



Source: AFP, 'Last year deadliest for troops in Iraq', *The Australian online*, 02/01/08.

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I received a letter yesterday. It says to read it today. It says to begin again, to be at the start of something. Or maybe it says something about going back to it. It says to be present and humble. To stand before your heroes. And to take wing into the cold night sky. It says to listen closely, that what it says is important and especially the part about listening to what it says is important. It says this could be the one. It says this could be the one worth waiting for. It says the waiting is all. And that is all it says.

You will receive a letter tomorrow. It tells of a journey. It tells of faraway countries and accents strange to the tongue. Its crackling skin smells of foreign technology. It tells of unfamiliar constellations in the cold night sky. It reminds you gently of an old friend who set sail long ago and has been unknown ever since. It tells of the mystery of distance. The romance of adventure. The pain of goodbye. The setting sun and the rising tide. It tells of the places you've been on your way to finding yourself here, where you sit quietly, listening to what it tells you.

I wrote you last year. I described the tall pines through the mist, the sound of a train passing. I described the changing of the clocks, the marking of the time, the measuring out of lives. I described the glittering lights in the cold night skyline, the office towers visible through the swaying leaves and my heart beating slowly in the darkness. I described expectation, uncertainty, hesitation, and hope. I described your eyes and I described myself in them, watching you back, watching your lips move.

We are resolved to look forward. We are resolved to stick together. We are resolved to see this through to the end. To burn from both ends. To light up the cold night sky. To celebrate on the streets. We are resolved that this will not be in vain. We are resolved to make the best of it. We are resolved in our words and in our deeds. In these moments we spend together. In the past and future both. In this in-between time too. We are resolved because we say we are, and because of those of us who are listening.

A message through the ether. A scratching made in code. A chain of signification. A harbour in a storm. A pleasing turn of phrase. A license to reveal all. An army of

metaphors. A fight to be heard. A story that had to be told. A question from a friend. An answer to the world. A signal fire. A hopeless plea. A hidden meaning. A carving in a tree. A careless whisper lost to the cold night sky. A sound. That makes. A word. Appear.

You will pick up a message on your phone. You will not know who it's from. You will not be sure it's for you. You will be late for something else. You will be in a room full of strangers. Or trying to catch a cab. Or waiting for your plane. Or sleeping with a friend. You will hear crying in the static. Or maybe someone laughing too. The sound of fireworks or marching bands. Or riots in the streets. You will see yourself reflected. Or catch some stranger's eye. Or hide your face in your hand. Or look up at the cold night sky. You will turn back where you were going. You will finish what you were doing. You will make it out some other time. You will get what you came here for.

I have been talking all this time. I was speaking to myself, about the dream I half-remembered or the thing someone said to me. I was telling my story to anyone who listened, or listening for my story from anyone who talked. I said 'Hello stranger.' I said 'Who else did you expect?' I've been waiting for your answer. I've been waiting where the sun is shining. I've been waiting where it's summer still. I was keeping one eye on the clock, and one eye on the weather, and I shut them both when I thought about the cold night sky to come when no one will be listening and no one will be here. I have been waiting for that day. I have been dreaming half-remembering and talking without fear.

Ring. Click. Tap. Return. Pause. Reverse. Advance. Collect. Remember. Embolden.

Answer. Hold. Wait. Remit. Prompt. Reply.

Hello. Chatter. Signal. Noise. Resize. Replay. Remit. Reprise.

Right-click. Heel-tap. Turn-point. Mind-gap. About-face.

US-led. Year-long. Wind-up. Get-go. Shut-down. Black-out.

Out-cold. Night-sky.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Theron Schmidt.*