



Source: Alissa Rubin, Reuters, AFP, 'Ball in Iran's court as West outlines new deal', *LA Times* in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 03/06/06.

Tags: [intimacy](#), [corporeality](#), [disease](#), [language](#)

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"You should lie to make yourself sound less appealing—to gain the respect that comes with the courage of honesty."

My eyes barely took it in. They ran over and over the line, not comprehending, not soaking anything in. They had soaked themselves, already. They had absorbed too much, already, and the slightly complicated compound sentence only floated in front of them, a linguistic fog, unclear and obtrusive, confusing what they had seen, already, what they had learned in the last few weeks. They were in danger of losing their ground to the clumsy dash and awkward phrasing.

My ears. My ears heard it, clear as tap water, exactly as you would have ordered it, each word pronounced precisely, each nuance articulated according to your accent, a ringing directive spoken a few levels louder than necessary. My ears heard this sentence in order with the rest of your letter, following the line previous, preceding the line following. My ears had learned to read, gradually, in the many years you wrote to me. You too often attempted to cram heavy and complex ideas into brief phrases and inadequate nouns, verbs, the occasional adverb. I was probably the only human being capable of acting as your editor, after too much time spent as your transcriber. And, as we learned early on, I was one of the few qualified to act as your lover and companion, due to your demanding nature and lofty standards. Your total lack of organization. You were loquacious. Wordy. Often managing verbose austerity. I was succinct. Terse. At times, reticent.

This was the subject matter you decided to tackle in this letter, your most recent piece of writing.

I had considerable command over your manuscripts, presiding over them with total confidence and authority, from the first draft through to publication. And yet this particular letter made no sense to me. Its subject matter was completely foreign, its context, unfamiliar. Its sudden appearance on my night-stand was unexpected. I came home with a carton of milk, three oranges, and a box of steel wool, and you were not in your chair. You were not in the bathroom, and you were not sprawled on the kitchen floor, where I had found you on occasion when returning home from a short trip. You couldn't wait, you had told me on these occasions, for me to bring you a glass of water. You were feeling better, having a good day, and wanted to get the water yourself.

Instead of you, conscious or unconscious, in bed or on the floor, I found your letter on my night-stand, on my side of the empty bed. 'You are too good,' it started.

'I don't mean, you are an angel for taking care of me these last few years. I do mean, you are too exemplary. As if you existed for others to learn from. You walk around an image of goodness that no one can believe. But you must be believable, like any character in literature, or no one

will trust or appreciate you. They will throw you aside after twenty pages. I appreciate you because I know you, and because I have learned over time that your composure is your perfection, that you are what you appear. But even if you are without fault, you have to present yourself as though you are pocked, in order to be trusted. You should lie to make yourself sound less appealing—to gain the respect that comes with the courage of honesty. Otherwise you are lost and limited to yourself.'

I sat down to finish the letter and emerged from it knowing I would never see you again and never learn where you fled. I did understand why you did. You predicted I would—you didn't bother to include that much in your letter. Though you were dependent on me in all things literary, and though we fed each other, fed off each other, you had grown increasingly uncomfortable over the years with your physical degeneration. You became ashamed of existing in front of me. We learned, during our most recent visit to the purple-carpeted, over-sized, airport-like medical complex, that the latest development was the last. That the end, as you joked in the taxi, was near, and that it would only come after a steep and sudden decline.

I had been preparing myself, since the day we bought your wheelchair and attached a writing desk to its right arm, for your final days. When the doctor, the picture of professional composure, portentously removed his eyeglasses and told us that you had max six months, I was shocked. But I held together, because we had allowed for this possibility when we went over our finances and reviewed your life insurance policy. When I poured out your bedpan and combed your hair with a soft-bristled brush, I could see myself looking over you one last time, before they handed me the urn and I shook your ashes over the side of The Opium, our motorboat on the east bay. It was painful, to envisage myself committing such a significant act without you there to hold your hand on the small of my back. But I looked forward to it so that, the closer the moment became, the less sharp and pointed its effect would be.

I had not known, in the taxi, when you joked about your mini-apocalypse, that we would have only weeks, not months, to spend together before breaking apart and setting off on our own separate paths. I had expected to depart from your body when you did. And so I allowed myself a moment of weakness, of hubris, when I acknowledged that you had made this final escape from me, for me, to reveal my failure. To strip me of my careful cowl and show the world how much your absence would impinge on my perception of the justness of reality. To force me to gain the respect that comes with the certitude of vulnerability.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ella Longpre.*