

Story for performance #806
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Tags: [intimacy](#), [Iraq](#), [corporeality](#)
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Holding him in this way she felt her edges dissolving, things all indistinct, and happily so. Warm breath on skin. She could simply stay here cocooned and not move a millimetre. Yet already there was a stir inside their stillness: thoughts that jagged across. Here is the trouble, she found herself thinking, that living well depends on good judgement and good judgement depends on what you remember and what you remember depends on what you forget. The remembering seems the easiest part, something you can work at; but how to forget and forget well, how to forget what is good to forget? Muffled sounds of passing cars filtered through the walls of the hotel. She saw herself all built up like a deposit, like calcium, a thing she couldn't remove.

She stayed there, all the same, firm in the embrace. Bits of language slid across their bodies from the TV, just so. Twenty years ago Lake Chad looked like this, now it looks like this. The mapmakers are barely able to keep up with the geographical rate of change. She just saw his skin against her, blurred lashes and hair. She closed her eyes and conjured in the darkness a hand-drawn animated map of the world, with all its lines sliding and wavering with the times. Her pulse made soft drumbeats in her ear. More drawing in her mind...She chalked a white line around the shape they made together, like you used to see in cop stuff before it all became forensic, with vivid insides. As she went, she tried to feel the grazing of her hand against his back. She knew the curve of his shoulders well, the shape of his head. But here, where their bodies met, she couldn't draw a line, couldn't separate his from her self. So she carried on around the outside, around her head and torso, down her tucked in legs and closed the line. It looked like an amoeba. She opened her eyes. There again, felt his breath on her neck. It was a slum. Then it became a battlefield. More TV patter. His bloody body identified by the wife who had only just left his side. Sounds of engines driving through empty streets and sporadic night-time gunfire. Walid hadn't seen his house since May. We took him as close as we were allowed. She forced her mind back to her body, her hand now pressed in the hollow of his back, finding his familiar ache. She thought about all the different rooms and beds they had been in and briefly tried to count them up. She thought about a funny flip-book she

could make, a set of drawings of the moves their bodies would make in the night. A lorry passed. He came in closer.

What if, she thought. What if, I was to keep doing this, night after night, to never stop? What if, he was always here, breathing on my collarbone, turning through my thoughts? How could I hold on to him? Her mind flitted through wearying times, flashes of long lost disputes and hateful eyes. How to sustain something so fragile, so nebulous, to stick it for the duration? In Dora Market the walls are fortified. The shops are still open for business, but all they sell is dust. She thought about time getting timeless, as it was now, slipping and extending, being without measure. She saw herself in future times, as a deposit once again, but this time as silt, glistening in the sea.

She felt his hold on her loosen, his hand getting heavy with sleep, drifting down her leg. Some sunlight played across the ceiling. The risk, the reporter said, of further destabilising this already weak country. His breathing slowed and hit its familiar rhythm. To withdraw, Bush said, from a position of strength and success, not from a position of fear and failure. She heard his folksy voice, its narrow resolve, and knew that he could only think inside his own will. Human conflict and natural disasters, the TV presenter surmised: the deeper questions still remain. Signing off. To stay here, she thought, I will need to be both blind and to see more, to remember everything and always forget. To really leave the map unfinished, the lines must never still. She felt her eyelids weighing down. In the braid of our bodies, to accept this binding as a freedom, or to not see freedom as being unbound.

In the morning they woke early with the television still on and the traffic hum below. They asked how each other had slept, what each other had dreamt. They took showers and dressed in turn. She waited for him as he packed up his bag and checked that they had left nothing behind. They closed the door, walked down the stairs and out into the city.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Adrian Heathfield.