



Source: AFP, AP, 'No guilt over killing Kurds, Saddam tells Iraqis', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 12/09/06.  
Tags: [disease](#), [crime](#), [incarceration](#), [home](#), [child/parent](#)  
Writer/s: [Tim Etchells](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

'I THOUGHT I SMELLED SOMETHING DIRTY'.

That was what someone had painted on the wall under her apartment and she tried hard not to take it personally but those ideas get in you like shrapnel from the landmines and you cannot stop it.

So that summer she sank into a depression. It was like when the *Titanic* was headed for an iceberg—they said lookout and the loser captain said No it is okay but it was not okay. With her it was the same. For a long while she could see the depression far off on the horizon like the aftermath of a skirmish, all heat hazes and fog—and she knew she was heading straight for it but she thought okay, okay, I can deal with that. But then she could not and she sank.

Her friend came round to cheer her up but that didn't work. Her mum called but made things worse. A 'bird' came to sing at her window but in one week the batteries ran down and it sat there getting rusted.

\* \* \*

In September, maybe, the teenage kid from over the hallway tried the door to her place and finding it open, stepped in. That kid was a bit defective—with a disjointed body, disconnected mind and a tee-shirt that said IRRESPECTIVE OF ANYTHING. The neighbours said he wrote that sentence on the outside of that building but there was no proof, you could not pin it on him. If you tried to pin it on him he would run. And you could not catch him. That was how the argument went.

In Jessica's apartment the kid made himself at home by watching loud re-runs of *Dead End* and *Terror Town* and eating any food and when he was tired lying stretched on the red couch with his too-big and dirty neglected feet.

He did not notice that under the sheets of that bed in the corner of the room was the Jessica person lying hidden, in her state of depression. He thought he had the whole place to himself.

\* \* \*

Across the hallway the defective kid's father soon became concerned that his son was not there and started to yell for him, calling 'Leroi' from the doorway and out the window because that was that kid's name. No answer came.

Of course the Leroi did not hear him. *Terror Town* just got to the episode where Cal and Victoria get the assignment to infiltrate a unit of robot police and follow them into Siberian wastelands for some reason that is not clear but just as they are taking the microchips on pills that will miniaturise them Victoria discovers that she may be pregnant and has to back off from the mission and her place is taken by Natalia and there is a jealous rage between her (Victoria played by Lindsay Lohan) and Cal who says 'Look I love you' and she says 'Then leave Terror Town with me for good, we cannot love here' and he says no he is committed to the Department of Insurgency and she says she is sorry she has to put her unborn baby first and then departs to leave Cal with Natalia (played by someone else) who turns out to be a spy. It is a good episode and not surprising that Leroi was kind of hooked into it.

\* \* \*

Jessica lay under sheets all night in the depression too scared to even peep out because that kid moving round in her apartment was very disturbing by anybody's standards, even if you were not depressed. She watched shadows of his movement through nylon and made dumb-ass calculations like if she could reach the phone or not before the kid got to her, or how much hurt would she be if she jumped from her tenth floor window, just over the letter H in THOUGHT that was part of the graffiti.

\* \* \*

When morning came she sneaked out of bed. The kid was asleep on the sofa. He looked sweet but the Jessica was still in the depression though and had a lot of problems separating facts from the assortment of fictions that she read about on the inside of her own skull. Without making hardly any kind of sound at all she crept around the apartment and packed a plastic bag containing important things and also useful things like clothes, a gun and ammunition.

Then she went out the door, did not close it, did not look back.

\* \* \*

The defective kid's father lived under some kind of tagged incarceration (that they said was a humane equivalent to jail) and therefore was not allowed to leave his premises. He spent the night in the doorway calling out for Leroi, sometimes loud, sometimes softer.

He did not see Jessica creep by.

\* \* \*

Sometimes just a change of circumstances is enough to make a life change for the better and get depression lifted. Outside on the highway a campervan went by full of happy young people that were going on a holiday and drinking Diet Sprite. They stopped and offered Jessica a ride and she went with them to a new town where there were still some of the freedoms and she could start a new life.

\* \* \*

Defective Leroi was not so lucky. Cops with burgers, Tasers and odour-free coffee arrived when he left her apartment and tackled him to the motherfucking floor and dragged him off to face a court with martial law.

\* \* \*

The sentence they came out with was what they called the humane equivalent of the death penalty which meant that Leroi was strapped under heavy sedation on a plastic mattress in his father's apartment and left there unconscious in legal perpetuity.

Workers from the government working less than minimum wage came by the next week as he lay there oblivious and painted out his graffiti.

So where it said I THOUGHT I SMELLED SOMETHING DIRTY it then said nothing at all.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Tim Etchells.*