



Source: Conal Urquhart, 'Israel, Hizbullah a disgrace, says UN as aid is blocked', *Guardian Unlimited*, 11/08/06.

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We were driving on roads barely plowed. That is, roads that had been, somehow, plowed, cleared—clean black lines cutting through deserted fields of untouched snow. It was almost unfathomable that anyone had ever driven where we were driving, or that anything had ever rolled over these nameless, endless stretches of thick gravel. Still, the roads were plowed—yet they couldn't have been.

Cameron was navigating the ambiguous roads while I watched the blank nothingness of night streak by. Like a carefully crafted lie, snow is blinding in sunlight but invisible in darkness. So impaired by the sun, our only choice was the dark. I could feel the snow-laden fields as we pulled ahead, because even invisibility can't cover heaviness, or cold. The cold was so heavy, this heaviness so cold, that it pressed against the tin doors of our dilapidated lemon, and the two of us shrank away from it, until our shoulders touched and half my bottom lifted off the seat. I chewed the tip of my finger absently.

Cameron saw it first: a faint ring of horizontal light rising into the upper right corner of the windshield, just faint enough to be mistaken for an aura of dizziness. Then it crept into the upper left corner of my window. We collectively, unconsciously, decided to pull over. Closer to the source, the ring of light now appeared to be cracked—the negative transfer of an addict's gold-webbed mirror. I grabbed the bag of stale bread from the salt-stained car floor, and, getting out of the car, saw that this cracked ring of light was a glowing campfire, reflected on the field of ice chunks and its unreachable ravines of white powder.

We made our way toward the camp. We neared, making out a party of eight; one of them, huddled low in her parka, sat away from the group. Just beyond the fire was a slate gray cat in a primitive cage, meowing pathetically. There was no need to greet the group. They were ready for us. I handed one of them the bag of bread, which was set hesitantly on the ground.

The leader of the group, a shadow from his hood covering most of his face, filled us in on the story. Cameron kept close attention, but most of mine was lost to the cat.

This group used to be known as the People's Activation Front, working in strict opposition to the League of Concerned Citizens for Justice and Social Change. The Front had no one cause or objective, other than to incite the People into action, usually by fabricating emotionally-charged news stories and handing out pamphlets written in hate-rhetoric. Some anonymous acts of violence and arson were attributed to the Front, but the accusations were never proven. The People's Activation Front saw the public as lethargic and passionless, aimless and lifeless, and so began 'activating'. This group, over time, accumulated a number of enemies. It was said that its termination would not be far away.

The group had recently attended a CWSB conference, standing in the lobby handing out pamphlets for passion, calling attendees to take action against the gruesome assassination of a fictitious Leader. A staunch female

figure stood in a dimly lit corner of the lobby, in a grey tunic, watching with crossed arms and pursed lips. The figure disappeared shortly before the Front's bus arrived to drive them miles away, on to the next convention. The members were righteously exhausted and paid no attention to the route.

It was at this point in the story that I lost all concern for the plight of the Activation Front. I was intent on inspecting this cage that housed the bony grey cat. The 'cage' was a semi-collapsed cube, made of 4 x 1 inch wooden slats, screwed loosely together. I nudged one side of the cage with four fingers, at which it sprung into regular, perpendicularized shape. The cat squeezed out of one of the openings and made off into the darkness.

One of the parka-huddling members spat into a tin cup. 'That was our food for a week,' he announced nonchalantly.

'Maybe it was fate, then,' I offered. 'You know, that I brought the bread.'

I received a grunt in reply.

Guiltily, I turned my attention back to the leader's story. It appeared that the bus driver taking them from one convention to the next, had stopped along the road, let them off, and drove away. It wasn't until their sleepy eyes searched for street lamps and brick buildings that they noticed they had been left in the middle of nowhere.

'How long have you been here?' Cameron asked.

'Something of a while. A while,' the leader replied.

'Have you tried looking for shelter, or going out to find someone? Has anyone gone for help?'

'No. We figure we're going to stay here for a while.'

At this, the member sitting away from the rest of the group scoffed. She spoke in a lilting, stammering accent. 'Activation, action, movement, and here we are, waiting. Waiting for nothing, in the darkness, and there is nothing here for us. Nothing to do, nothing to eat.'

I screwed up my face at the last phrase, and luckily, while my eyes were still squinted, I noticed a raccoon scuffling just in reach of the fire's light. I ran to catch it—it seemed heavily sedated, and didn't struggle to get away. I stuffed it into the cat-sized box like a magician stuffing a colored scarf into his fist. My beaming resolution caused no applause.

'Waiting in darkness, you said?' Cameron asked, turning a shoulder to me. 'So you've only been here a few hours.'

'No,' the stammering woman replied, taking a break from nervously biting her fingernail. 'It is always dark here. Here it is always night. Here we can see each other clearly.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ella Longpre.*