



Source: Ed O'Loughlin, 'Palestinians baulk at new Israeli demand', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 16/11/07.
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Go further

With the other shallow-breathing passengers on the tram you sway and frown, allowing your mind to begin the calculations of the day. Through the rectangle of the closed window you glimpse a woman on a bicycle. Your mother learned to ride a bicycle after her seventieth birthday. But the woman you see now is a thin, young woman wearing a thin cardigan. There is an open box of tissues strapped to the bicycle pack-rack. You notice the box of tissues, her strenuous pedalling, and the skin of her face taut with cold all at once; you notice and suddenly you are admiring her compulsion. That compulsion comes not from having made a decision, but from apprehending a course of action. With great clarity and without warning she has departed; she has left on her bicycle without turning off the kitchen light, without locking the door, without a coat.

The woman pedals incessantly against this morning's undertow of cars and trucks and your tram; against renouncing her implacable reason for setting out with the box of tissues. She has a date, an agenda, but her resolve is fragile from being so raw, so she cuts her path through the traffic bent towards the hard, black ground, and without turning her head; without braking, her hands clenched to white around the handlebars.

You watch the tissues fluttering and tearing like perished miniature sails behind her. Each scrap that is carried off is a tiny bid for surrender, surrender that she is heroically resisting. On her seventieth birthday your mother told

you to stop counting her birthdays, and that in her view the truth can only ever be tested, not proved.

Once you stood at a bus-stop and screamed, howling nonsense into the swirling dust and din at the intersection. The bus had passed without stopping. And abruptly, desperately, you did not want to think of numbers any more; any numbers—the numbers of days and distances, hours and telephones, betrayals, births, the sick and the dying, bullets, famines, and silent hordes. You stood at the bus-stop and felt them all splitting further into sharper and sharper fractions; punishing, incomprehensible fractions that threatened to slow the whole of life to the remote and endlessly suffocating pace of a dream.

You sway with the other passengers on the tram and understand today that of course, each has his or her date, an agenda, but perhaps a stronger desire to appear patient and properly armoured against the urgent, foolhardy splendour of grief. Your mother said she felt that she should go further; this was why, after her seventieth birthday, she bought a bicycle.

The tram has not yet reached your destination, but you clamber down into the street, onto the city's hard, black ground and run. You run like that woman was riding, recklessly, with breath pounding, to push forward into the midst of what needs to be done, in spite of and because of the incalculable numbers.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Cynthia Troup.