became almost boring and he would try to sit up again, only to be eventually thrown backwards with a gasp.

But he was determined today to see the leaves fall to the ground. The autumn leaves mirrored his sensation of change and falling. Sometimes light and flexible and happy in a bright wind. Other times fierce and harsh and crashing in wild gusts. He knew well that he might not see the final leaves tumble, as he might not witness his own final fall, or flight.

He was not pessimistic or sad. Just determined and focussed. Clear. Contented. His only real desire was to see the leaves to the ground, to bear witness to a small flight of golden orange through a bright wintry blue sky. To see them come to rest on a growing pile of leaves which would already be decomposing. Going back to the ground. A sense of completion.

A growing sound stirred him from his quiet breathing. The leaves were heaving and sighing in waves. It was as if they

were moving closer -then far, far away. It took some time for the sound to gather enough to penetrate his pain free restfulness. He stirred and again the ceiling moved away to reveal the window and the trees as he rearranged himself to watch. His breathing was heavy from the extra effort of moving quietly so no-one else would hear him and be tempted into his cocoon.

He rested forward now with both elbows propped up onto pillows at the edge of the bed close to the window. He could see the height of the trees, and the ground scattered with browning leaves. The trees were breathing softly, calmly. His own breath followed their pattern of swishing and rustling and swaying.

In.

Out.

In.

Out.

A long breath in, and then, with the out-breath, a great swoosh of leaves were scooped out of the enfolding limb and released into the sky. He held his breath, leant forward a little more, just far enough to feel the pain pinch, and tilted his head upwards to the highest leaf, and sighed 'Glorious'. Dappled gold against endless clear sky.

The leaf made its way down as if humming along to itself as it swayed from one side to the other. He stretched and swayed his head slightly to follow it down. The rhythm of motion and sound batting back and forth in easy company as it flew and tumbled and fell.

In.

Out.

Rustle.

Silence.

A building wind.

A retreating distant sigh.

A rising crescendo of boughs tangling against each other.

He rested his chin on his hands, looking slightly downwards now. He could hear the strength in his breathing. A longer out-breath than in, playing out the quietening of the trees between squalls. The most-wanted leaf came closer. As the wind fell quiet he saw the leaf fall into the autumn heap.

He sighed for a long time then drew enough breath to move off his elbows and lie his head sideways on the pillow, and look out. He could see the sky, and the tops of the trees. The wind took one mighty roaring in-breath and rushed through the last leaves. The passing breath whispered a quiet silence in reply.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Helen Idle.*