



Source: Michael R. Gordon, 'Hints of progress, and questions, in Iraq data', *New York Times online*, 08/09/07.

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Surely, there was something for everyone in a sunset. As the light went out of the sky, and the lights in the valley started to assert the small hopes of their radiance against the increasing dark, he turned to the west to watch the brightness dwindle. She watched something else that was growing in stature behind them. Perhaps it was a bank of clouds, or just the silence that thickened between the trees by the road. Whichever it was, she made no comment on it and left the space between the two of them empty, or for him to fill. He didn't fill it, but continued to gaze at the space where the sun had just sunk.

'Beautiful.' He said, finally.

'What?'

'The sort of toxic glow the sky gets at this time of night—there, between those cranes and the skeleton of that building—those greens and purples.'

'Oh.'

'I s'pose it's pollution, all those tiny particles of stuff in the atmosphere, all floating and refracting their little bit of light. Maybe the different colours are made by different substances doing the refraction. The browns must be petrol, but the other stuff—I dunno -you could imagine those greens are made by plastics burning, purples by buildings, the greys must be paper.'

'And people? What colour do they make?'

'What, burning? I'd have to imagine some sort of purply brown, so it'd be a combination of petrol and houses...'

There was a further silence, him staring at the western horizon and her turned back to whatever had caught her interest before. Her silence had a tense quality, something in it that was waiting to leap. She was turned away, so her face was unreadable, though in any case the growing darkness masked them both.

'What?' He said.

'Sorry?'

'What's up with you? There's something.'

'Nothing.'

'That's not true. You've been funny since we came up here.'

'Glad you think I'm funny.'

'You know that's not what I meant. So let's have it—what's the matter?'

She made a sound that could have been a sigh, or something else. Her silence had gone brittle now. She wrapped her arms around herself.

He had a choice; either to pursue this, which meant deciding whether he really wanted to know what the matter was and trying to deal with it, or talking of something else and coming round to the issue in, perhaps, a less contentious way. Better yet, it might go away of its own accord.

'So what have you been looking at so intently? The sunset didn't interest you.'

'No.'

'I thought you enjoyed sunsets, sometimes.'

'I was looking at something else.'

'That's obvious. Any chance you'll tell me about it?'

She mumbled, but the words 'no point' seemed to be discernable, and were half meant to be.

'Well, I'd like to know.'

She gestured vaguely, carefully unwrapping one of her arms from around her body and waving it in the direction of the road and trees, now lost in the dark, mostly. He looked, saw nothing.

'What's there—or was there?'

'Just—nothing much.'

'Oh.'

'There was some people.'

'Sorry, I missed that.'

'I know you did. They were there.'

'What was it about them?'

'Nothing, really.'

'Well, what sort of people? How did they feel about you glaring so intently at them?'

'It didn't seem like they even noticed. I wasn't glaring, I was just watching. They were there in the trees, but it didn't seem like they were there.'

'So were they? There I mean.'

'I think so. But what I mean is, they didn't act like they were.'

'So how were they acting?'

'As if they were somewhere else. They were walking around, and standing. They weren't looking around at anything. It was as if they were just—waiting.'

'For what? What did they look like?'

'Anyone. There were old people, I think, and young ones, too. Just—everyone, it seemed like. I didn't recognise faces. I don't know what they were waiting for. It was getting dark.'

'I know. You didn't tell me they were all there, I would've liked to have seen that.'

'I didn't.'

'Didn't what?'

'Tell you.'

'I know, but why not?'

'I don't know. Maybe I didn't think that you'd see them. I'd like us, just once, to see the same thing.'

'Then why not tell me?'

'Because I didn't think that you would. I was afraid of that.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Robin Bale.*