



Source: Andy McSmith, 'Leaked memo shows Iraq pull-out plans', *The Independent online*, 10/07/05
Tags: [evidence](#)
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The question mark raked across the page, its scrawny tail bisected by a harsh, whippy dash. A poor imitation of the pensive dot that is meant to be the lot of a truly querying question mark.

Alice traced the curve with her finger, almost a lemniscate, she thought, almost, but not quite, and certainly not with that brutal dash at its base.

She brushed the cat hair off the page, sighed, and turned it over, picking up a child's orange crayon to eke out a reply. Not a lot of room, using a crayon. Can't fit much on a page, the letters having to be that much bigger. But what was there to say, anyway? Of course she'd 'learnt her lesson' last time, but there are always more moments for more ellipses, more mistakes, more fires.

Alice chewed the quicks of her fingernails, shredding and biting the sides of each nail. She began to draw a curvy, soft spiral in the top left hand corner of the page, the crayon sliding off the paper and onto the Laminex leaving a waxy orange trim when she shifted the page across a little.

The candle resting next to the wall wavered a little on some soundless breeze, the ruddy glow scampering across the plaster cracks and over the picture rail.

The tail of the spiral became the body of a chicken, the gentle curve of its belly. Alice reached for a green crayon and added tail feathers, two stalky legs, and an eye. With a yellow crayon she drew in a small, oval egg a few centimetres behind the bird, then traced an orange question mark next to it.

Alice folded the page in three, and propped it up on the mail rack in the hallway, chicken facing out. She made her way out the front door, clicking out the lights as she left.

Steam clouded from her mouth as she turned the key in the lock, tugging the door closed. Alice pulled the faux-fur trim on her gloves, willing them to stretch over her wrists and under her coat cuffs.

She stepped off the bus a few stops early, insisting to herself that she walk the last few blocks to the bakery. A delivery van tooted to the bus driver as he swerved back out into the thin, early-morning traffic. Alice's boot-heels tapped on the pavement; resounding, timely clicks as she stepped two paces to a segment, avoiding the cracks in the cement.

Inside, Alice fumbled in the small straw basket on the ledge for more bobby pins. One hand held her black curls up in a rolling, riotous bun, the other pummelled the mass with pins, trapping each tendril of hair as it snaked down, tracing her cheek or floating on her shoulders. Eventually she jammed the white fabric hat on, fastening it with two extra pins on each side.

Alice strode into the kitchen, yanking on the oven doors as she passed, pulling each smooth, metal lever around and out, releasing the heat, and just as quickly, sealing it back in again. Hanging on a hook above the bench was the list for the day: continental vanilla, rum baba, toska, paradise, chocolate tortes...the list went on.

At the bottom were a few random items, cheesecakes, honey cakes, cherry crumble . . . each accompanied by a red question mark. To be made today if there were time. But not the priority, not with those question marks next to them, somehow reducing them, marking them as less relevant. Irrelevant?

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Amelia Young.