



Source: 'Clinton rejects Bush's war plan', *Washington Post* in *The Age* online, 19/01/07.
Tags: [child/parent](#), [dystopia](#)
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Now, it was Winter. Everyone would stay Inside. The sky was dark all day and all night, and it was shadowy Inside, too; power was to be conserved for heat—saved for safety, people said—though it was never warm. It was always windy, Outside. Whether it was whiny, moaning or howling, the wind's mood was a constant condition for life Inside. And it snowed all the time, not in soft flakes but in hard, glassy little fragments. You could hear the Squad's boot heels crunching on it, Outside, as they made their rounds on a twisting path that shifted hourly as the drifts grew and moved, which all but covered and hid the low buildings of the Quadrant.

Little One, in the library, wrapped in her blanket, pressed her head against one of the small windows nearly blacked out by the snowdrift, waiting to hear the engine whine and the caterpillar tracks of one of the Squad vehicles, hoping for a flash of headlamp that would for a second capture for her a crystalline pattern of snow on thick glass, the memory of whose filigreed tracery she could take back to her room. There, straining her eyes by candlelight, she would make her drawings. Little One feared that in the soft, crepuscular gloom, Inside, they would all end up sightless, so she drew and drew—endless, delicate fractal designs covering page after page—to ward off the end of light.

It was a long time since anyone had been Outside safely, but for Squad members, and they were barracked somewhere out in the drifts, on higher ground, it was said. The Squad would come for a teenaged child, every now and then, looming, indistinct figures, silent, padded, masked and booted, reflective strips on their uniforms barely limning them in the candlelight. The teenager would be pleased enough to go: service was the price of safety, after all. Little One still missed Mignonette, though, who had taken it upon herself to practice needlepoint, while seeing the need for neither needle, thread, nor frame—her tiny hands, which Little One would bend close to observe, flying above her lap in intricate mime. 'Lion rampant,' Mignonette would say: 'here, gold...here, red,' and you could almost see the picture take form, glinting in the dark air. Little One thought Mignonette had been trying to save something, too, and wondered whether it was ever Mignonette's headlamp flashing against the library window.

From Inside, there was the tunnel to the Commissariat, where supplies of vat-grown proteins were dispensed, and, more importantly for Little One, recycled paper. She liked to tag along with her parents, though they were typically dour and silent people, if not grim, and it was a long trudge, for at the end of the dim tunnel the Commissariat was a pool of electric light. It seemed so luxurious, almost shocking, and while her parents were lining up Little One would stand under the bulbs, unblinking, as if to absorb the light directly into her retina, where she hoped a spark might permanently lodge

itself.

Occasionally, a poor disturbed soul would Risk Everything, as was inevitably said, afterwards, and go Outside. There had been a cousin whom Little One barely knew, who, it eventually emerged, must have spent long hours cutting a narrow hatch in a crawlspace above the ceiling—scratching away in pitch blackness, Little One realized—working with a table knife, tools being available only when properly requested from the Commissariat, until she had managed to squeeze herself out and, it was presumed, fall into or through the snowdrift. She was simply not seen again, only her endeavour was quickly discovered because the temperature had fallen after she pushed her little doorway open, and a search for the leak site had ensued. A period of dark mutterings followed, and for some little while, Little One and Mignonette had found themselves curtailed in what they thought were their own private patterns of movement through the gloom. Parents, uncles and aunts would silently appear out of nowhere, coincidentally to block their way, though soon enough supervision returned to its usually lax level.

Once, too, there was heard a series of sharp cracks from the north west corner of the Quadrant, which Little One had not understood, but whose mysterious phenomena also elicited a round of murmuring and the wringing of hands emerging from parental cloaks. Little One found herself convinced that her parents had soon after actually stopped and waited for another couple in the tunnel, with whom they spoke briefly, even hurriedly, before then letting them go on ahead some way, en route to the Commissariat. Her mother, she thought—who normally seemed resigned and distant and whom Little One largely ignored—might have been trying not to cry. It had been soon after that, when the Squad arrived for Mignonette, and there had been some hubbub in the library, from which Little One had been unceremoniously removed by an uncle, so that not only was Mignonette taken to serve without saying goodbye, but Little One was so disquieted that she missed most of an evening of drawing. Strangely, for no reason that she could quite put her finger on, she had found herself trying not to cry, that night, too.

Service notwithstanding, Little One had eventually come to feel that Mignonette was the price of her safety—Mignonette who had named her Little One, after all—and so, late, late at night, once she had sufficiently elaborated her latest snow picture, she would reach into a hiding place for the drawings she had begun to do, portraits of Mignonette, from memory, that memory trained so well on glimpses of backlit snow, and portraits of Mignonette as Little One imagined she had aged in the months and years since she had gone to serve. Little One wasn't sure why, but she felt quite, quite certain she needed to keep them hidden.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Frazer Ward.