



Source: Marie Colvin, 'Iraq's divided sects unite over terror', *The Sunday Times*, AFP in *The Australian online*, 24/12/07.

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Suspended, still, feeling the pull of gravity, feeling the gravity, knowing the position is a sign of something wrong, the mind shifts and searches without finding right. It will take some shoveling before the rescue and so in this suspended position the mind must wait. Pulse is racing and blood is running and running wrong and away and tight in the head and where is the sun now relative to the self? These are some of the questions but not all.

This trap, this metal cage, is clutching, holding, protecting, unyielding. Think. Think now. Or wait. Sending all strength to the body, the mind lapses into a dark, dark place. Now there is more stillness than the mind can fathom. Now there is only darkness and calm and here there is no sound.

Across the world in Spain people hold up their phones to a sand sculpture of the Christian nativity. When the moisture that holds this arrangement of grains evaporates they will separate into a thousand directions but for now they stick together, unified.

But here, bodies are trapped in a mass of twisted metal, and on this, a holiday, he is one of them.

But think, there is she, far away in Chicago, left behind, not a soldier. Just a civilian. Part of the peace yet to come. Part of the reason we have to protect the homeland. Part of what is now completely out of reach.

This is some kind of world upside down.

Her day in Chicago yesterday as she remembers it: Above her as she walks to work a man is dangling from ropes off a tall building. His arms comb the air as if playing an enormous harp. For a moment it looks as though he is in trouble but this is simply the dance of his job. This image triggers thoughts of her distant love: a door on his forearm and spiders across his shoulder, along with other tattoos sprinkled over his body, suggest a mystery whose code might be cracked if taken in the right order.

Trying to think about what it means to finish, to end, to let something die, to move on, is causing a dull ache that seeps into the forefront and permeates the farthest reaches of the day turning every one of its details. Have I said what I needed to say? Because the moment of ending puts a stop to all future possibilities, of finding a better way to finish the line. And the feeling of ending is here, now the end is near.

Today in Chicago the sky has become chalk white with snow. The naked branches quiver in the wind. What hits the window sounds like sand. The wind howls.

Unconscious of his current position she is thinking about the day he left. If it had been a swift ending, a stroke of death that snuffed life in an instant without thought or consciousness taking part that would be one thing: difficult, but with clear, hard, sharp, edges of pain that could be signified without vagueness or blur. But this was a slow, burning, agony with a murky, swampy, weary

coming to an uncertain close. Something intolerable that could no longer be part of the fabric of the days as they moved forward. A sad end that became clear in the distance and then shape-shifted several times before coming to a halt right in front of her. A soldier. Somehow he had become a soldier.

At this moment he is still suspended and until he comes to, his mind will entertain him with notions that keep his consciousness at bay. Some damage can never be reversed. Some memories should never be planted. Just as the girl who closes her eyes at the movies during the bad part, his mind knows instinctively about indelibility.

She is thinking toward him, talking to the spark of him that remains in her head, even though it is over between them and he is so inexplicably distant in every way she can imagine. She forms a complete sentence, she makes space for it inside her thoughts: Today I can think of nothing but the wind, she tells him. The windows won't hold it back.

He begins to hear noises again and this might be a good thing. He is coming closer to something. He begins to know he is in danger.

Understanding the end requires a vision that takes in the future blur without fear. It takes a belief that time will sort out the details, that there is rhyme and rhythm to the universe. Now that he isn't going to last, everything melts and morphs including the image of himself and his place in the world. He clings to the thought of oaks being planted hundreds of years before they are needed and to the concert going on now in Germany that will take 639 years to complete. Those who started it will never hear the end. They trust that generations to come will benefit in ways that matter somehow now.

In the near distance a Shia boy tells a reporter: 'An al-Qa'ida man shot my uncle, then a second man ran over him with a motorcycle. His head squished.'

Now again the mind becomes disorganized and the thoughts that float forward need translation that may never come.

Then a memory, cool and clear from the winter solstices of more than one year: Drummers at dawn in a small studio by the el tracks in Chicago. Two drummers measuring the difference between night and day, sunlight eventually outweighing the candles that surrounded them. He is remembering these men drumming and how we no longer heard the wind hard against the windows. The movement of the trees aligned with the rhythms they made. Gradually the sun lit the top of the cloud layer and just enough got through for us to know that it was day.

It was the shortest day or the second shortest day but not the last.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Karen Christopher.*