



Source: Jeffrey Fleishman, 'Embassies torched as violence escalates', *LA Times*, Reuters in Sydney Morning Herald online, 06/02/06.

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Call this a confession. Or—since really it concerns no crime and not even a significant misdemeanor—perhaps it's simply an aside. A soliloquy, then: one of those passages apart from the time of the frantic action of plot, in which a character muses aloud for the audience to overhear. Soliloquies represent a lull in the narrative traffic. Or seem to. But of course it's a well-known irony that they may also further it. Even if sometimes they simply seem to complicate. Unnecessarily, some would say. But what would they know?

It is in the nature of soliloquies to be digressive, freely associative. You will simply have to follow from here on in because at this point no one is giving directions and no one is leading.

Lives, unlike plays, don't really have plots. We turn them into stories after the event. Or we make stories from them as we go along in the oblivious everyday—hundreds of small stories, subplots, some unthinkingly alike as if a script is being endlessly enacted, others at odds, contradictory, frictional, resistant to interpretation. But these small stories never do quite add up to a grand narrative with a single satisfying thread or a consistent character at the centre, holding it all together. Things fall apart, and from the fraying threads we forge our new beginnings.

So perhaps it's not so strange, at this moment—here and now—in a new twist in a story of peaceful silence and tranquil obscurity I sometimes tell myself, to find myself cast as a character and thrust on stage to speak. More than that, to tell a story. Which means to entertain. Which I could perhaps do by introducing other characters who might perform the work for me. Because it is work that's required, whether it's carried out by intriguing, enthralling, frightening, disgusting, tantalising, mocking, the retailing of amusing gossip, running the real risk, these days, of sedition—whatever: the means at my disposal seem unlimited. All that is required from this work is that I hold your attention and do not disappoint. Or if I disappoint, it should be clear that I am doing it for a reason, that disappointment is a deliberate act. Be reassured—you are in good hands. What is done is done for your own good.

Who ever believed that?

A story can be a bitter pill and there are always those who think themselves strong enough to swallow. We thirst for stories and we drink them down like a stiff gin and tonic at dusk after a long hot day of work. Who can really predict the action of such an intoxicating and romantic drug on the individual body? Authorities issue warnings and some packets come with labels. Then again, labels can deceive, advertised contents may vary and some stories just arrive unheralded. And—magic!—you're hooked before you know it. Too late then for informed consent.

It seems I have been recruited to deal in dangerous substances. I could imagine the securing of contracts, sale of the film rights, the generation of endless wealth, but really I know that volatile things have a way of backfiring, of blowing up in your face. It's hard to say, between the two of us, who might be in more danger from all this. Perhaps I will infect you with a foreign agent whose insidious effects only unfold over time. Perhaps you will not die but only suffer (whether from doubt, or from certain knowledge) as you go on living. My end, on the other hand could be immediate. I feel myself go pale with fear at the thought that the spell of story might fail and you might turn away. At that moment the axe falls.

Problem is, I've never been much of a story-teller. More of a listener, really, or a reader. Even a passionate reader. But at a certain point, even novels ceased to enthrall. Well, most novels, anyway. I still have my favourite writers and once in a while something new and exciting does turn up. It's just that on the whole there's something too predictable about the rhythms of narrative prose with its tedious descriptions, its casts of characters, its insistence on story and the endless unfolding of plot. The need always to be going somewhere, bags packed and bookings made. By nature I'm more of a risk-taker, more experimental. I do things impulsively—'*a l'improviste*', says one of my favourite friends. Perhaps that's why I'm digressing now, taking the risk of taking a break from story and staging—as they say—a moment in which you see me as I am, when I am not performing for you.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Anna Gibbs.*