



Source: Julian Borger, 'Drift into war with Iran out of control, says UN', *Guardian Unlimited*, 18/09/07.

Tags: [child/parent](#), [home](#), [discomfort](#)
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A blob of glue elasticated itself from the brush, and swung like a trembling pendant earring over the polished floor before landing safely inside the child-shaped outline that filled the paper. A collage was in progress. Multi-coloured scraps of tissue paper, foam feet and hands in autumnal orange and brown and unnatural pink, paint pens and stampers were strewn in artistic abandon around the piece. Strawn by Mica. Francesca herself ignored them, and sat in stern silence cutting up old Christmas cards.

'I think the collage is finished', she announced, not looking up.

Mica sighed, and the beginnings of butterflies rumbled in her stomach. Not ten minutes before, she had been jubilating inside, thinking she had won some time, had successfully transferred the great weight of motherhood from the back of her neck into the little outstretched hands of her small daughter, just for an instant. This handing on of the generations, this curdling of two incompatible sets of memories of her own childhood—what she'd like to have happened, and what actually had happened—it was all so much harder than she'd been led to believe.

'Why don't you try screwing up some tissue paper, make it into little balls. You could make a pattern. When it's all filled in, we'll cut round it, don't you think that would look lovely? We could hang it up...', the crowning bribe, '...and don't you think Daddy would love to see it?'

It would be a perfect paper cut out of a little girl. Francesca had lain down on the paper, and Mica had drawn all around her prone form with a pink felt tip pen that morning.

Mica found the image of the young man from the day before coming back into her mind. Francesca sat now with her back to her mother, flicking through the pages of one of the numberless slim-spined books in her special cupboard, half-listening to Winnie-the-Pooh on a tape. The metallic blue of her Disney Cinderella dress eddied about her, a perfect simulacrum of a ball dress in miniature, covered in paint stains and crinkled with love.

She had been wearing it yesterday as they walked down the hill, Mica, Francesca and the baby in his Maclaren. The young man had spotted them, and whipped a camera in front of his face, squatted on his haunches, even lolloped backwards on them as though on springs to frame what he wanted. The picture had been snapped before Mica had even realised he'd taken it. Her head had turned to see who he was photographing before she understood that the object in his lens was her daughter. The next instant he was off up the hill without a word. She had stopped short, bewildered, and called after him.

'Excuse me. Excuse me!' she had called. He had carried on walking, then stopped and turned, pointing theatrically to himself, loping back down the hill at a bouncing clip towards the middle-aged woman, standing in the cold

evening air, with her four-year-old, and the baby. He was still putting his camera into its important-looking pouch as he strode. He was slight, good-looking, with an open friendly face. Brown hair.

Mica had not known what she was going to say to him before she spoke. She knew only that a tight band of panic was snaking around her chest.

'Don't you need to ask permission before you do that, before you take photos of children?' she began.

'No, I don't. Not under British law.' He patted the pouch. 'Not for touristic photos.' A fixed smile played across his face, his jaw tight. He was staring at Mica, his cheeks slightly flushed. He spoke with what sounded like a Dutch accent. A girl had been with him, who had walked on ahead. She too stopped and turned now, Mica was aware of her strolling back down the hill to join them. The traffic was building up on the road beside them, parents taking children home at the end of the day. Leaves were starting to come down. People starting the fight to get home from work. The tying up of loose ends from the day.

'Don't you think you ought to ask permission? Given the kind of things that —' Mica didn't know how to go on. What was speaking through her? Her voice sounded as though it belonged to someone else, a reporter from *The Sun*, another, better, mother. She was trapped inside her own documentary. *Child's Image Used in Pornography. Mother Did Not Do Enough To Protect Daughter.* She was a ventriloquist, expected to resist at all times, to stave off the pressing tendrils of perversion everywhere, all around her and her tiny cargo.

He shrugged, and the smile widened. He waved extravagantly at Francesca. 'But, she's beautiful—'

'I think you should have asked.' Mica cut him dead.

The girl intervened. 'I'm sorry. Did you delete it?' she turned to her companion.

'Yes, it's already done.' But it hadn't been deleted. Mica was sure. The drama was over, she had run out of time, they had to move on. Any more and she would have to ask to see the camera.

As they walked, Francesca's hand had slipped into Mica's. 'He was a silly man, wasn't he, Mummy? If he had a little girl and we wanted to take a photo of her, we would have asked, wouldn't we?' Mica felt the ready tears prickple. How was it possible that her child knew all this stuff? What patrolled her logic and her innocence?

Winnie-the-Pooh seemed now to have built a bridge between Francesca's boredom and Mica's guilt. The morning was flowing again. The young man and his companion walked on away up the hill.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ingrid Wassenaar.