



Source: Michael R Gordon, 'Night raid in Iraq: seeking militants, but also learning the lay of the land', *New York Times online*, 04/08/07.

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He was very still, his gaze not exactly present but neither faraway. I watched him quietly, respectfully, waiting for the moment, the moment that would signal the appropriate time to break the silence. It is amazing how at such times the slightest detail becomes so exaggerated. It can transport you into another world. The slight Parkinson tremor in his left hand was one of those details.

Stillness. Except for that barely perceptible, rhythmic trembling. A tremble that became a rumble, a deep fissure waiting to break open, break apart, to reveal the detail indicating the abyss that lay hidden behind the guise of this controlled, quiet, polite man. This polite man, sitting motionless, on a perfect winter's day. This polite man who just stepped out of time, into my lounge room. This polite man who presented clues and held answers.

Back to the trembling, the gentle wave-lapping, the quivering. It is said that the mind can reach a meditative state induced from watching a river pass. This is because, due to the constant fluid shifting of the ripples, the eyes, in an effort to continually readjust focus, start to 'zone out' in a softer way. Rather than battling to keep everything in sharp focus, they relax and take everything in, in a less agitated way. This can induce a sense of tranquility and, as the brain responds to this reduction in stressful 'looking' it goes into something like a trance state.

Back to the quivering trance, the trembling calm.

I had only met him once before, this man. That was many years ago when I was an adolescent girl and my grandfather was still alive. I was always impressed by the way he held himself and the air of adventure that seemed to envelop his very being. He was the ideal and I was an adolescent girl after-all.

Now, here he was twenty years later, the worldliness turned to weariness and the lines on his face mapping the journey.

And the trembling.

My mind wandered to the various trembling caresses I had encountered.

Caresses that were tentative but urgent. Caresses that tickled. Caresses that threatened to bring the house down. Caresses that were thorough. Caresses that knew how to undress dresses. Caresses that knew the very language of caress. Caresses that were insecure. Caresses that were forgotten.

Not so long ago, I had been entertaining a young army guy. It was all very exciting and intriguing. He had been 'over there' and the scent of implicit danger still clung heavily to him and set me trembling with anticipation.

Unsurprisingly, our sexual encounter became, for him, like a reconnaissance mission, and I was the enemy territory. A difficult terrain, an area, a place to gain intelligence

about and learn the lay of the land. As he leap-frogged over my bomb-seeded roads, he used code words like 'ice' and 'cherry', checked in with the 'shark', trekked to remote regions and zeroed in on the 'squirters' before he finally came to the decision I was a 'high value target'. However, by that stage I just felt like a stretch of soggy farmland and the only target I was interested in was the one closely relating my boot to his arse and the front door. There was no moon that night. In retrospect I should have paid closer attention to the omens.

Back to the trembling.

Back to his eyes. They had shifted focus and were honed in on a photo displayed on my wall.

This was no ordinary photo, it was the only photo of my great grandmother. My grandfather's mother. This photo had lain dormant, undiscovered for many, many years. It was only after my grandfather passed away and I was helping sort out his belongings, that I found a curious stiffness in a jacket. Exploring further, I found it, sewn into the lining of my grandfather's suit. I can only imagine that it had been carefully placed, safely stored in its satin envelope, to ensure its secure journey to 'here' when my grandfather had left 'there'.

'I knew her back then, you know'.

His words shocked me from my reverie.

'Yes, she was a very fine woman. She took me in like a second son, even though I was young enough to be her son's son. You see, I had no family left of my own. Her kindness meant the world to me and still does.'

His voice, unlike his hand was steady. Commanding, yet not demanding attention. I tuned into its timbre.

'It's funny how your memories start to trade off with each other. Some recede while others come forward. It all depends on the situation. Most of the time, I feel like I see my memories through the greenish hue of those night-vision goggles we were made to wear again and again, night after night, raid after raid. They made the world hyper-real, took it to another place, installed us in a video game, made it so much easier to squeeze the trigger...

'Yes, a fine woman, the sort of woman I would have liked to marry...

'I'm sorry, I must leave now. There is more to tell you, more to say but right now I must go. I am sorry, very sorry, there is so much more. I've travelled so far to find you but now I have to leave.'

His sudden underlying distress took me aback. As I walked him to the door I took his hand, the trembling one, the one that held the secrets and said 'It's alright, there is more time for this. More time, the next time you come.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Julie Vulcan.*