Story for performance #315
webcast from Sydney at 05:14PM, 01 May 06

Source: 'Iraq families flee violence', *New York Times* in *The Age online*, 01/05/06.
Tags: Shanghai, surveillance, violence, sex, drugs, storytelling, Iraq
Writer/s: Mark Wakely

The story starts now:

Right now, where somewhere above us a satellite system, code-named Argus, is in orbit recording remarkably detailed video images from around the globe, at absolute random. Each recording lasts less than a minute before Argus moves on. They are fragments from the lives of strangers, each an unfinished story.

So powerful is the satellite's surveillance capacity that if I were to go out into the garden to read your letter, Argus would be able to see—not only your signature—but the smile that spreads across my face as I read your cryptic words once again.

Simply to see is rarely to understand, you wrote to me.

The story starts now:

At this very moment in a lane in Sao Paulo, where a Brazilian youth called Fernando is bashing Henry Benson, a drunken Texan tourist, with a baseball bat having robbed him of sixty dollars. He is raising his bat to make what could be the fatal blow to the left side of Mr. Benson's head when his mobile phone signals an incoming text message. Fernando stops the beating to read it. Sent by his brother-in-law, it's news about his pregnant sister, Maria. Preceded by a circular text symbol of a smiley face, the message reads in Portuguese: 'It's a boy!' It is punctuated with an exclamation mark, not unlike the shape of Fernando's bloodied baseball bat. Nonchalantly, the boy turns away from his victim and heads in the direction of the hospital to visit his new nephew.

Words can save us all you wrote.

The story starts now my dearest:

Now in Shanghai where a 50-year-old British diplomat, named James Ingram, is waiting to meet his unlikely lover in the public square, where they met by chance two months ago and have met every Monday afternoon since. Her name is Sue Lee. She is 18 years-old and she works in a t-shirt factory. James—who was only posted in China last November—speaks next to no Mandarin. The little English Sue Lee knows comes from the t-shirts she sews, destined for American souvenir shops. Every Monday she greets her lover with a new slogan she has learned, a gift of meaningless words. Today, using two hands to form the shape of a heart she says: 'I love New Jersey.' Smiling, he responds 'And I love Sue Lee,' very quietly, in case someone overhears.

How trite I thought when you wrote: Love is its own language.

The story starts now:

Right now, in the morning light of a park in London, where David Martin, a futures trader on his way to work thinks no one is watching as he stands against the outside wall of a locked toilet block in Regents Park. Removing the belt from his Paul Smith suit, he ties it tightly around his arm. He searches for a vein. Finds one. Fifteen seconds later he is sliding down the wall, which is covered in graffiti. Among spray-painted tags and obscenities, incongruously printed in small neat handwriting are the numbers 0 4 0 2 7 9 0 2 8 and 7. And in the same red ink the word 'hope'. The digits correspond to the number now displayed on the screen of David's cell phone, which lies at his feet next to the needle. The number appears to have been un-dialed.

Every choice we make is another chapter, you wrote.

The story starts now my love:

This very instant where outside LaGuardia International Airport, a Columbia University professor by the name of Raymond Bessinger, is waiting in line to use an ATM when something catches his attention. He reaches down to pick up a fragment of a *New York Times* report which—torn into minuscule pieces—blows across the pavement: 'nettlesome' the fragment reads. And for a moment Raymond—a lecturer in applied mathematics and logic, experienced in finding solutions for the most irksome, complex problems—contemplates gathering up the other pieces so that he can make sense of it. But it is the professor's turn now at the teller machine the moment passes and the wind carries off any chance of retrieving the context of the word, which he casually lets slip from his fingers.

However frustrating, some puzzles should be left unsolved you wrote.

The story starts now:

Beneath a date palm in western Baghdad, behind the house of Amira Sami. Amira is telling her Shiite family that the time has come to leave their home in this largely Sunni neighbourhood. A place where harassment and reprisal killings have become a way of life, as the country slips further into civil war. In her hand Amira clutches a note left anonymously overnight under the front door. Typed in courier font, it reads: 'The time has come for infidels to be punished'. We must leave tomorrow for Jordan, Amira says.

It takes courage to accept when something is over, you wrote.

The story starts now:

This very moment, as the sun prepares to set on a beach in Port Douglas. Samantha Whitlock, a gap student from Toronto, Canada, defeated by the failing light gives up on the postcard she is writing to her boyfriend back home. She slides it, incomplete, into the side pocket of her daypack and walks down to where the sand meets the surf. Picking up a long piece of driftwood, she begins to write a sentence in the sand. But no sooner has she written four letters than the sea reclaims the first and then the second. Undeterred she continues, feeding the sea with letters as she forms her secret message; wondering whether tomorrow the sea will bring her words back and rest them on the sand for some passing stranger to read.

We are all tellers of unfinished stories, you wrote.

The story starts now:

Right now, where somewhere above us a spy satellite, code-named Argus, is in orbit recording remarkably detailed video images from around the globe, at absolute random.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Mark Wakely.