



Source: Kirk Semple, 'Iraqis' daily struggle trumps charter woes', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune online*, 25/08/05

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Google to the rescue again. No story has come in and now, with an hour or so to go, something must be snatched from the resource. I discover when I retype my prompt back into Google that back in 2000, 'Behind the Curtain' was a project in which bloggers recorded a day in their life.

Although that project has ended now, I think 'why not take that very simple idea as a way of manufacturing a script for tonight's performance?' You see, I am the man, well woman, behind the curtain of this particular project and this is a day in its life.

Since this is a narrative, and as all good narratives progress forward in time, I'm obliged to start at the beginning of the day.

The alarm clock in my head goes off at 7.30 a.m., as usual, no matter how much sleep or wakefulness or nightmares or good creative thoughts have filled it in the preceding eight hours. At this particular 7.30 it's raining and so even harder to swing the feet off the bed and onto the floor, but I do, because the show must go on. It's the contract I've signed with you all, you see. I shuffle over to pick up the old blue pottery mug I use as a water container and on my way to fill it from the bathroom I turn on my PowerBook G4. By the time I've shuffled back with the water, the computer is booted up and my eyes are preparing themselves for reading.

I launch straight into the *International Herald Tribune* link to stories from the Middle East. There's more news from Gaza but for the Western media outlets, it seems like we're coming to the end of that particular narrative. The Palestinians are happy for now, the evicted settlers unhappy but resigned. So today I turn my attention to Iraq as they struggle to draft a new constitution by a mysteriously enforced deadline. There seem to be big issues still to be ironed out, like federalism and the role of religion in the law and this of course is contrasted with the daily experience of the citizens who must focus on the reality of no water, electricity, security, medical supplies and so on.

I'm struck by one particular quote from a 'man on the street' interviewed by the *New York Times* journalist. "'I am not very convinced about what is going on behind the curtains,' Shawkat Falih, 40, a Sunni street vendor in Baghdad said darkly. 'The process should be visible and audible to the Iraqi people.'" So I choose 'behind the curtains' and I wonder if Mr Falih knows that this is also a famous quote from *The Wizard of Oz*. You'll remember, it comes at the moment when Dorothy and her gang of three finally meet the Wizard. Toto pulls away a curtain to reveal a mere mortal at the controls of the phantasmagoria that is the Wizard—all smoke and

mirrors, *son et lumière*. So who is the Wizard: the man behind the curtain or the illusion? Plato asked it centuries before in his parable of the cave in *The Republic*. But I don't suppose any of these illusions or allusions would be playing on the mind of Mr Falih in Baghdad.

I did the watercolour, Photoshopped it, and posted it onto the site as today's prompt. I also sent it as an attachment to the writer whom I thought might like to respond with a story. I'm ashamed to say that I then crawled back to bed for another hour.

Then followed the predictable train of events—shower, breakfast, email-writing and reading before I got down to the dreary end of the show: transferring the videos of the performances from tape to hard drive for editing and then back to tape for archiving. So cruel to have to hear the fumbles in delivery and see the outbreaks of acne. I left it as often as I could to do the slightly more exciting things like cleaning and shopping and making social dates with other artists.

Towards five o'clock I started to get a little anxious that no stories had yet come in. I sent off a politely questioning email to the writer who I thought was going to submit, but by six o'clock, when the writing deadline had passed, there was still nothing.

Even worse, I'd organised a little *soirée* this evening for artists from the Middle East who also have studios here. The first, and luckily only, guests arrived soon after 6.00 p.m.—Nadjibi, a sculptor and painter from Iran with his young daughter Najarb. It soon became apparent that we had no *lingua franca* and as usual, it was the child who made the social exchange possible. She showed me some of her own creations and from her pressed clay mask I learnt the Farsi for eyes, nose and mouth. The other little clay face had a moustache like her father's and so that was added to my vocabulary. Of course now, only an hour after they've left, I don't remember any of these words but she graciously gave me one of the clay masks so perhaps the words will come to me in the night from the distorted clay mouth. With pained apologies from me, I had to explain to my guests that tonight I had no story and would now have to do something about it. A final cocktail of Farsi, French and English words was raised at the door and I turned to face the keyboard.

Now, just before I reach my word limit, I turn my head towards the windows and notice the quality of the light. This afternoon's golden glow is what the *émigré* architect Harry Seidler once called an aberrant light, one that he wanted none of his modernist towers bathed in. I smile as I see Notre Dame *à contre-jour*, the tips of the plane trees just outside glinting and winking in the breeze.

Written and performed by Barbara Campbell.