



Source: Scott Wilson, 'Israel upgrades, fortifies crossings from West Bank', *Washington Post online*, 30/07/05.

Tags: [surveillance](#), [animals](#)

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The trick is to know when to make the move. If I get up too quickly, he will be alerted to the action and spring to attention to bar the direction in which I'm heading. Not slowly enough and I end up being watched, surveyed from a distance as my progress towards the target is made, at the last minute, having my path casually blocked by his presence. And too slowly—no there doesn't seem to be a too slowly. In slow motion or not even that, in stop-frame-action I could raise myself, inch by inch, not making a sound, my body breathing and beating silently, watching the watcher. And still I am barred. So I must be patient, and choose my moment.

He watches and dozes, crossing the line of consciousness with regular slippages. Around him lies the refuse of journeys out and huddled boredoms in. Shards of rubbish litter the corner, reminders of my previous trips away to the beach. The towels and coverings used to protect me from the sun, now frayed into small pieces through boredom, leaving annoying unravelling trails. Scraps of plastic tarp are mixed with the towelling shreds, all lying in haphazard array as if attacked in a frenzy of nightmare memory. He surveys the room from a vantage point of power, surrounded by the tattered remains of shelter and protection. I am the watched, the preyed upon, the one his eyes feast upon and the one he responds to. Nothing should change and nothing need change, no movement IS no change. Everything is well and as it should be in this room but I'm uncomfortable. My body complains from the stillness and—wants to be active, wants to turn, to stretch, wants to drink or is that just because I am being watched?

The breathing is steady.  
The watcher is asleep.  
Now is the time to move.  
How long have I been here?  
How long will I have to stay?  
Will I be missed?

The door is too far from my seat and the light is fading. I'm surprised. I wonder at the time. There are no clocks in the room but the shadows are falling over the table and onto the wall, sending finger-like sinews of light and dark, trailing the traces of the day over furniture and fabric. I can't remember how long I've been here, seated on this chair, watching the watcher. No, not yet. Keep the watcher in your gaze, listen to the breathing, watch the muscles. I wonder if he dreams in his own tired, exhausted state.

Before this, before the eyes came into the room and the watcher took up residence in the corner, before the room even, I had freedom. I walked the paths and hills to the ocean and breathed the salt air that had come 'all the way from South Africa' across oceans of oceans, straight to me. All the way across the mirror of water, the long flat horizon showing nothing but the odd tanker parked, waiting for entry, patiently waiting. The tankers that took the grain—to where? Off over the long flat horizon, following the wind from Africa, beating against the wind to another part of the world. I could walk to the edge of the world, to the edge of the continent and breathe the air of adventure and distance.

Not now. Now I have a boundary, a fence of watching and caution, rounding me up into a small area, a room, a corner with only a brief glimpse of the sky above the great limestone wall of the house. I know it's a pretty wall but I can't see the ocean from behind it and now, I can't get to the wall. Can I get to the door?

Stretch the toes.  
Clench the hands.  
Lean into the room.  
Hold the breath—not loudly, breathe in with his rhythm. Feel the thighs slowly rise from the chair—STOP, not too fast, you have an age to go before the door is reached. The handle is calling—is it locked?

One step, what's in the way, is he looking, is he listening, can he hear? Slide the socked foot along the floor-boards, will that be less noisy? It makes a sort of shhhhhing noise that is like the wind through a Sheoak. No, not all the way, there's a mat.

Still no movement from the watcher.  
I think I'm going to make it, the handle is calling—  
Around the chair, another step and around the table, not too fast.  
Don't get too excited.  
Still the beating, still the breathing.  
Three steps.  
Watch the light, watch the shadow, watch the cast down onto the watcher.

Too late.  
His eyes are open.  
He springs up.  
Not this time.

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