



Source: AFP, 'Putin braves 'plot' for Tehran talks', *The Australian online*, 17/10/07.

Tags: [husband/wife](#), [streets](#), [travel](#)

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He could be under the wheels of a bus, the passengers inside it fighting with their curiosity whether or not to look out the window. There are grim-faced emergency service people holding up sheets, and clusters of onlookers standing on the pavement with their hands to their faces.

Or he could be one of these onlookers. He cannot resist disasters, be they car accidents with flashing lights and a litter of glass, or fallen trees after storms with the ozone scent of lightning, or a dropped carton of eggs on the supermarket floor with yolks bleeding.

In these situations, he'll stare and stare, his eyes glassy. I never know what he's thinking in these moments, because if I ask, he always says 'Nothing'. He could be thinking this nothing now, among a group of strangers, watching the rubber gloves and the stretchers and the police notebooks.

Or in the back seat of a taxi, stuck behind all this commotion, he's reading a newspaper article about the development of radio-controlled moths and has not noticed the delay. The taxi driver drums his fingers on the dashboard and makes attempts to catch his passenger's attention, with pointed looks into the rear-view mirror. What could he be reading that's so engrossing that he's failed to notice they have not moved?

'Interesting article mate?'

'Yes, it's about research into radio-controlled insects. The US Defence Force are funding research into steerable moths that they can use as spies.'

'It's a weird old world, weird old world. Look at this traffic...'

Maybe he's actually escaping from the city. His hands are under the white skirts of a laughing girl as they look out the windows of a train carriage as it takes them away. She's erased all of his memories up until this moment, so he remembers nothing of his former life. They're going to a place with apple orchards and endless sunny days.

Or, he's the person sitting behind this couple, their complete insularity making him ache for the times that he has felt like that, for then he wouldn't be worried about being late. He wouldn't be urging the train onwards to its first stop, where he'll leave the couple sighing at each other and run up the station stairs, and out the ticket gates, every footfall like a terrible second hand reminding him of his mistake.

His mistake could be spending too long searching for his keys. Or being kept too long on the telephone by his father, feeling that he cannot cut short the conversation because dad's old and has no one else to talk to, and every time could possibly be the last time.

Or it could simply be forgetfulness. A drowsy afternoon, forgetting time for the soup of warm air in his flat and the texture of the bed sheets, until something wakes him up like the slam of a car door or his neighbour's kid starting her saxophone practice. He remembers me and imagines me waiting and feels sick for the trouble he knows he is causing by his absence.

So he stops to buy me presents on the way. A box full of meringues. Or a bird identification book. Or bunches of flowers, despite my sinuses' objection to pollen. This just makes him later, as I sit here, disliking the part of myself that is annoyed that last week his mobile phone fell out of his pocket as he rode his bike down Parramatta Road, and was instantly crushed under the wheels of a stretch Hummer full of teenagers on their way to a Year 11 formal.

So there's no way I can call him and to distract myself I've tidied the house so thoroughly it could be a display home. I've polished the knobs on the stove, I've taken the attachment off the end of the vacuum cleaner and dragged the pipe along the edges of the rooms where hairs and dust collide in grey, linty tufts. I challenge anyone to find a hair that is not connected to a body, or a living dust mite.

I'm standing at the window, then I'm lying on the bed, listening for the sound of the gate. I feel like a dog, lying with my jowls puddled on the concrete path, waiting for the sound of the car engine I know belongs to my humans. Hearing it, what joy! I'll leap up and howl, and watch them rush to shush me up.

I'm standing at the window, then I'm lying on the bed, flipping past all the possible reasons why he's not here. All the possible delays. He's out there in the city somewhere, stuck inside its workings, he's alive, he's dead, he's with someone else, he's forgotten, he's asleep, if I put this Enoch Light record he hates on the stereo he'll be sure to arrive, if I leave the house for ten minutes to visit the corner store to buy one of their dusty packets of chocolate biscuits he'll arrive while I'm out, because isn't that how it always is? Stop paying attention, and you'll get what you want.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Vanessa Berry.*