

Story for performance #634
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Source: Ibrahim Barzak, AP, ' Hamas and Fatah settle on coalition', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 16/03/07.

Tags: [disenchantment](#), [retribution](#), [politics](#)

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She was in the studio when the call came. She had been half-expecting it for weeks and so, after recognizing the number from the caller ID, didn't bother to pick up. No reason to leave incriminating evidence, although she knew she would never need to defend herself now. She took a quick look at the painting on the easel, dipped the brush in an old coffee can of red paint that was sitting there on the tabouret, and painted a red X whose centre was smack in the middle of the painting. She stood there and watched with satisfaction as the blood-red paint dripped down the canvas and gathered in a pool on the floor. She turned around and glanced out the window, only to see the tail-end of a red flash across the alley. Success. He had seen it. She walked toward the canvas to grab the brush and take it to the sink to wash it out, then stopped herself and laughed. Old habits die hard, of course, or maybe there was some anxiety in the thrill that she felt right now. After dressing carefully and grabbing what she needed, she locked the door behind her and was quickly on her way. They recognized each other as they converged on the centre of town, by a little sign or a movement here and there, more and more of them, people whose paths crossed every day but had never spoken.

They had met in small groups, infrequently, often disguised, for fear of betrayal. Some of them were older and remembered life before the coup, but she was barely twenty when Bush's executive order allowed him to run for a third term, which he won easily and before anyone had time to blink, put the country under martial law. The Congress was hustled away and disbanded, and no one saw any of them again. There were rumours that some of them were living abroad but news was scarce. She had been studying in France and her mother begged her to stay away to no avail, she so badly wanted to come home; at first she found it difficult to accept the pairs of soldiers in their camouflage uniforms on the street corners, the sound of shots as they rang out when someone got out of line. She had never seen a dead body but learned to quickly skirt around the corpses as they lay rotting on the streets. Usually they were gone within a day or two, leaving a stain on the sidewalk, after the black wagons appeared and disposed of them in the night. Bush taught a lesson that was quickly learned, and a spoiled populace that had only vaguely known fear was easily subdued.

Her parents disappeared during one of the first major raids, and she assumed they were dead until the day the buzzer rang and an unfamiliar voice spoke up: let me in, quickly, I have information. After that she kept in touch furtively, occasionally, until she joined the movement

herself. She learned to spot the signs on the street, and met with the others in basements and lofts, quietly in the dark, making plans, gathering weapons and supplies, little by little. She had grown older too, even in time accepting the life she lived now, never knowing when the call would come. Once she fell in love with someone in the movement, but he disappeared too, and so she went back to her painting. She took out all of her father's old canvases, and painted them over, one by one, with fantasy landscapes and seascapes à la Caspar David Friedrich, with blue skies, white fluffy clouds and fairy castles, recreating the stories she loved as a child. She painted herself and her twin brother, at various ages, into each picture. There they were as babies, here as toddlers, holding hands, beautiful chubby children laughing and exploring the world around them. Where was he now? He had reluctantly followed her into the movement, but then had risen rapidly within the ranks and had been moved to central headquarters years ago. She always hoped to see all of them again, but had stopped anticipating the reunion.

She looked down at her feet now, moving steadily and rhythmically, speeding up slightly as she recognized and fell in with the other members of her group. They were doing their job well, and were not detected by the soldiers, grown lazy and complacent. One of them winked at her briefly, and she smiled back, quickly looking the other way. Orders.

She looked up and saw them behind the windows, you had to look carefully because they were told to stand back, to keep out of sight until the motorcade was visible. The streets were decked with garlands and banners, crowds holding flags and rolls of confetti, already the sound of their voices rose and drowned out the sound of the footsteps, it was all planned.

She knocked quietly and slipped quickly into the dark hallway, picked up her rifle and ammunition, and made her way to her post on the top floor, north window. If you looked up from the street you could probably see them now, silent and still, prepared and waiting. But no one did.

She could just hear the sounds of the marching bands over the roar of the crowd. She leaned out to look as far as she could and caught sight of the black limo in the distance. She cocked her rifle and stood as she had been taught. It would only be a few minutes more. And then she could live again.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Myrel Chernick.