



Source: Suzanne Goldenberg, 'A wary defiance in the village Hizullah's leader calls home', *Guardian Unlimited*, 28/07/06.

Tags: [incarceration](#), [child/parent](#), [dreams](#), [corporeality](#)

Writer/s: [Michelle Outram](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

You roll your eyes like a skittish horse. I stand here and watch you do it. You don't move me. Your stupid tricks won't move me.

I don't feel anything for you at all. I don't roll my eyes. I just watch. Relaxed. Seeing it make you mad. More desperate.

You came out of the darkness—that hole. You came out, shielding your eyes from the sun. The heat not drying your sweat fast enough to hide your fear. I can smell the acrid testosterone stink of a man left too long unwashed.

It's strange passing through the countryside. Silent. Even the animals are gone. The people who have stayed are not inquisitive about strangers. They can't afford to be. Yet there is a seething just below the surface. Waiting to erupt. Everybody gets hungry sometime.

I watch you as you take a shit. Or try to. I watch you with my placid eyes. In another time and place you might be ashamed. Yet here we are surrounded by such shame that this small thing is nothing. Merely the repetitive functions of the animals we are.

You lift your eyes to me askance. I stand. Unblinking. Unresponsive. You take this as acquiescence, though it is my duty here to neither give nor deny. We must both wait.

---

At night I dream about a row of silhouetted men. Dark shapes emerging from behind a hill. They begin to move like the target-ducks at a sideshow—from right to left along the horizon. My gun is in my hand and I am shooting. They are falling. There is no sound. There is no prize. Only silence.

---

At some point you stopped trying to brush out your hair with your fingers. At first you sat there idly, nervously, raking it. Not just wanting to look your best, but using it as a way to touch yourself. Make contact. Keep strong and sane. At some point you stopped and now your hair is densely matted and scraggly. You no longer care about the crumbs and bits of muck in your beard. Half the time you don't even wash when you could. Once you asked for scissors. Now you don't ask for anything.

You don't try and look at me any more. You stare, eyes glazed, unblinking. Where I am soft in my gaze, you are hard. Sometimes you rock forward and back, back and forward. But mostly you remain still. You know the cracks

in the walls, ceiling and floor better than you know the new creases around your eyes and mouth.

You know what time the flies will come each day and you know when the shadow will reach the furthest point of the mattress on the floor in the corner. You smell any creature as it approaches and know if it's a rat or lizard, one of us or one of them. The dead and decomposing things at the edge of the compound do not seem to bother you. Nor the smell. Nor the way they seem to sigh in the night.

---

I dream of my father. 'Dear father' I say. And it is as if I am praying to him, though I am not religious.

Dear father. You are my father. Please come home. Take me home. Please father. Dear father. You've gotten so old. I can see the blood pulse under your skin. I can feel the heat of your body close to me. Dear father. Your arms are like twigs. So frail. Please father. How did you get so frail?

His face looms, bursts and I wake with tears. Hot and flushed—and alone.

---

I watch you as ever.

I see your dry whitish tongue as you lick your lips. That same discernible movement, over and over. I watch as your fingernails grow, incrementally, now dirty, now clean. I see your pores open with the heat of the day, your grease spreading as you sit against the wall. I see the pattern of it all.

I watch you as ever.

I've seen your eyes dull. I've seen the grey in your hair thicken. I've seen the cracks in your face merge with the cracks and stains of this place. I've watched you closely and seen you become the animal you always were.

I've seen them. Those like you. Sniffing out the blood-trails like the dogs you really are.

Yet I just watch you. I don't feel anything. It is my job to watch you. I make sure you are not slaughtered while you sleep. I make sure you don't succeed for yourself. I am trusted to report without bias.

By this I do my duty.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Michelle Outram.*