



Source: Michael Gordon, 'US drafts plan to boost Iraqi PM's authority', *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* in *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 30/11/06.

Tags: [death](#), [intimacy](#), [dystopia](#), [retribution](#)

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After she met him she wrote on her hand three words:

'Intentions seem good'.

One month later she figured out she was wrong.

He was one of those guys with the electricity in the eyes and skin that smells like roses or some kind of chocolate. He had that radio voice, full of airwaves, frequencies and good vibrations. He was something to look at, everyone agreed on that, including her sister who was normally choosy when it came to the guys and would not dream of dating anyone she had met in a clinic.

His name was Citrus and when he two-stepped from the path of an oncoming joy-rider's four-wheel drive, or when he aimed a lazy kick at one of the rats that lived in the filthy apartment, you could really think for a moment that he was dancing. He had grace. He could cut a long story short and many times it ended up in the bedroom, though just as often it ended up in court. He stole her clothes and her microwave, sold her TV on eBay, uploaded their private pix and videos onto Flickr with a caption that said Check THIS—She Used to Be My Girl. He was no good. His intentions were no good at all. He was not what he seemed.

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Charlene's possible routes to revenge were kind of limited and living with no clothes, no microwave and no TV in a mainly empty apartment was not very easy. She wrapped herself in a blanket to keep warm, then took some clothes (without asking) from a neighbour who was blind. It was the law of the jungle round there, where she lived, or law of the something, but no one knew what. Charlene had not seen a jungle, except in the film called LICENSED INSANITY or UNDENIABLE—PROOF OF THE STATE.

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Time went by and she befriended a couple of kind of wasted looking semi-drunk semi-retired guys who said they used to be semi-professional wrestlers and who often stood out front of her building or sat on the steps. One of them—who liked to be known as The Jones—said he was connected to some guys in Disorganised Crime. She let slip some stuff about how Citrus betrayed her and in time, as trust grows in these situations, The Jones promised that he would say a word in some ears and then see what kind of legal or illegal things could be done to intervene in the narrative. The Jones was a drunk but to hear him talk he knew some stuff about what he called Story Structure. He once did a Correspondence Course, that's what he boasted, though in truth he never completed it. Charlene needed development he said, she needed fleshing out and he made her feel special when he said that, and his hand brushed her thigh and she liked the way he picked the dirt and stuff from out behind his fingernails using a plastic disposable knife as he talked. Even more than development, The Jones said to Charlene when they sat on the steps one night and watched helicopters searching for Insurgents, even more than

development, she needed closure. The thing with Citrus was an opening, an incomplete thread, an orphan event. A life could get shapeless with too much of those, or the air could all escape from it and leave a person deflated. She needed some closure and The Jones said he'd help her find it, even though he was like three times her age, immune to her limited charms and totally beyond an erection.

* * *

Summer turned into December. Charlene took a job with a firm that removed asbestos from the ceilings of buildings that were bombed out and were due to be knocked down. You had to provide your own protective clothing and masks, you had to figure out your own hours and rota with the absentee foreman and there were no actual wages, it was basically working for tips. But it was a job and she got by.

The Jones out front of her building was always talking to her about sub-plots, denouements and character arcs, but by this point, with the fake snow falling in drifts and the sound of Bing Fucking Crosby everywhere she found him tedious and repetitive; all she wanted was the chance to get even on the Citrus thing.

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To make matters worse of course she saw him (Citrus) from time to time which is probably inevitable in a small city with a siege and a curfew like that one. He would be hanging at the improvised checkpoint on 9th Street getting tolls and dues from the Cunts who were all leaving town. Another time he was running down what used to be Broadway, pursued by men and dogs and cop cars and youths with sticks and crying children and weeping women and soldiers and tigers and birds and security guards and mobsters and insects and journalists with satellite phones. He had something of the legend about him, even when he was in trouble.

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In the end The Jones gave Charlene a number for his friends in Disorganised Crime. She called it and told the whole story—a total recap in a fraction of the words—her early optimism back on the day when she had first met Citrus, his grace and how his intentions seemed good and then the whole thing with the blow-job videos and her Sanyo microwave she never saw again. The bloke at the other end seemed impassive, not really there, just phoning it in, but the next night he showed up at midnight, outside Charlene's place, on the sidewalk with Citrus' body in a Circuit City shopping cart and his bloody head in a double-thickness Wall-Mart polyurethane bag.

'Nothing's too much trouble for a friend of The Jones', he said. 'We guys in Disorganised Crime, we stick together.' Then he handed her the bag and was gone.

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