



Source: Carl Hulse and Jeff Zeleny, 'Congress and Bush striving for compromise on war funds', *New York Times online*, 18/05/07.

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'We need to do it now,' she said.

She wanted him to agree, to say 'Yes, we do. We do need to do it, and do it now.' But she hadn't asked a question, and so he didn't offer a response. Still, he changed his expression—which was something. That foggy look came over his face, the look of a person reading the newspaper, the look that belies a sad sinking feeling that our heads are not quite above water.

He wondered: What was so different about 'now'? What was so different that we should need to do IT just at this moment?

As so many times before, they sat at breakfast. They sat with the statement pinned to the air. 'We need to do it' was stitched to the word 'now', and yet, as before, the now stretched into an infinite ampersand—and now and now and now and now...

This is what she thought, without saying: We are never quite able to do anything.

This is what they both thought: We need to do it now, but we aren't at all sure what 'it' is, let alone how to 'do' it, nor when, exactly, 'now' will truly take place.

When questions masquerade as statements, it's not a good day for action. That's what he thought as they sat over oatmeal at the start of another now. Any day is a good day for action, she thought. And still, that feeling: We need to do it now. He poured another coffee. She opened the newspaper.

She might have anticipated the news that morning. The same report of imperatives, of resistance to 'watered down' compromises. There appeared to be the taking of stands, the beating of chests toward the fighting of fights that might get IT DONE. Still and all, for all the taking and all the talking, the 'it' in question dragged along, masquerading as something responsible persons could countenance, something they could 'do' something about, something that could find closure and be 'done'. She wanted it done. She wanted it done and over, for sure—and she wanted it now. The search for 'a responsible end' to an irresponsible war was, she thought, irresponsible—there could be no 'responsible' end, there could only be an end. Searching was a lie that resulted in a never arriving 'now'. A 'now' of needing to do rather than doing. A now of never.

Never, she thought, won't do.

She chose to believe they might regain some decency, something resembling honour. She wanted to feel the way she sometimes had felt, naively, before this war. Okay, so her 1960s childhood had instilled a belief in the efficacy of public protest—when 'now' appeared to provide a radical insistence on the possibility of change. Not like this now now; not like this present of sitting tongue-tied and fogged in over-soft food.

She felt responsible for inaction. Next, she felt mired in that responsibility. And then the foggy feeling ensued as it always did—the inky letters on the newspaper page

began to look like little open mouths, gasping for air, just below the water. They seemed to be mouthing: We need to do it now.

She poured another coffee and passed him the newspaper, but not before saying again: 'We need to do it now.' This time he looked at her, full on, for an instant. Then he looked to the newspaper, his fog rolling in. She continued: 'It's just that...it's only that...I just feel that it...'

He looked up again. She stammered again. She searched her mind for words. It's just that...it's only that...

He would look away again if she didn't keep trying. 'I feel that it...'

The 'it' was pesky. The 'it' was secretive. A sly and secretive it. A silent, sneaky, even snotty little it that wouldn't come when called, and wouldn't stay in place when it did show its demonic little face. A flashing it. A grinning, impish, intolerable it. An it that no one wants. An it that lies and bites. What was it? What was it they needed to do? And how could they do it?

She searched her mind for words and fastened on the newspaper in his hands. 'You know,' she said, 'it's like the situation with that war. We need to do it now.' She was thinking of the search for a responsible end to an irresponsible relationship. So she asked: 'Could there be such a thing? Or only stalemate? Only and forever stalemate, with a crotchety receding now and a devilish gnat-like "it."'

He thought: How dare she? How dare she compare a private relationship to a public war? How compare their love (and they did love deeply, passionately, fully, repeatedly) to a violent, senseless vendetta run by a clown in an oil-stained suit? The gall of it. The loss of civil liberties, the end of ethical humanism and common decency is not the disappointment of adultery. The small-minded, narcissistic nerve of the woman!

She too felt wrong: whole nations are not petty lovers; dead people are not sorry jilted wives. But the newspaper lay on the table between them like years and so, grasping for words, she pulled some into place. In some way, this small citation was an action taken. A rearrangement. Something, some very small thing done to interrupt the impasse of habit, the sediment of inaction. At the very least, in their morning world, the word 'end' had been uttered. Even if plagiarized, even if poached, the word had been lifted out to pierce the silence like a foghorn.

They talked now. A little. The emphasis, he said, had to be on 'responsible'. The emphasis, she said, had to be on 'end'. People could get hurt, he said. People are getting hurt, she said.

Later, while soaking the crusty oatmeal off the bowls, they leant into one another. She lifted her neck for his mouth. He ran his lips along her skin.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Rebecca Schneider.*