

Story for performance #978  
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Source: AP, AFP, 'Turkey strikes at Kurds in Iraq', *The Australian online*, 23/02/08.  
Tags: [child/parent](#), [film](#), [war](#)  
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'This space in between is so extremely small, and normal life seems nearly within their reach...' and she gestures restively with her hands to describe it, bringing them almost right in front of her open, intelligent face framed with short spiky hair. The hands are so close to her face now that she must be feeling her own breath on them as the words fail her for just a moment and she pauses, looking intently into that volume of air separating the outline of her face from her open palms. She does not linger in this place, she moves on with the look of someone who can see clearly but chooses not to overstep the fine line that has allowed her to bring this story on in the first place.

'They are not victims,' she insists, 'they are warriors.' In the main, they are not more than 11 or 12 years old, although it is difficult to tell because of the homelessness, and drink, and glue they are sniffing so openly before that camera. I am enraged but the camera is steady and calm, and it is not until the film has ended that I begin to accept, at first barely containing my anger that it is not up to me to do...anything. It is not up to me to set the terms of this. The shock and desire to help are so painfully and obviously futile in this half-empty theatre many, many miles away, and it is not about that kind of distance anyway. This is what she tells me with each shot. She is that same breath away from them as they speak, so near them that those shaved heads could almost be resting in her palms, so gentle is the camera as their stories slowly unravel. And she knows better than to overstep. For, as she will eventually conclude in that lingering sentence, in an honest anticlimax delivered with an almost comic smile, 'it is not that simple.'

I almost forgot why I began telling you this story in the first place. It is those other children, released from school in small greying towns and put onto buses, brought to the capital to fill the numbers for the impotent and highly dangerous old men's show of a preposterous and oh, how we all hope, nonexistent, force. They are all under 18 years of age, they are drunk and violent and so deserving of punishment you feel you could put on that sober prosecutor's suit yourself and face them in any court, any time. I imagine myself feeling the same and the relief is instant, the world is almost coming into place; I am finally shaped, grown-up and confident in those smart clothes. My mum was so good at that job and I

so long to join her as she was then, if only because of the fear of slowly losing her now to old age. I could make those same unruffled speeches and share in her unfailing sense for justice.

Please do not think I am making fun of her, or of you. I just keep talking for the fear that, if I pause again, you may definitively turn away, that you may categorically decide that the world holds brighter colours for you, and that it is somehow taking too much of everything to engage in this story.

So I will try it another way.

I have wondered about this for a long time. I have really given it some thought. And I think I am beginning to understand, just barely, that it is not about these kinds of choices at all, between getting on with your life or not, or turning away or not, or even closing your eyes or keeping them wide open until insomnia seeps into the sockets and you forget what it means to sleep. It is not even about trying so desperately to understand, or about taking responsibility in some very complicated way. It is not about anger, and it really is not about that kind of justice. It is about fear, and perhaps also about danger. But above all it is about giving time. And taking care. Giving a lot of time, and taking a lot of care. Not that I overestimate the results. It is just that the measure of it is so fine I become alive as I sometimes, not often, begin to approach it. We all come to life in this fine balance.

And because it is so near, I ask you to stay with me just a little bit longer.

I do not promise you anything. These forces are older and more vicious when they encroach upon a human body than almost anything we can put in their way, and I am certainly not in mastery of them. I just ask you not to turn your head away, for this is not the dark underworld, this is not yet the dwelling of the dead that you must now pass through without ever looking back. It is the same world as you know it, just in some very extreme circumstances. And if you allow the harsher season to weather you, you may come prepared. Prepared for the fighting season.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Branislava Kuburovic.*