



Source: correspondents, 'Nuclear checks to stop, Iran threatens', *The Times*, Reuters, DPA in *The Weekend Australian online*, 14/01/06.

Tags: [chance](#), [husband/wife](#), [intimacy](#), [literature](#), [death](#)  
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After Lisa left with Skye, certain events were lost to me. I know, for example, that I fell seriously ill, perhaps some kind of infection, but retain no memory of the incident. My surgeon here finds no record of a previous hospitalisation. I'm convinced, but afraid to ask further. They'll think I'm going crazy again.

Even the date of Lisa's departure is uncertain: sometime in autumn seven years ago. I only know my confusion lasted an entire year until the second spring when I encountered Ian Silver one day at Stevenson Books. Then the curtain began to lift. Perhaps I was only meant to be happy in love, but now who can say? I am determined not to let despair overwhelm me a second time. Perhaps the difference is that Lisa wished me to suffer but Ian would not.

I knew of him 18 years ago at university, when my mind was yet unclouded.

In those days I experienced intense feelings for a certain English student, whose name I have forgotten. We went to movies and shared quiet dinners, never acknowledging our evenings together as dates. His boldness and proclaimed sexual experience intrigued me, but I felt disgust at his superficiality and proclivity for gossip. Our attraction was never consummated. One afternoon at the campus coffee shop, he pointed out the young Professor Silver, who was known to live with a male lover, a cop.

'Isn't he repulsive?' said my companion.

I thought otherwise. As if Ian could feel our words and eyes upon him, he gazed toward me for the first time, clear blue through thick glasses. He was husky, bearded and a little shabby, clearly not to the taste of my fashionable friend. But I, seeing a perfect English professor in the making, looked away nervously. I was studying geology, incongruously, and did not meet him for another decade.

By then I was married seven years. The bad times with Lisa gave no forewarning, but tectonic shifts within our relationship must have awakened something within me. I, who had studiously avoided artistic disciplines forever, felt compelled to write poetry. At first it took the form of sonnets to Lisa and our daughter, Skye, the only people I allowed myself to see. But the passion ballooned into something larger, less distinct. I started writing on lunch breaks in the soil analysis lab where I worked. One day Margaret, my boss, found me penning furiously and insisted on reading some. She invited me to a poetry reading held once a month in the coffee shop at Stevenson Books.

Ian sometimes emceed those open mic sessions, so that was how we met the first time. He didn't see when I entered with Margaret, so I dragged her to a shadowy corner. Then I shuffled through my pages, looking for the least bald verses. All intended as love poems to Lisa, they had suddenly transformed into cries of loneliness. I folded my writing and stood up, seizing my jacket.

'What are you doing?' Margaret said. 'You're not leaving!'

She held onto me relentlessly while several others read. When a pause came, she propelled me toward the podium.

*I swim beneath stars tonight caressing watered cosmos  
while you sleep under a distant moon.*

*Dark water encloses my head. A vacuum, silent thunders.*

*Even if you wakened and spoke or dreamed of me and  
breathed my name I could not hear.*

I never looked in Ian's direction. Afterward I wanted to leave immediately, but had to wait while my boss went to the washroom. He came over to speak with me alone.

'You didn't study English, did you?' he said.

I took it as a criticism, and could only stammer in humiliation.

'I'm not talking about your poetry,' he explained. 'I saw you on campus years ago. Your companion was an English major, and I wondered if you might be, too. But I never saw you again.'

The rest of the conversation blurred together. When Margaret returned, I begged to hurry home. Lisa and Skye waited. My reading had left an impression on people, Margaret said. But the following month I made an excuse, and avoided returning.

The nakedness could not be denied. When you spend your life hiding from people, especially from yourself, then someone looks right through the façade, it starts to collapse. You can't continue an act you no longer believe. Our marriage was already failing. Lisa was unhappy. I loved her desperately, but she needed something better than desperation. When I finally recognised my truth and told her, I was unprepared for the consequences. Within a week, she and Skye were gone. Then began the worst time, hardly seeing my daughter for two years.

I didn't return to Stevenson Books until I was ready. Then, my intentions carried me indirectly, unconsciously. Standing at a sale pile, with an Asian bistro cookbook in hand, I discovered Ian watching me from the shelves of field guides. He came forward, speaking my name. Two years had passed. How did he remember?

'I didn't realise you read about nature,' I said, grasping.

'It was practically my first love.'

'Is poetry your greatest love?' I asked.

'No,' he said. 'That is Leo, but he died five years ago.'

Five more years, and Ian is my greatest love, but he died yesterday, not slowly in illness. He went instantly in the car accident that spared me by a hair's breadth, landing me back in hospital. When the nurse changed the intravenous tube in my arm this afternoon, I realised it is not the first time I've experienced that uncomfortable sensation. The halls are too familiar. These scraps of evidence feed my suspicions I've been through here before, past the brink of death. What other experiences did I forget before Ian brought life back into focus?

I've never lost anyone, not like this. I can hardly feel.

What next? Some loving and giving is so complete, nothing can take it away. I am not afraid.

I am afraid.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a  
story by Van Waffle.*