

Story for performance #611
webcast from Sydney at 07:42PM, 21 Feb 07



Source: Guy Faulconbridge, 'Russians to delay Iran nuclear deal', Reuters, *New York Times* in *The Age* online, 21/02/07.

Tags: [Afghanistan](#), [intimacy](#), [war](#)

Writer/s: [Folake Shoga](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

He came into the house like a bristly shadow, head down, keeping away from the light. She led him by the hand. Slight, illuminated, with all the fragile clarity of light green glass. She thought she was his beacon. She herself was unaware of her fragility—one sharp knock and who'll be left to pick up the pieces then, eh?

He hugged everyone in the house, big tight hugs, unbending hard muscle to reach down to such a bunch of short-arses. He was shaking. To put a hand up to his hair was to feel thick gold suede, a little longer than a regulation haircut. There was a chemical roughness to his hair since the platoon, for solidarity, had bleached themselves uniformly blond as if they were a football team. Wouldn't that make each soldier even more of a target? They must have kept their helmets on. Perhaps the landscape itself is blond in Helmand.

Palaver ensued. The household would become aware that he was in the house (orgasm noises). They might run into him unexpectedly lurking in corners, or pass him on the stairs. And he looked progressively more red-eyed, more shaky, more haunted. The blond grew out of his hair. The old quarrel he'd had with his mother seemed to resurface. Sometimes there were blundering noises in the dark, and the smell of spirits. She would arrive home without him, and in the morning his car would have appeared parked across the street so erratically that someone would have to go sneak his keys and put it right. Later in his psych sessions he would talk about walking through the Mall tamping down random reflex impulses to shoot any bugger moving.

*

They'd been in school together but three years on he'd reappeared in her life so much more muscly and handsome and decisive she'd been charmed; she was an attractive enough girl that having suitors running around in circles trying to please her was beginning to pall—buying her cars, taking her on trips, more or less apologising for breathing, begging her for one last chance, that sort of thing. A little bit of rough would just do her nicely. It was a challenge; because he was unmoved by her more extravagant whims—she could stand helplessly in front of doors all she liked, he wasn't rushing to open them for her, he'd just ask what was wrong with her arms. He was no pushover and she'd get to flex her flirting muscles.

So this is what she tried on while getting ready for a tarts and vicars party he and his brother invited her to. She'd been in school with both of them, there was none of this allure of the unknown quantity going on between them: only he had the slight bad-boy cachet that he'd defied his family to join the army. And he was very resentful, because his mother had stopped speaking to him on account of it. But the brother was altogether an easier-going person.

So these are the costumes she tried on.

Outfit one: clingy red polyester calf-length halter-necked sheath dress with thin leather strap holding up halter.

Exposure factor: shoulders, back, moderate cleavage. Shoes: red stilettos. Enquiries to the household elicited the view that her look could well be down to simply having a taste crisis while trying to look smart.

Outfit two: belted denim miniskirt with deep flouncy frill bringing it to mid-thigh. Strappy black top with narrow scarlet rickrack trim and embroidery over the boobs. Shoes: as above. Exposure factor: shoulders, legs, narrow strip of midriff. In this case the demure nature of the embroidery worked with the skirt length to produce a powerfully mixed-up message.

Outfit three: powder blue halter-neck mini with frill as before. Elasticised hips and boobs. Exposure factor: froufrou, tight and teasing. When asked why in the world she bought such a garment, the girl replied she had thought it would be nice to have something to walk along the beach in the last time she was on holiday. She paraded up and down the garden, asking all-comers which of these outfits was the most tarty. Her mother advised her to phone through to the boys with photos and ask them which was the prettiest outfit, because that would be the one that made her look most like a prostitute. In the end she played cool and went to the party in jeans and a shirt. She kept the red stilettos on.

*

So here she is, the fragile girl with the wardrobe of only potential tartiness, the light green bottle-glass girl, in her new flat, in a new town, far from home but close to the barracks;

All done out with new stuff, new little day-bed, new electric blanket, new kitchen set from Argos, and maybe she's not yet behind with the payments, but it's a hard winter to be scrimping so hard on the meters for all that she's nesting, dreaming of that two-bedroom house on the smart side of town, and her man, and a baby, or twins;

Here she is with her new job with its new training spec and its new seniority structure which she's infiltrating, starting from the bottom, since her friends are back home;

And here she is in camos and shiny black boots, running around parks on 'manoeuvres', pretending to shoot at her mates. Here she is proving girls can do press-ups but finding out even rather small men are much bigger and stronger than she: it takes all her body weight to do up the tent studs they can manage one-handed. Here she is being fed beefburgers by her CO at camp (get some weight on you, girl!) and there's none of the hazing you get in the real army—no forced naked mud-wrestling with gym mats strapped to their arms for the Territorials. Hopefully. Hopefully you need to be in the elite forces before that starts looking like fun.

So here she is; but where's he?

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Folake Shoga.