

Story for performance #928
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Source: Sami Moubayed, 'The clock ticks for Iraq's time bomb', *Asia Times online*, 04/01/08.

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You start at dusk, mid century, in the boondocks. We're in that golden time when the air hummed in anticipation of Louis Armstrong's celebrated 'dark sacred night'.

Everything has its invisible side. Trucks move in the carved gap between the hills. Up here by the fence it's possible to look out across the street to the opposite field, to cows hanging out in the long grass—mystic bovine reverie of chewing and gazing.

You register an all-over body itch that's developed through a long day of doing nothing but listening to voices—relieved by a burst of idiot sprinting round the house through clumps of insects and warm air. There's a whiff of diesel and pine sap on the wind.

Indoors, everything that's dear: dinner, cardboard boxes stuffed with cushions, wave-shaped sofas, family, conversation. You've been excused, exiled to the outside for whatever reason.

So this is pretty much when it begins: daemonic energy rustling up out of the earth next to the ride-on mower. It grabs you all of a sudden and scrapes a wire over your scalp. Holy shit! Alive with the fundamental need to Mess Something Up.

Mischief loves company and right on cue up the driveway comes a kid called Andre who has no reputation whatsoever save that he is Dutch and doesn't play sport. Andre looks like he's been frowning for some time, but now his eyes widen with the same evening energy you're feeling and he's juggling small brown rocks.

'Hi. Want to do something?'

Andre's skin like wood in the sepia-tone light.

You answer his question but it amounts to nothing —'face farting' as it's known by Zen sages the world over.

Andre tosses a rock your way. You catch it and almost immediately swing it back to him. You keep this up for a few minutes, adding some ducking and weaving and darting forays up and down the driveway.

Now a rabid, breathless version of tag through the feijoa trees alongside the drive. Cheerful whacks round your legs with a thin stick of bamboo. No shouting, no words, just observing each others' flushed faces, little tears caused by escalating hysteria—the best improvised fun in the world. This is a precursor to all the memorable action in your life. All the violence and caresses that ever come your

way. That feeling which wells up from nowhere some nights as you stare through the pixels.

Anyway, Andre and you end up collapsed on the lawn, ecstatic, licking ears.

Minutes later, by the fence, looking at the paddock over the road, dreamily contemplating cows, green pastures, the good old country life that's being demolished by this suburb.

Who suggests it? Who invents the fun? The idea to fling stones—only small ones mind—at the cows, or rather at the open field, reaching our presence over to the quiet world beyond the street below. Who starts? Who cares? Andre and you in the early stages of your own imagined community, the first borders crossed, moments of joy tallied up and exceeded.

There's a satisfyingly leathery thud as you hit a heifer with a pebble and it scampers into the gloom. A follow-up shower of dirt and bigger stones sends the herd crazy and they gallop off towards the shelter of a windbreak of huge macrocarpas.

From then on, your own twilight reverie disintegrates. Andre leaves quickly and silently, knowing a back way home that involves slipping between stands of Chinese gooseberries in Briscoe's place and over a breeze-block wall to his own dry section.

The next hour compresses into a narrative of fear and shame with minor scene changes. From the fence you glimpse a man jogging up the driveway, you instinctively quit the scene and hide inside a woodpile—shaking in cartoon rabbit fashion—under a green tarpaulin. You hear: 1) the angry descriptions of the rock that hit the car roof, that terrified the kids, that almost caused the crash; 2) the crunch of gravel as the guy storms off without meeting the guilty party; 3) the shouting from the kitchen door.

Then, after some minutes as the dew settles on your temporary home—the grandfatherly hands on your arm and the dozen words that hurt more than anything that happens later on.

So, therefore, how odd after all this time, as you try to summon up that deep sustaining sense of guilt (always good for a loan over so many years), there's nothing left.

Just the sensation of a hot tongue in the ear and the rising of lawn spirits all over again.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Brent Clough.