



Source: Jonathan Weisman, [‘Rocketing US war spending under fire’](#), *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 21/04/06.

Tags: [intimacy](#), [travel](#), [home](#), [animals](#)

Writer/s: [Gregory Pryor](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

Tony was walking down the street with untied shoelaces dragging behind each footstep. It was early in the morning and his head wasn't clear. He had been up late, writing a long letter to his girlfriend who lived a long way away. It was the only way he could muster a connection to life, these long correspondences. He listened to melancholic music, and he played complicated games with the mice that periodically ventured into his kitchen. He covered the many cracks and holes that opened up in the walls of this old house with thin wafers of rice paper. As he carefully pinned each sheet in place, he felt as if he were stretching skin over the body of a drum. Each morning he checked which sheets the mice had gnawed through. Occasionally they devoured the whole piece of rice paper and other times they simply nibbled a hole through which they went in search of a more varied diet. This interaction with mice occupied a worryingly large part of his thinking each day.

When he wrote to Caroline however, he lived another life. Somehow she made more things seem possible and he spoke to her of other projects and dreams. He spoke to her of books he had read and films and music, he was even able to recall incidental observations he had made from his life and conversations he had had with people they both knew. The life he transcribed to her seemed to be someone else's life. He even suggested games they could undertake together when they met again and this planning and longing sustained them both. The problem was, he wasn't earning any money at the moment and he had no idea how he could get over to Germany by the end of the year. With the price of oil skyrocketing, an airfare was now a lot more expensive than it had ever been.

He moved the old refrigerator out from the wall and inspected the rice paper he had attached over the largest hole where the skirting board had been infested with termites. The hole in the paper had been caused partly through gnawing and partly through tearing, the mouse

forcing its way as soon as its head could poke through. He took the paper and added it to his album. Each page represented a passage, a breakthrough or a meal at the door. He assessed his own situation each time he opened this album. Where was he going? What was he looking for? Was he hungry? Could he see through to the other side? But most of all he thought about various models of migratory paths between this old dilapidated house in Kalgoorlie and Caroline's apartment in Hamburg.

When he wrote to her that night he finally told her about the mice and of the time he spent maintaining and cataloguing these paper barriers. It was a confession of sorts, an expression of his unhappiness, something he really didn't want to reveal to her.

To his relief however, Caroline was pleased that he had unburdened himself and released his despair. She too had been struggling and had found herself working ridiculous hours to cover up her loneliness. From then on, it was as if this mutual expression of unhappiness had illuminated something in their lives and their meeting again would arrive sooner than anticipated.

The following week as Tony went outside to buy more rice paper, he checked his letterbox and found two letters. One was a postcard from Caroline of a sculpture by Katarina Fritsch of a gigantic black rat squatting on its hind legs on top of a man asleep in bed. He immediately smiled and felt lucky to have met such a special woman. As he walked to the shops, he opened the other letter, already feeling that it was good news. And sure enough, his application for research funding had been successful.

He walked past the delicatessen and into the local travel agents, immediately booking a flight to Germany for the following month.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Gregory Pryor.*