



Source: Robin Wright, 'Rumsfeld memos: snowflakes from a man at war', *Washington Post* in *The Age* online, 02/11/07.

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Yeah, some days there were sixty. A lot of days more, though. Hardly ever less. Well, towards the end maybe.

But most days they came thick and fast: in eddies his ideas would swirl about the suite.

They'd just tumble from him like it was the result of some natural process. Some cycle. The buzzer would go off and, if you were next, you'd get up, knock on the door and enter the room. There he'd be with his back to you and his arms outstretched like that Jesus in Bolivia or wherever it is. Looking out over the capital. So you'd enter, making no sound, creep around the desk, and gather them all up into your wicker basket. There might be ten, gathered at his feet like albino guinea pigs. Or four, one caught and teetering on the edge of his suit pocket, the balance resting on the top of his flat shoes. Or just one, precarious on his right shoulder, held between the folds of his jacket. It was dicey, plucking that white flower from the very tree of knowledge itself. You had to dislodge it with minimal disturbance, preferably none. That was the rule in the rules book. Well, 'minimal disturbance' were the words that were printed in the rules book, and someone, maybe he himself, had written in green ink, 'preferably none' above an upside-down 'v' between the word 'disturbance' and the full stop.

Preferably none.

From fairly early on in the job I began to like him, which was unfortunate, given what I was there to do and indeed, the way everything turned out.

The first thing was the forms of the snowflakes themselves. Perfectly formed crystalline structures. No two the same. Each crease in the paper where he'd crumpled it up before discarding it was precise and the longer I was in the job, the more I became convinced that the folds themselves were as rich a source of information as the words scrawled green upon the paper.

Second up, and this was dreadful, he was not a monster. He was human human human. On the days that he wore the black suits, there were little piles of dandruff which avalanched if you needed to retrieve a snowflake from the Anapurna of his shoulders. Also, he made his own lunch. He was a man entire.

Finally his words. This was the ostensible bounty that we gatherers harvested. This was why he was kept here. This was why I had been placed there by my comrades. Why

years had been invested in establishing me as trustworthy enough to be employed by the administration. If my cover were ever blown, I knew that I would be notified of it by a bullet driving towards me at one thousand miles an hour. I was prepared for that.

What I wasn't prepared for was the power of his snowflakes. His words. Full of insight, intellect, poetry. Cutting to the chase. Summing up the extraordinarily complex situation that we were in—and now, I realised, we were all in it, together—into perfect jewels of language that anyone could understand. And follow.

The more I read these, the more I loved him. Loved his high, cold mind.

And so caught up in my reading of the snowflakes did I become that I was no longer an effective agent. I failed to notice the falling temperature of the room, even though my fellow gatherers gabbled about his falling productivity and suspicion falling on one of us and our supervision being increased.

And though I did not know it then, my comrades had long since stopped paying attention to my transmissions, thinking that my descriptions of the snowflakes could not possibly be true.

On my last day, the buzzer sounded and I entered the office. There was a gun in his hand and just one snowflake on the carpet. I picked it up.

'The devotee is more dangerous than the enemy.'

I was in the air before he could react. I was on his shoulders while he jerked the trigger. I was snapping his neck and leaping forward, my arms crossed before my face, as the gun roared and the bullet smacked into a wall. I was forward rolling onto the lawn in a glittering shower of shards of glass as I heard his body hit the floor.

And as I ran I became free free free. Free even of him. Because I knew as soon as I read it that that clunky phrase had been written by some dull security minded turd. Not by him. A snowfake, not a snowflake. And he had allowed that to happen.

I didn't have a chance in hell, but I headed up north, and that's where I have lived until this day.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Bernard Caleo.*