



Source: Michael R. Gordon, 'U.S. command shortens life of 'long war' as a reference', *New York Times online*, 24/04/07.

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Light was streaming in between the wooden slats of the Venetian blinds. There was a pathway of motes between the East facing window and himself. As his eyes followed it, it pulled him back to the last moments of unconsciousness.

He is in an airport, it might be LAX, maybe somewhere else. He has time. He passes one store after another; he remembers the book that he was travelling with falling from his shoulder bag in super slo-mo. He does nothing to catch or even to retrieve it. In the language of the unconscious, somehow this makes sense. Everything makes sense, including the first editions that are being hawked in the windows of the airport shops. He wonders, 'Why would anyone buy a 1948 first edition of a Gore Vidal novel in an airport?' He wants to look in, but is somehow pulled forward. Is it the language of the unconscious or long distance travel? He doesn't fight it, but glances over his right shoulder as he passes. Instead of dusty volumes, he sees that beyond the display windows are vitrines filled with Cartier wallets. When did airports become shopping malls?

He remembers his father warning him about duty free shops, 'They're never cheaper than what you could buy things for elsewhere.' These look so tempting. Every high-end store he could think of. He guesses they're here for businessmen who need to pick up a little something, and had no time in Bangkok or Doha to look for local souvenirs. Who could argue with Dolce & Gabbana? How could anyone be angry at getting that purse that was featured on Reece Witherspoon's arm on Access Hollywood?

This consumerism was fascinating him. He looked across the faux century-old bookshop and could scan at least a half dozen display windows each below a name that carried a price tag. That price tag was invariably beyond his semi-monthly paycheck, but he knew them all. He lusted after some of them. The allure of style, the pure sensual pleasure of touching a well-made object, running one's hand across a sleek or textured surface in search of perfection...All the adjectives used on the Home Shopping Network, *Style File*, or any other lifestyle show couldn't transmit the tactile.

He might be critical of it all, but still when he looks down at his untucked shirt and rumpled jeans, he knows that he needs a style guide. Maybe more than one. Five...he needs the *Queer Eye* cast! He remembers watching and thinking, 'What if they came to me?' This was in the early days before they became so picky and started advertising for specialized cases: croupiers in Las Vegas, cowboys in Texas, lead guitarists in Seattle ('Would they settle for just a rhythm or bass player?'—he wonders.) He gets teary thinking about someone caring that much—helping him make decisions about clothes and moisturizers. Suddenly

the loneliness becomes palpable and the tears are streaming like eau de Nile. People turn and stare, but he can't stop the feeling of loneliness from rising to the surface.

As audible sobbing starts, everything drifts. He is back in bed staring at the light and feeling the mattress below him. He can sense the moisture on his cheeks. He feels the cold air on his face too and he doesn't want to get out of bed. A little longer. His urethra burns, and he knows that he has to pee. It is a necessity, but he savours it. Strange pleasure.

Just a few seconds longer, and it takes him back to his childhood bedroom, waiting in this nether state for his father to wake him. His father has been gone for an age. What would his father make of the man he had become? What would he make of either him or the company he kept? Lesbians, Feng Shui masters, and durational performance artists—they all populated his life in a sort of alternative chorus that his father would not want to hear.

Now that chorus is a long way off, as he wakes alone. Again. For another in a succession of hundreds, no thousands, of days. What would his father make of that? Certainly, his father made trade offs for happiness, but his little rituals seemed to make a difference to him. Every morning an espresso with the *New York Times*. As he'd grown, he learned to prepare the morning dose for his dad. The bitter dark liquid came out of the machine in thick droplets. This was in the 1960s before the machines were common; he couldn't remember the story of how his father had acquired that machine. It was big and spewed steam like a boiler in a cartoon. He could almost feel the steam on his face still.

He supposed that in the presence of absence, it is in these sensual pleasures that we must indulge. They exist outside of us and if they leave you cold, at least they don't disappoint with their finite gratification. They are what they are. He remembers loving the sight of his father moving the cheese plane across the triangle of Swiss each morning: the slightly plastic look and the nutty smell. Truth is he couldn't stomach the taste until he was a teenager; before then it was awful. He wondered about how and why tastes change. Was it because taste buds really did die as you got older....nasty things were really just as nasty as a child thinks—you just lose your ability to perceive it?

Some things cannot be put off, and as the sun dries his face he gets out of bed and recalls, 'Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.'

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Jordan Peimer.