



Source: Carlos Hamann, 'Second Saddam lawyer killed',  
AFP in *The Australian online*, 09/11/05.  
Tags: [child/parent](#)  
Writer/s: [Anne Brennan](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

As soon as she opened the door and saw the two policemen, she wanted to shut it again immediately. She answered their questions, but she wasn't really hearing them; she was already thinking of something else—that other doorstep encounter, when they turned to each other at the hospital entrance and kissed each other goodbye.

It was not, she remembered, each other they were farewelling, but a kind of life together. Goodbye to the life that had bound only them, their daily routines and pleasures, their irritations and squabbles. 'This is it,' he had said, and she knew what he meant. In their farewell kiss, they were moving into another way of being together, cemented by the new little life that was so urgently making its way into the world.

She had vowed that she would remember every detail of that night, but of course she didn't. Afterwards, she lost any sense of a sequence to the events, and was left with a series of impressions utterly visceral in their intensity. She remembered the whiteness of the hospital room, and how there was a large clock on the wall opposite the bed. She remembered how irritated she was by the one picture in the room: a saccharine little landscape, a token attempt to humanise the antiseptic space. She made him take it down, much to the bewilderment of the midwife.

She remembered how, later on, nothing seemed to exist beyond the walls of that room, as though it contained the world itself. She remembered how time seemed to warp and swell, then suddenly shrink, so that sometimes she would raise her eyes to the clock after hours seemed to have elapsed, to discover that it was only five minutes since the last time she looked. At other times, two hours seemed to have been swallowed up in the time it took him to bathe her face. It was not so much that time slowed or speeded up, but that they were outside it altogether, drifting helplessly, like shipwrecked sailors.

And then, of course, she remembered pain. She remembered how there didn't seem to be any word to adequately describe the immensity of what her body was doing. Her body was unbounded; she had become engulfed by some kind of huge force that slowly and remorselessly squeezed and crushed her. Lying on her side, she could feel every muscle in her vibrating as though it were charged with electricity. She was immeasurably heavy. She could not move to save herself. She shouted at the midwife when she suggested that 'a change of position might help'. She seemed to be skimming on top of the pain, kept afloat only by her

panicky, fluttering breath. She remembered later that moment of clarity when she realised how fragile was the membrane between life and death, how it would only take one small thing, one mishap, to sweep her from one side to the other. It must have been then that she cried out for her mother.

Later, she remembered how suddenly everything changed gear. She wanted to push, she was shouting at him to let her push, and he was pressing the bell for the midwife, saying 'Not yet! Not yet!' There were trolleys, and lights, and the stirrups, which she refused to use. There was the midwife, telling her what to do, and a man she had never seen before, standing back a little in the entrance to the room, tying on a surgical mask. Then there was the long, groaning push and she felt it! she felt it—first the head, and then, quite distinctly, the little shoulder passing through her and slithering out into the world. The midwife was saying that the membranes were intact—how lucky a sign that was, how the baby would never die by drowning. And then she held him up, not yet breathing, still not of this world, his skin all waxy and his head and shoulders covered in a tide-mark of blood. He was still attached to her, the cord was still pulsing, and she remembered it clearly, how beautiful it was, twisted like barley sugar and the colour of jade. 'My baby!' she cried triumphantly, 'my baby!'

Later, after the weighing and the bathing and the stitching and the laughing and the congratulations, he went away with the list to phone everyone and they were alone at last, she and her son. In the early morning light, she looked at the baby's sleeping face, wrinkled and wet-looking, like the petals of a poppy, newly unfurled. Somewhere, a radio was on, and she could hear a viola playing—*Harold in Italy*, she remembered. It was raining softly outside, and she thought that if she died at this moment, she could be perfectly content. She, who had never met her grandmother, thought suddenly of her, and of her mother before her, connected to her through this moment, this experience, so universal and yet so particular, so miraculous. She felt...she groped for the word...she felt...yes, for the first time in her life, she felt invincible.

Standing on the doorstep, she was aware that it was raining. She could hear someone repeating her name. She was looking into the policeman's face. He was taking off his hat. He was asking if he could come in.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Anne Brennan.*