

Story for performance #973  
webcast from Sydney at 07:45PM, 18 Feb 08



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Tags: corporeality, language, storytelling

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This morning I woke feeling dizzy. I thought my vision was a bit blurry, but that happens sometimes if I don't eat. So I had breakfast and then I went to my desk to start work but when I turned on the computer I couldn't understand the writing.

I know I could read yesterday but now when I look, it's just hooks and circles, some crowded together some standing alone: a rope with a loop in it, the wing of a bird, a house with the door open.

My eyes snag on them. I yank at them and shake my head to move them but they will not budge.

I called Nina who was much more alarmed about all this than me. She thought I might be having a stroke and immediately called an ambulance. How embarrassing. They arrived within ten minutes with sirens screaming and blokes running up the stairs and you can feel the entire street going: OH MY GOD WHAT'S HAPPENED?

They took my blood pressure and looked in my eyes with a little torch and made me do tongue twisters and squinch my face up like this...and this...and I had to do coordinated gesticulations, like semaphore, like this...and this...and after all this they said it definitely wasn't a stroke and I wasn't 'in any immediate physical danger'.

Then Nina arrived and she said that she'd stay with me and take me to the Doctor. Everyone was saying: she shouldn't drive, she shouldn't drive. Fair enough, I guess, but the ambos were relieved that I could still tell left from right and remember phone numbers. Anyway. During all this I was worrying about my work for today. Since I couldn't read, how could I find a prompt to put up on the website? How could I read the story of the day? I tried for a while, with Nina coaching me, to read the headline words on some magazines and newspapers: She was going 'this is an A. Do you remember A?' But I can't remember A. Not what it looks like anyway.

So: What am I going to do? I have become an illiterate woman overnight!

Nina, who is nothing if not practical, suggested that the phrase 'the illiterate woman' could be the prompt for today and she would write the words out for me so I could do my water colour, just as a kind of colouring-in exercise.

But how would I read the story for the evening webcast? We talked about free improvisation—but that's never been my strong point, and we thought about someone else reading for me. But that would mess up the whole tongue-stud thing...I don't know, it just felt wrong. Then Nina had the idea: if you're illiterate then you have to receive a story made in sound not writing! You have to tell a story that is heard rather than written.

And we decided that a fun way to do this would be for me to listen to the radio during the webcast and to speak what I'm hearing. And Nina is going to flip channels while I listen, so that I don't just get clagged up in a dreadful song or something. And then after seven to ten minutes have passed, she's just going to turn off the radio and that will be the end.

So, this is going to be messy, dear listener, messy and with an abrupt ending. But illiteracy is messy, at least for the literate—that is, for you.

And so, here it is: the messy story of the 21st century illiterate woman by Nina, Barbara and the free to air public domain radio media.

The story begins:

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I had met many strange characters of course. It was that kind of place...my companions were exclusively male. I met men who had no doubt killed other men but to borrow a...line from Bob...Dylan they never did like to talk about it all that much. The emphasis of the gym's activities was fighting and strength...I had already...fought several...times and had more fights lined up and...those big heavy punches came flying at me. A woman half his size who barely came up...to...his...his...armpit.

Cricket's on the radio!

He swings at this! It's gone long! It's gone out of the ground just about! That is a HUGE hit over square leg! Make sure you catch all the action! Sri Lanka take on India at the Adelaide oval tomorrow afternoon: Grandstand cricket...ball by ball...cricket.

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...I have lost weight.. on a diet and lifestyle change...Neil hello? Neil? Yes. Hello, Neil? No...Neil's disappeared. Hello, Andrew go ahead. Hi Neil, it's Andrew. I...didn't see that program. I...turn it off as soon as it gets to the gory bits, but in defence of that lady she was...about 190 kilos and she had a car accident which broke her pelvis. She had a long time just laying in bed which is how she got to 400 kilos. It was very, very sick to show that there's this lady and then she died!

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...wouldn't it be great if Triple M organised the footy tipping for you? What's that? We do? Join the footy tipping on-line! There are great prizes and you don't have to worry about Greg from accounts keeping it honest. Sign up for Triple-M footy tipping.

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Welcome back to the third...He's still out there trying to do his best. But it's getting dark. Now there's almost no chance of his finding...his...lost contact lenses...

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...a labrador attack. People buy a dog and they just leave them in the back yard! Don't pay any attention to the dog! Don't trust a labrador either!...I wouldn't trust any dog with any child, particularly young kids 'cause they do tend to be rather cruel to dogs...

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Margaret Trail.*