



Source: Stephen Farrell and Ian Mackinnon, 'Pragmatism set to triumph over fading charisma', *The Times* in *The Australian online*, 29/03/06.

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I never knew what to expect when I pushed the door open in the morning. Sometimes she was already awake, staring at the back of the door with her eyes wide open, watching and waiting for me. On those days I threw myself laughing onto the bed, noticing her eyes crinkling at the edges as she grinned and warmed to my enthusiasm. I curled myself into the crook of her arm while we snuggled, and rushed to tell her my news, sometimes speaking so quickly that the words tripped over each other, running together, as I related the events of the day before. 'Oh that silly Anna,' she would say, when I told of being snubbed, 'she doesn't know what she is missing,' and suddenly what had been such a tragedy last night was no longer very important. I smoothed her hair, and stared into her deep blue eyes, deeper than deep, endlessly deep, and occasionally as I stared a tiny tear would form at the corner, and slowly build up, until it spilled over the side and down her cheek. I caressed the tear softly away with my hand, and kissed the cheek, and she said, 'off you go, you'll be late.' I jumped down from the bed, turned and waved, and pulled the door shut behind me.

On other days she was still asleep when I got there. Then I would sit, cross-legged on the floor, and wait for her to open her eyes. I sat so quietly I could sometimes hear my own heart beat, and I watched and listened as she stirred in her sleep, or shifted her weight in the bed. I concentrated on the rising sun streaming through the window that brought the dust alive, and followed the flecks as they danced their way down to the floor. Sometimes, when the angle of the sun was just right, a silent ray tapped the mirror with the beveled corners on the wall opposite her bed, and broke into geometric shapes that shone brilliantly on the wall above her head until the sun moved and they disappeared. She would open her eyes slowly, blinking once or twice, and I knew she had been far away, lost in a dream, perhaps she even sensed my silent presence and dreamt of me. But by now it was late, and so I climbed briefly to sit on the edge of the bed, blew her a kiss and tore myself away.

Some days she was angry. Perhaps I made too much noise as I clambered in, perhaps she hadn't slept well, but on

those days her eyes shot daggers at me, and I cowered in the corner, as far away as I could get, wishing myself invisible, hoping the rage would pass. Her eyes weren't blue then, they were black and evil looking slits, and they looked right through me. If she moved her head, swearing, toward the wall, tossing and turning, I slithered toward the door on my belly, praying she wouldn't notice, hoping to get out before she turned around again. Then I swore I'd never go back. But, inevitably, the moment I woke up the next morning I was back, drawn toward her room, ready to brave anything for the chance of a good day.

The worst was when she ignored me completely. On those days she lay face turned to the wall, eyes fully or half-closed, murmuring softly, never acknowledging my presence. I, torn between making a scene or stealing softly away, often did neither, but stood at the foot of the bed, tapping gently on the floor with my foot, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes deliberately. If I got no response at all, I might hit the door hard on my way out. Occasionally she turned toward me as I left, a half-smile on her lips, her mouth open in what I interpreted as a silent goodbye. She might motion to me to take her hand, but this gesture made me nervous, and I looked down at the floor and fled.

There were days when she slept through my entire visit. If she'd been awake during the night she took a pill, I could see the open bottle and the glass on her nightstand, and she lay in a deep, drug-induced sleep, snoring loudly, fists clenched, dead to the world. I knew there was no hope for me on those days, I could squeeze her wrist and she wouldn't stir, and so I walked quickly away, stomping my feet, no need for quiet then.

One day the door wouldn't open at all. I pushed, and pushed again, and kicked, and scratched at it but the door was shut tight and wouldn't budge. I looked up to see the tall, dark figure waiting, took his outstretched hand, and we walked away down the now silent corridor.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Myrel Chernick.*