



Source: Richard Norton-Taylor, 'Troops add to instability, says US general', *The Guardian*, Reuters in *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 08/02/06.

Tags: [food](#), [violence](#), [literature](#)

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I have been in the company of people who travel with paperbacks and leave them on trains when they have finished, a gift for whomever next occupies that seat. At the other end of the carriage, so to speak, I have known people who think even the faintest trace of pale pencil in the margin of a free pamphlet on dental hygiene is sacrilege.

My lover and I have highlighted passages and traded novels in transit. We have put flawless first editions in glass cases and refrained from cutting creamy pages lest we mar the embryonic biblio-perfection: instead stroking the leather binding as if we could draw the text through the paper and cured skin and know the words by our own secret Braille. And once, we read a book whose contents rang so true and precious and reverberated so deep within our trembling chromosomes that we could not even speak of it. We could have launched it on a rocket, but the words were already etched in us and would not be far away no matter where the book was exiled. So we hid the volume under a seat cushion for a week, casting dark and furtive glances when we darted past it and each other at odd hours.

We slept to get away from the book. But when we slept we dreamt of the book. We dreamt of the book through a consuming hunger. They were craving dreams. We had desires in our sleep so profound and intense, that we felt wider than awake. But in coming to, all we retained were memories of the things we had wanted so badly. One night my lover craved a small white table in the middle of a blinding snowstorm, set with a single glass of red wine. The next night I craved a broken candy cane, meticulously tongue-sharpened into a needlepoint. Another night my lover craved the purest Alpine water served in a crystal glass with a jagged edge. And on yet another, I craved the fruit of an unimaginably strange tree, succulent, restorative and delicious, a tree that grew from a seed that had been planted in my stomach I knew not when. The night we fell asleep in the bathtub we both woke up with a residual craving for strangulation by honey-glazed harp string. The objects were diverse, but each one represented the book, and each one was, in its fashion, edible, as well as increasingly dangerous.

And it went on like that, our dreams getting more and more in synch, more and more palatable, until the Monday night, for fear of putting on weight and the executioner's mask, we found insomnia in a dusty corner.

My lover's words were mine, and mine were my lover's. And it was on Monday night that I knew I would have to eat my lover's words, and mine must be eaten, if we were to rid ourselves of what we had read. It may be that the deepest truths will break a person, and must be diluted, even if only slightly, by amnesia.

On Tuesday afternoon we knelt on the floor, clinging to each other in teary silence.

On Wednesday we went to the library and consulted everyone from Brillat-Savarin to M.F.K. Fisher to the man who ran the bagel cart outside.

On Thursday we went to the market. Shallots and onions, sweet and burning, went on the opposite side of the straw basket from cilantro and mint, insolent and cool.

On Friday we rose at dawn and cooked all day. Cardamom and marjoram, thyme and rye, chervil and garlic, bay leaf and cinnamon stick, parsley, sage, rosemary and dill went under the knife and through the grater. Béarnaise, béchamel, curry, clam, piperade, tapenade, remoulade, hollandaise, vinaigrette, guacamole, and a dozen other spices for dips, seasons for sauces, we mixed, beat, whipped, stirred, shook, simmered, sifted, burned, browned, reduced, turned, puréed and separated until bowls and saucers of culinary completions lined the floors like ribbon trim on a sailor suit.

At the first sign of Saturday we locked the door, unplugged the phone and slept, but not before my lover retrieved the book and placed it on the now pristine kitchen counter, on a silver platter garnished with lemon slices.

And in Sunday's silence, page by page, sopping flavors scoring its edges, we ate it.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Alex Keller.*