



Source: Ashraf Khalil and Craig Whitlock, 'Man and wife bomb team—woman lives', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 14/11/05.

Tags: [death](#), [intimacy](#), [sport](#), [disease](#)

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He watches the ball rise up through the air, pivoting and twisting on its way towards the sky. He watches, wondering whether this time it will rise up above the tree in the corner of the park. A huge, twisted old fig that's been there forever. He likes to have a goal. The ball moves up through atmosphere, higher and higher. He has kicked for hours, and sometimes the ball has made it, but mostly it hasn't. He realises that he cares less and less.

As he watches the ball tumble through the air, he thinks about his kick. He thinks about the energy of the kick, and how that energy connects and transfers itself to the old ratty ball, and taking that energy, the ball climbs and climbs up through the air. He still feels that energy, watching the ball. He feels the connection. He thinks about the simplicity of it, the physics of it, the beauty of that ball rising through the air. Energy transferred, shared.

It's uncomplicated, straightforward. A beautiful law of physics that connects the movement of the ball precisely to the strength of his kick. He enjoys the purity of it. He knows there's a mathematical equation for this, but he can't bring it to mind just now. But just knowing that this is something controlled by a physical law is enough for him. He likes rules, laws. He didn't once, but today he does.

The ball does not reach the tips of the tallest leaves on the old fig. His kick has lost some of its power, but again, he doesn't mind. He will keep kicking, because he likes his connection to something that flies through the air, and comes back to earth. The pure joy, the thrill of the thing, will make him happy this afternoon. He will come back home to her and he will be content, and she'll be glad of it.

There are things that he has connected with, sent on their way, and that have never, ever returned. Women have flown away. Beautiful ones, unreliable ones, ones he deeply loved. He regrets some of them, thinks about them twisting and pivoting across the arcs of their own lives, having lost connection with him.

He sees Jo in his mind. They argued this morning. He'd had enough. He was mean and she was sulky. He tries not to argue, but sometimes it feels too hard not to. She's difficult, of course. She's demanding and needy and he has to ride it out.

She's getting ready to leave. He thinks of the irony, how all those years ago he asked her to leave, tried to kick her away, and she stayed. Because she saw something in him. And she has stayed all this time, and now she is going.

And he can't do anything about it.

He kicks again. He loves the sound of his foot against the ball. Leather on leather, a dull thump sounding like a heartbeat. The ball reaches high into the air, higher than the last kick, and he winces because the effort required strained his muscles. He is forty-five, and he thinks that once, this was easier than it is today.

The sun is setting and it's getting cold. The air stings his face, invades his nostrils with its chill. But it's not time to go home yet. Not time to make the soup, try to talk, try to make it easier. He asked her to leave, all those years ago, and now she is. He feels let down, conned, and he doesn't want to make her soup just yet.

What he wants is to be a boy, with no troubles or attachments or soup to put on the stove. He doesn't want to worry, and he doesn't want to have to think about another person. He especially doesn't want to have to think about her. So he kicks again and the ball rises again and eventually, it comes back to him, back to his arms, and he holds it, pleased with his catch, and unable to let it go. He lies on the ground, looking at the sky, feeling the cold, and not letting go.

He cannot let go. Because he thinks of all the women who he has let go and he remembers the regret and sometimes the relief and he knows that Jo, the woman that he loves, now, today, for the past 10 years, is about to go, and she's not coming back.

It is not her choice, and it's not his. She is dying, and very soon, she will leave him. He will not kick this time. He will try to hold her so tight that she can't escape. He will take all his force, all his energy, and he will wrap her up and not let go. But she will go anyway, and she will fly through the cold air, alone. And all he will have is this stupid, stupid game of kicking the ball, letting it go, shouting like a small boy.

The sky is orange, and the old gnarled fig seems more misshapen in the shadows. It's too cold to be out in his t-shirt and shorts. She said he should take a jumper, but he didn't feel like listening.

He walks with his ball back to the car, ready to go back to her now, to look after her. He's ready to put his arms right round her, and love her. But he's still not ready to let her go.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Sophie Townsend.*