



Source: Michael Gawenda, 'No courage in their convictions', *The Age online*, 05/02/07.
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Big Bad Wolf

The Wolf was clearing houses just outside the green zone when it happened. The dusty streets were empty. Leaflets had rained down from the planes for three days, and most people had taken the hint. A lot of Pigs had probably left as well, but there were more than enough left to get you well and truly dead. The Wolf scanned windows and rooftops, looking for a flicker of light or movement that would betray the presence of a sniper. Nothing. No shit. Most of them were too damn good to give themselves away like that. The way you found out a sniper was eyeballing you was that someone got shot.

A brief acceleration disturbed the hot, still air, pushing a wave of dust before it and sending warning leaflets tumbling in flat somersaults down the street. The Wolf scratched behind his twitching ear. Gravity tugged sweat into slowly flowing lines across his back. He pulled scorching air deep into his lungs, and was just about to blow in the door. CRACK! The same air from which he had drawn breath split wide open. He heard a disembodied scream, and after a long second realised that his own throat had made that sound of shock and fear. Shock and fear, but no pain in it. The pain came later. Now he felt a warm pool spread like syrup across his chest. It soaked into his matted fur, mingling with dust and perspiration. He heard automatic weapons fire, and shouts he could not understand. Above him, a thin geyser of red shot playfully into the air. It was only when he noticed that it ebbed and surged in time with his heartbeat that he recognised the source. It was one of his own arteries, spurting his life away toward the empty stupid sky. Crazy laughter shook him, and he felt for the hole and stuck a digit there to hold back the tide. Someone was next to him. Someone jabbed a needle in his arm. A face blocked the sky, mouthing words that he couldn't hear, it was all so loud, and the Wolf just wanted to sleep, he didn't want to know. As they carried him away the Wolf saw the glassy-eyed body of a Pig sprawled in a doorway, hot sticky blood spattered all over his dirty pink skin, and was glad.

CLICK.

"...enemy of the week tonight is Jane Fonda. 'Hanoi Jane' was up to her old tricks again at a rally in our nation's capital earlier this week, and I'd just like to remind her and all those other empty-headed celebrities that are putting our country in danger that the freedoms they..."

CLICK.

"...terrified that when I tell you, you'll hate me forever,

you'll never be able to forgive me. Because it was me, Thorne! I was driving that car! I killed your..."

CLICK.

"...hits collection over 13 compact discs! You know Bert, you can't put a price on the memories that these classic songs..."

CLICK.

The Wolf pawed at the buttons on the remote control. No thumbs. He cycled through the channels reflexively. Everything looked so normal. Everyone huffed and puffed about threat assessments and terror and the defining ideological conflict of the twenty-first century and how lack of political resolve risked giving succour to the enemy, and used words like freedom and victory and democracy and bravery as if they had found them at the bottom of a cereal box at breakfast. But their make-up was pristine and their hair shone, and it was the end of the world if the price of gasoline went up another ten cents. And here he was, a patchwork of skin grafts and neatly stitched seams, and all their words were just noise. He didn't know what they meant now, and he hated the glossy lips and square jaws that uttered them, and then twisted into whorish smiles that screamed 'Thanks for watching!' He pawed at the TV remote one more time to quiet the damn box, then shifted the position of his body on the bed. The movement hurt him, but only a little. Not enough for the morphine drip, with its magic button, which they had taken away last week. He closed his eyes and tried to fantasise about sex with one of the nurses, but the faces got mixed up and he was looking into the eyes of a local who had shyly acknowledged him on a Tuesday and was splashing tears over crispy pieces of her younger brother by Thursday, screaming at the Wolf in a language that he didn't understand and, frankly, hated the guttural oinking sound of. A couple of the other Dogs had joked, 'Does anyone smell bacon?' He opened his eyes to the still, silent room and was now looking at the jar full of twisted metal that stood on the nightstand next to a vase of cheap flowers. All the blackened bits of shrapnel that the surgeons had prised from his perforated body. They seemed fragile, brittle, like they might turn to dust and be blown away. They didn't belong over here. He had smuggled traitorous materials inside his body. They didn't project an aura of success. The cold silence in the room became too much. The Wolf switched the television back on to drown it out. Even the huffing and puffing was better than the void.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Gavin Sladen.