



Source: Robert Tait, 'Iran net nanny blocks YouTube and Wikipedia', *Guardian* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 05/12/06.

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Writer/s: Susan Murphy

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It had been happening to him all his life, actually. His mother wasn't someone you could mention these things to. When she got in from the club at two in the morning and woke him up in the daybed to talk, he knew it was only her she really wanted to talk about, but he was so glad to see her it didn't matter. That was before Tito moved in with his Russian cigarettes and heavy hands. She stopped waking him up then, except with strange cries in the night at first, and then other kinds of sobbing, and then a silence had settled as bruised as the dark in the sockets of her eyes.

The first time was over in the schoolyard—his private place when all the kids had gone, a warm peace at last descended. He was lost in studying something as everyday as the hibiscus bushes, the nodding flower faces, rude pink stamens, black ants hunting sweetness in the hollow glow, when a shadow fell over him.

He looked up. Against the powerful low sun you could make out a man with his Gladstone workbag and *Daily Tele* tucked under his arm, taking a shortcut on his way home from work. But Colin had seen the shadow, and seen that the shadow had wings. And the man, or whatever it was, had seen that Colin had seen.

It was an odd moment. What do you say to an angel when you're six years old and the only mothering you've ever really had was 'never talk to strangers'? They were locked in a gaze neither could easily escape. So there was a lot of time for the eyes to talk, and decide. The angel seemed very slightly to nod, and then they could talk, just as if they'd known each other since before any of this was here—rumbling city, school buildings with peeling paint, summer heat rising off the black macadam, small boy with scabby knees and possibly rickets.

'I'm here because you can see me', said the angel. 'But you can't ask what I'm doing here,' he added, before the question surging towards his lips and mouth could even form.

Colin's hot heart overflowed.

'Then tell me why I am here. Am I going to grow up? Is the world going to end? Who is my father, and did he really die when I was born? Who are you?'

The angel's face began to close, protectively, but Colin was quick. He grabbed a tight scrunch of trouser-leg. It nearly made him faint, the rush of immediate contact with that dark wind that has always been blowing, but he grew as steely as the eyes of the angel that now looked down as if from battlements.

'We cannot say. It would kill you to know what a great kindness hides from you. You live only because you can't see round that corner.'

The boy Colin did not let go, though his mind almost blacked out with effort. 'Show me why I wouldn't want to know,' he managed.

The angel hesitated. In his last few thousand years, he'd

met Colins once or twice before, and in truth, they fascinated him. So tiring, in its way, never to be seen or heard, only felt, but passed off as intuition or insight. So hard to do what had to not be done. Humans—with their dark minds and darker questions, never seeing far enough beyond that strange thing they called their 'self', and stranger still, trapped in life that cannot dream of death, cannot even dream what death might be.

To Colin's shock and thrill of fear, the angel slowly nodded. 'You will come a step or two with me', he said. 'You may not survive it but I think you will. So that you can see enough to see why you do not want to know'...

And he did. He saw.

They stood beneath a concrete housing tower and watched a baby fall from a balcony and plummet towards them. Thank god, he thought. Thank god an angel's here.

But the angel only softly watched as the child hit the concrete at their feet with a retort like a gun, her life spilled like a broken egg. The angel softly listened as torn drunken screams of the parents from far above reached their ears. And the angel softly nodded.

Back in the playground the boy Colin sobbed and shook till all tears left him. A Mississippi of time downstream from that great gun crack coursed through him: he had had to feel the changes in those grief-gutted parents ripple out and alter a hundred lives, a thousand lives—a whole bent of time, marvellously changed by subtle tilt. In his small child's heart that immense push, of heart against fate, of love against agony, the difficult blooming of pain into human.

And blooming still twenty years later, on a 438 bus tediously edging towards Railway Square. Colin was a computer technician these days, though no one more than barely knew what a computer might be. Like an angel, computers forgot nothing, could not sleep or dream. Perhaps this was what had drawn him to study the things, glowing mainframes deep in basement temples.

He was more at ease with it now, he thought, the angel thing, the meetings. Never quite the same one, or else even they may subtly change in time. Or did they change only in his time, under the moon?

The bus stopped crawling forward, blocked by a semi-trailer. The tall man beside him got out his paper, rattled it open in front of Colin. They'd be stuck a fair bit longer yet.

Colin barely saw the headline, SHAH TOPPLED. KHOMEINI DECLARES SHARIYA LAW, before the page blurred white except for words that strangely swam across the whole: 'THIS PAGE IS FORBIDDEN'.

The dark wind moved. The man who was not a man became aware, stopped his fiercely intent reading, and looked at him.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Susan Murphy.*