

Story for performance #411
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Source: Thom Shanker, 'Civil war risk in Iraq rises, U.S. commander says', *New York Times in International Herald Tribune online*, 05/08/06.

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I hadn't seen Viola for over a year. Had no idea where she might be, although I did know she'd gone overseas after falling into a coma for two weeks and waking up with itchy feet. Then this email popped up.

< Hi Pip,

Mystery—I'm in a chateau on a mountain near a volcano. Guess which country. Deep snow out in the gardens but inside so cosy—soft white frilled pillows, fab, free minibar, huge marble shower and bath with gold taps...I'm watching my center of gravity here...the pool is divine.>

'Stop!' A Voice in the writer's head suddenly butts in. 'How can you write this trivia when Baghdad's burning—when the center of gravity is this civil war attracting more military. Seriously, the whole Middle East is going up and you're writing like you're going to dance to the airport for a holiday...'

Well yes. Okay. But I didn't expect the soundtrack to Armageddon to be Condry on the piano playing Brahms. It's disconcerting to say the least...I mean how irrelevant is that!

The Voice goes silent. The neighbour's TV is really loud. The writer, that's me, could retire to the bathroom and sit on the toilet seat lid [great invention that], but it's cold in Sydney tonight.

Viola can wait. I don't need this Voice.

Cold. This week I went to the theatre to see *Das Kalte Kind* (The Cold Child), by Marius von Mayenburg, in which the Father dies on a toilet seat when his wife says the words 'India Rubber' [Kautschuk, in German], too many times.

Breaking News—Terry Hicks, father of David Hicks named Father of the Year.

Ruddock outraged. Kautschuk.

The cold child was a baby in a pram—it got beer thrown all over it by its bad mother and its father fussed and fussed and peered so much into the pram the bad mother said there must be a tv in there.

Tonight on my walk I saw a homeless person settling down in the small grandstand for the night, talking to someone on her mobile. Nobody in the play had a mobile. The father turned into a stuck pig with an apple in his mouth. The baby turned out to be a doll and was violently dismembered by its parents—that dog Barney, who ripped up Mabel, Elvis's teddy bear, couldn't have done it better.

Isn't it good to see an insurance company go up its own arse...insisting on a dog to mind a whole lot of toys. The dog getting jealous because the Security guy gave Mabel a bit of a cuddle—just like something out of Grimm's fairy tales. Although insurance companies weren't in any of their stories that I can remember.

Anyhow, I think there was a happy ending to the play—at least one daughter got to fuck the sexual pervert and the other to cover herself with fake blood after her husband got a bit arrogant so she decided to stab him with a knife from the picnic.

And the cool triumphant matriarch ended up in Singapore

with all the money looking for another husband to kill with words she enjoyed it so much.

The cold child had nothing to do with anything really. That's why it was the title—which is another type of gravity—like *Gravity's Rainbow*.

You wonder what happens to gravity during a quantum leap.

That Senator McCain said a civil war in Baghdad being a center of gravity was no different from the game 'whack-a-mole'. I don't know that game. Do Americans whack moles into holes or what. What is this game?

Going to the theatre set off quite a good week in which the whole world went ape over the 'Planemo twins' up there in the Ophiuchus star-forming region; 25% of China's air pollution drifted over to LA; and an artist called Liam Yates appeared in a 'commute suit' designed to give you lots of space when you travel underground. He had prongs, water, a fan, flashing lights and a spoon dripping with yoghurt for fending off pushers and shovers.

I also had some shelves put up. My friend Denke came over to make holes in the wall. The shelves look great, like the cupboard he made, and the box. We had chicken risotto at a café near the Royal Yacht Club, then saw a Bill Hensen show at the Roslyn Oxley gallery. Some soft photos of ships hulking on the water at evening were my favourites, and his too.

Next day I picked up *A Life of Boswell*, and read: 'We turned down Gracechurch Street and went upon the top of London Bridge, from whence we viewed with a pleasing horror, the rude and terrible appearance of the river, partly froze up, partly covered with enormous shoals of floating ice which often crashed against each other.' No global warming then.

Boswell's 'Signor Gonorrhoea' was getting worse all the time on his walk, having been tricked into a passionate affair with an infected actress named Louisa. Next day he takes his 'damned twinges, scalding heat and deep-tinged loathsome matter' to the Doctor, who will not give him a discount.

< Dear Pippy, Do you watch The Bill still? Wasn't that pathetic the way they did away with Gabriel, the serial killer. Why introduce such a character—which lost half the viewers anyway from him getting away with so much, then cop out at the end just when...>

Viola! She won't stay in the wings. I want to be Pip and go see her.

'Viola—how many open fires are there in your chateau? How many girls in shining armour? Don't send any more emails—there's this Voice which berates the writer for writing you. We could meet somewhere though. I want to fly out of here. How about Levin?'

She emailed back.

< Great. That's where Janet Frame's gravity star shines on the mountains. That's where you can get a giant jam and real cream doughnut.>

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Loma Bridge.