



Source: Mark Landler, 'At German base, troops and kin gird for new Iraq tour', *New York Times online*, 18/08/07.

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Her son had taken up the piano, because she believed it was good for a child to be musical, but she could see no sign that he had any talent. His music teacher kindly said that it was too soon to tell, but she could tell. He seemed not to understand the point of the thing.

She watched him play at it, trying to be encouraging, trying hard not to wince. She suspected that he did not care, suspected that she could stop him at any moment by screaming 'Awful! Awful! Enough!', and that he would simply stop and go about his business until it was time for bed. She suspected that he would not feel embarrassment, or the anger that came at knowing that your mother isn't pleased.

He didn't seem to care about pleasing his mother, and she was not often pleased by him, but that was her dark and guilty secret and she thought she hid it well. So she would not shout 'Awful! Awful! Enough!'—not ever. And perhaps one day because she seemed encouraging and pleased he would actually do something to please her.

She watches him through her tumbler, holding it in front of her face after draining it of scotch. It was a wedding gift, part of a set of six, although it was soon whittled down to three after her son's second birthday. They were clearly expensive, heavy with glass and German craftsmanship. Through it, she watches the world like she's sitting in a hall of mirrors. Coming up from the base, the cut pattern rises up in vertical panels, and looking through each panel her son is multiplied, and it seems to her odd that the sound of his fingers on the keys does not multiply with the image.

If she spins the glass round in her hand, she sees a merry-go-round of little boys, all the same, but they swirl round and round and never end. It scares her, this idea, this idea of her boy, her noisy boy spinning round and round and round—coming, always coming at her.

So she stops looking at him. She wraps her hand round the glass and simply looks at this new view of her flesh. The pads of her fingers have gone square with the pressure of holding themselves tight against the glass. She likes this, and squeezes harder, watching her fingers grow whiter, fatter, and the lines on her palm redder and more intense. Her hand itself segments into pieces through the cut glass, and she likes to see them pixilated like this. She takes comfort in the lines she sees, magnified through the glass. She notices the pads on each finger, the tiny swirls and patterns that could be lifted off this glass to identify her, if she were ever to do something that required identification by the authorities.

She releases her grip, holding the glass again lightly in her

fingers. The playing continues. There is ten minutes to go until the end of his practice session. She has insisted on thirty minutes a night and she feels that she must not relax this rule. She watches the scene again, through glass.

She often looked through glass as a child. She liked the cool liquidity it gave things, the fact that you could look at something through glass, without having to feel it, the way it separated without obliterating the view. She always liked that.

Perhaps it was her father that made her look through glass. He made glass eyes for a living, before he retired. He used to tell her how he did this thing, this secret thing that none of the other fathers did. He'd blow his glass, a white bulb to sit in the socket of the empty eyes. He'd bring home the bulbs he made that weren't quite the right shape, that had not been blown correctly, and she'd place them up against her own eye, feeling the cold transfer.

When she asked him how he made the coloured bit, he told her it was called an iris. She thought that it might be the easy part, that it would be like placing marbles of blue or green or grey at the centre of the bulb. But he told her that to make the iris, he would spin rods of glass of many many different colours together into the bulb—tiny specks of colour combined to create something lifelike and unlike a marble at all.

She asked him once would he ever make an iris in gold or ruby or some other glittering jewel and he'd told her that people wanted eyes that looked like eyes, that weren't jewellery for the skull. Disappointing hazels and greys and browns were his specialty, and he was known for his skill in creating the colours of real life. She wondered what it would be like to have ruby coloured eyes, and looked through her mother's red tumblers to see what it would be like. She liked it.

She looks again through the tumbler and as she moves it round in her hands it reflects the light and things change shape, and move and shift as she turns it, looking this way and that, now through the thin top of the glass, now through its thick bottom.

And then something brings her back to the room. Her son has paused, and she looks at him, over the glass. The silence is nice, but shortlived. He starts up again. She places the glass on the table beside her, and looks at him.

'That's enough. Time for dinner.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Sophie Townsend.*