

Story for performance #49  
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Source: Steven Erlanger, 'Netanyahu quits over the pullout from Gaza', New York Times in International Herald Tribune online, 08/08/05.

Tags: [child/parent](#)

Writer/s: [Ninna Millikin](#)

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A delicate creature moves through night air. If light were to pass through its wings, fine veins would lace the membrane, red trade routes across a frayed map. Claws tiny as the hands of a newly born human loosely trail behind the pulse of joints, which, being closer to the heart, receive the command of flight first. Ennobled by the arrowhead of intent, the hideous mini gargoyle perfectly navigates the currents of languid air and understands the straightest line of flight, perfectly perceiving all obstacles in its path.

It's utterly degrading. So 'Jerry Springer' she could vomit with shame.

'So', she hears herself say silently, 'it's all come down to this—Psychological Amway: spilling one's guts up in front of 250-odd strangers.'

They slouch in their plastic chairs, row upon tedious row. And yet she can't resist—is hypnotized in fact by the woman's questions and bold, yes extravagant claims to understand her past, her entire psychological constitution. Christine is intoxicated by the other woman's fervour as she lobs a series of fast flying questions at Christine's beakish face. She's forty-two. Grey and blonde in a pony tail, the top she wears is a mawkish pink, tie-dye kaftan, its neckline thick with silver sequin-scales which frames her dubiously smooth, freckled cleavage. She's back at age eight and a half, and has decided for the first time that she is utterly stupid, unlovable and an embarrassment. This is what her psychoanalyst of five minutes tells her. At eight and a half what she said to herself is: 'I shouldn't be here'.

The line-up of siblings beside her have all capably read the clock face and pronounced the hour, but she is mystified. Greg is the second last, delivering the correct time from inside cupped hands, into their mother's ear, and he smiles slyly at Christine as he does so. Mother bestows due praise over his smug little mug, and he skips off to the cricket game in the street, though he first visits the dunny where the shit comes streaming out of him with a force he'd not yet encountered. He feels sick with relief.

'You're a disgrace, Christine Anne Peters: Gregory is a year younger. You should be teaching him. You can just stay

there on your red square until you can tell me what the time is. I don't care if it takes all weekend.'

The dial glares back at her, mocking her stupidity with its tick tock, its muffled click as the long line shifts into its consecutive position. She stays on the red square. In the street she can distinguish the little turd's voice amidst the choir of cheers and put-downs, and when any of them pass through the kitchen they snigger as they pass unnecessarily close and nudge her.

She can still see the threads of white through her very own red linoleum square. It strikes her now in the middle of this very public spectacle how much it looks like salami.

The group leader pushes on, intent on having the story out, flapping like a fish suffocating on the tiles. Christine is horrified to discover she is churning out details of her childhood serfdom—up before everyone to clean and tidy before the rest of them woke up, by which time she was on her way to school. How she has the four lunchboxes lined up on the bench the night before, brimming with *Woman's Day's* exciting and nutritious suggestions. Now she's telling them she's the franchise patisserie manager who scrubs the storeroom floor purely because she just can't trust the 16 year olds with their blonde fringes and bitten fingernails to do as good a job. When she calls home during the course, she can't help herself, just can't resist giving her daughter instructions on the correct way to blanch the veggies. She knows her eyes are rolling on the other end of the line, but she can't stop it. They've been married 22 years and she's proud of her self made high-flyer, coveting her box of love letters. Every day he tells her he loves her, but she keeps a neat 5% just out of his reach, just in case. She's told him four times. During the course she calls him and chokes out the fifth.

The largest mammal still in existence on the planet in the year 2005 allows the ocean to glide past its mass. Barnacles form entire civilizations along the expanse of its back. There's a tanker in the vicinity of a pod nearby. Below, a valley unfolds, the undulations of the seafloor seen in three perfect dimensions in the mind of the whale.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ninna Millikin.*