

MY WIFE EMILY

A Novel

by

MAURICE ROWDON

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1.

Every morning the San Francisco Chronicle has a picture of the president somewhere. He says things are going to be all right and they're getting better. This is good to hear and I need to hear it because other people say they couldn't be worse. Sometimes he seems to say we should drop nuclear bombs because they aren't as bad as all that, and sometimes he seems to say we shouldn't. It differs according to the people he's talking to, but where exactly is the truth? It isn't that I'm worried about whether a nuclear bomb will be dropped but that even the possibility casts a shadow on my doings. I have to calculate that any action of mine may not have an effect lasting a year, ten years, much less a lifetime as my animal self (I'm a veterinary surgeon), bent on racial survival, demands that it should.

Therefore I am at one and the same time frightened of the president and thankful for him. I am frightened he might do it and I am happy and grateful that he doesn't, and above all I'm relieved that he tells me, almost every morning in the pages of the San Francisco Chronicle, that things are all right, that the world is a safer place now than it was.

All this brings me to Emily, who shone like Vivien Leigh in 'Gone with the Wind' when I met her in a café. The sun was shining as usual and a smart reminding breeze (reminding because it carries a certain chill) came up from the Pacific. I walked in and there was a friend of mine and she (the friend) said 'This is Emily' and we all sat down to coffee.

Emily was for me all I meant by Connecticut and white-painted houses behind rising lawns and front doors you could leave open all day and friendly sheriffs and kids playing Huckleberry Finn by the river in the dappled shade of wych elm and commencement days and black gowns on lawns and strawberries and cream and light frilled flower-printed dresses and chipmunks in the walls and a Broadway show in the evening and Long Island weekends and courtesy and black ties.

She stood my height, and we communicated with our eyes, and I could see children, animals and a wooden wide-decked house at the edge of a eucalyptus grove and years of happiness stretching to a natural death (or maybe a presidential decision, which would at least be quick).

2.

Certain forces were obviously working in Emily to make me think of her in terms of Daughters of the American Revolution and Pennsylvanian colonial towns with burg on the end of their names, rather than in terms of her inmost San Diego nature.

And I must have had certain forces in me which made her think of me (as she told me later) in terms of Marines standing tall.

The café where I met Emily was on a wooded hill above Sausalito. It had a corrugated iron roof and plastic green curtains to keep the sun off and old wooden wheels on the lawn in front. People went there for the quality of the icecream and the fact that it was all broken down.

The upshot of this meeting high above a mooring

station for yachts, in a green-tinted café wafted by the musty scent of eucalyptus trees, was that we met again at a gala dance in Mill Valley. It was two o'clock in the morning and I was still dancing with Emily. Her hair got in my face and it was like the first time I kissed a girl in a field and I put my nose in her hair and felt what a horse must feel like (veterinary surgeon again) when he puts his nose in his feedbag after a hard day, that warm hay smell.

3.

Emily invited me to her home which was in Emeryville not far from the ocean, a crowded bungalow with a strip of lawn in front and a warehouse with a hooter behind it, and also a dye factory which emitted a noxious blue smoke from time to time. Happily it wasn't her only house. She spent most of her time in Petaluma, in sloping country that had once been flourishing chicken land, only the price of eggs had gone down, and now all you see is a grazing horse or two. The scent from the woods is delicious of an evening when the air cools, and truthfully those nearby trees seem to open boxes of nasal delights. She had a three-storey wooden house nestling among the trees at the edge of the woods, and at night, she told me, the animals out there were all but deafening. She'd even seen beaver, which I thought had gone out before the gold rush. She had a fur book, beautiful color plates showing every kind of fur you can imagine, from stoat to skunk, this book was such a beautiful job, it cost over a hundred dollars a few years back, this was at a time when the publishing trade was featuring highly expensive books

of this nature for people like Emily.

Together, her hay-fresh hair close to mine, we pored over these furs, and over the photos at the end of the book which showed eminent hunters standing smiling with shotguns in their hands.

These evenings at Emily's remote Petaluma place were enchanting for a kind of artistic undertone which very much belonged to her personality. She had pictures made of 'cracked steel' on her walls. Cracked steel is steel broken at fantastically high temperatures so that it forms bubbles, contusions, chasms. They weren't framed square or oblong like other pictures, which I thought most interesting. For instance, one steel picture was a vast jagged mass with points so sharp that, as Emily said, 'lean against that and you come away in shreds'. It was just propped against the wall, triangular, stretching from floor to ceiling among the stuffed birds. No pets were allowed in the room because of that spiked cracked-steel picture, they might run against it, Emily said, and she didn't want the responsibility.

One day she said would you like to see me naked. This was de rigueur among my friends at this time. Most people said 'What about a hot tub?' but, typically, Emily went straight to the reason for the hot tub craze. I suppose pipe-smoking therapists would say there was a sexual element (to compensate for it being so small, I'm referring to the therapist's) but in fact if there was any sexual interest between me and Emily in the hot tub it never manifested. We sat there like babes. Only afterwards in my bed sixty miles away did I realise that I'd been watching the most lusciously Junoesque body I had ever seen, the most generous hips and thighs and lips, the most handsomely swollen breasts I had ever overlooked to touch!

It was an extraordinary doubletake. She had the same feeling about me. Next day we threw ourselves

onto each other. It had been the longest flirtation either of us had been through. It had lasted four days, seven hours. It beat other flirtations hundreds of percents. In no time we were married. It seemed right after the long self-denial we had inexplicably imposed on ourselves. Between us we now had eight houses and several large holdings.

These included a fine house we bought in Santa Rosa, where we lived nearly all the time.

4.

Emily and I ran as usual (I mean as we had usually done as singles) in the annual May cross-city marathon in San Francisco, the whole seven and a half miles of it, mostly uphill, and readers who know San Francisco from the boob series will know what I mean by uphill. This marathon is an abuse of the body, as both of us discovered when we returned to our de luxe apartment in the Richmond district among wealthy won ton entrepreneurs. We'd had something of an altercation before setting out as I insisted that Emily wear a tighter bra as she has enormous tits inherited from her mother. She wouldn't hear of it and of course she had an uncomfortable seven-and-a-half mile journey. I got ahead of her and finished at least a mile in front. This irritated her and when we got back she began flinging insults at me.

'You crotch-bug, you small-ass, five-foot-two simian!'

It was an amazing tirade.

'And another thing,' she screamed, 'take your fucking running shoes off, you're supposed to be a

therapist, you should know about not trailing shit all over your own carpet, especially as I do my yoga on it!' (she never did yoga).

Her tits were a problem to her, as was her large nose, in fact the two became associated with each other, in both our minds, and if a reference was made to one her mind included the other involuntarily. Needless to say, both her tits and her nose were just the right size.

I ought to say here that I'm not a therapist and I'm not short. As I said, I'm a veterinary surgeon. But in our sexual fantasies I was a therapist, and short in the ass, as she always said. I was also black-haired, balding, with a paunch. Also in these fantasies I took no exercise. In real life I have auburn hair, stand middle height with rather muscular shoulders and chest, and I do a lot of exercise, I go to all the marathons I hear about, including cycling ones. It gives me a sense of belonging somewhere for a few hours.

5.

The sexual depravity between Emily and me was awesome. We had 172 fantasies. Here I would like to say something about Emily's vagina. There is nothing worse, I often told her, than a formless vagina. She could turn hers into anyone's. At one time I would be convinced that she had a short, slim, nubile vagina, at another (perhaps only a few minutes later) that of a mother of three who had been riding the marital phallus for years.

She would squint at me in a certain way across the dinner table in Chinatown and I would understand---with

a quickening of blood between my legs---that this was a reference to fantasy No 48. She would quickly slip her tongue out as I turned to her in a cinema foyer and I would suddenly be helplessly adrift in fantasy No 56. Or she would seek my hand during a film, laying two fingers in the palm of my hand, and that would be 32. Our repertoire covered a vast territory (gleaned, in large part, from my entirely imaginary therapeutic work). I found Emily quite frightening in this respect. She could have me helpless in a split second and none of my friends knew why I was so docile. This is why I looked at her so little, not because of her tits or her nose as she thought.

Emily and I stood the same height, we played some good tennis together, we approached sex in the same athletic way. But we didn't enjoy it. We fitted each other like a glove. I mean, genitally. Penetration gave us a satisfaction we'd neither of us gotten from others. But still we didn't enjoy it---because everything else was missing. So we opted for penetration at all costs, at all times, in the hope (I suppose) that it would activate interest in other areas. We did it without preliminaries, in the most unlikely places---the more unlikely, the greater the thrill (we hoped). We did it in people's bedrooms when we were supposed to be taking off our coats etc. We made contact behind screens, sculptures. The fact that it had to be momentary and couldn't lead to anything made it more delectable. It became an almost involuntary act, like taking a cigarette. One hardly consulted one's spouse about that.

Of course we knew that something had to be done. And that was how the 172 fantasies came about. We turned ourselves into other people, so that not a moment of sincerity should occur between us. It did the trick.

6.

I'm not at all ashamed to say that I married Emily largely because she was involved in the most remarkable genetic experiment of this century.

To get the facts straight at the outset, Emily was a biochemist by training and had a large stake, career-wise, in medical biology.

News of this experiment never reached the scientific journals, let alone the media. I won't try to describe the technical side, which involves equations and chemical formulae so complicated that they would alienate the reader's interest at once.

I shall say little more than that this most significant biological experiment of our time involved only two rats---at least at the time when Emily first worked on the project.

These rats were not only many thousands of miles from each other but many thousands of miles from themselves.

Let me explain. The two organisms were male and female. Emily had charge of the male head, which was sited in a Sonoma County lab (I don't want to be more specific). She was in constant electronic communication with this lab. That is, she could see from monitors which she kept in all her homes the minute-by-minute chemical changes that went on in the male head, and whether these corresponded with the needs of the experiment or not (as for treatment---I mean medical treatment---of any symptoms, this was handled automatically by computer feedback).

The male head had been modified somewhat. Both

ears and the tongue had been removed, together with part of the neurotransmission function affecting the olfactory, optic and oral outlets.

But apart from this the brain and its stem were left intact. The modifications were made in order to simplify the sensory stimuli to which the head was subjected at all times.

This was where Emily came in. While no fewer than eight scientific disciplines were involved in the monitoring of the head, she alone was responsible for the head's emotional life, both from the point of view of chemically induced emotions, and emotions that were the result of autonomic processes to be expected in the ordinary course of a rat's life.

At this point I ought to say that the prime mover in the experiment, its eminence grise, as the French say, was the Nobel Prize winning physicist, Clemens Martinez-Holstein. He'd got the prize about six years back for his work in high energy sub-nuclear interactions, like Europe's LEP (large electron-positron collider).

Since then he'd been living in the Berkeley hills with his family, devoting himself to his vast library (he had no fewer than 73 biographies of the British king George II, so Emily told me) and whatever experiments reached his ear and took his fancy.

Clemens lived serenely with his devoted wife, giving modest dinner parties for a few select professors from time to time. I was once an honored guest. This was just after I married Emily. I shall never forget it. Another physicist, the renowned Arthur Schendt, arrived with his charming violinist wife Lucy who tours the world while he studies away at his Santa Cruz research center. Discussion went on until after ten o'clock (Berkeley dinners tend to start around six) and covered such a variety of subjects that I left the house walking on clouds.

'Wow!' I kept saying to Emily in the car. 'Wow!'

Needless to say, most of our Nobel Peace Prize winners have to cope with a plethora of daily press enquiries. Sons, wives and daughters are warned not to say a word on the master's behalf but to make a written copy of the reporter's question, then submit it to dad in his study.

I happen to know that Clemens gets on the average three calls a week from various parts of the world. Naturally, the press is a source of a good many wry jokes at his Elysian dinner parties. To see this gentleman talking quietly at the head of the table while his wife ministers to guests with what I can only call protean versatility ('what would you like, white wine, red, beer?') is a sight to behold, and that this great man condescends to play a game of poker after the coffee is a mark of his balance and humanity.

Again and again I pay inner tribute to those Scandinavian gentlemen responsible for the awarding of the Prize for their artful delvings and prying into labs and workrooms the world over so as to winkle out the truthfully rich men of our time---rich in mind and resolve.

7.

But back to the experiment. The basic thing to know is that a sustained electrical impulse will keep any part of the body alive even though it has been severed from the main trunk, provided of course that a blood link has been maintained.

It was Clemens who skittishly devised the name ROOV 1V---at an informal gathering on his lawn one Thanksgiving, so Emily told me.

The initials refer to Rat Organs on Vacation, and the number 1V to the fact that the experiment is now in its fourth stage. At least three more stages are contemplated.

In the case of ROOV 1V rat-parts were packaged separately, kept alive by electrical impulse, and blood link, and sent to various parts of the world not

only still alive but in computer-link with the other parts of the same rat.

The parts severed were the legs, heart, kidneys, liver, limbs and reproductive system, while the digestive tract remained, with the head, at 'head-quarters' in Sonoma County.

The female head was stationed in a genetics center at Carcassone, in France (Europe). Unlike the male head, it had been kept intact, so that its responses to the male sexual stimuli (that is, to the stimuli of the male head's thoughts, chemically induced and computer-linked with the female head) would be those of a normal female animal.

Of course, herein lay the astonishing success of the experiment---the fact that the two heads remained in sympathetic connection with each other despite the geographical displacement. This was achieved by common nourishment (administered at precisely the same times), common stimuli and common blood supply, and of course deprivation of nearly all local stimuli, especially in the case of the male head. That is, a mutual magnetic attraction was set up across a space of over eight thousand miles, operated by computer programs and satellite communication.

The spinal columns of both organisms, the male tongue and the two livers went to the famous James Macbride, late of Bradford university in England, famous for his rodent work over the past thirty or forty years and especially for the 'rat-war' involving a thousand rats in two armies equipped with radial or electronically charged claws which created the equivalent of radioactive burns on the 'enemy'.

The most important element in the ROOV experiment, the reproductive systems of both male and female, were kept at a genetic center in Sidney, Australia, which has some of the most advanced equipment available for artificial insemination and cloning.

Now when I tell the reader that progeny in the form of six healthy rats was produced by the female womb after prolonged stimulation of the male head in Sonoma County, he will readily accede to my point that ROOV LV is indeed the experiment of our time.

And when I say that control of this most important aspect of the experiment, the stimulation, was in Emily's hands, the reader will have no problem understanding my respect for this remarkable young woman with the wild blonde hair.

8.

I actually believe that ROOV LV couldn't have happened without her. She daily administered to the male head terror, anguish, tenderness, longing, horror, bewilderment, anger, suicidal urges so desperate that the tongueless and earless face would contort in a thousand helpless wrinkles.

At first her choice of 'moods' was haphazard, she once told me. Her stimuli were crude over-doses, producing immediate dramatic and observable results but without rationale. When Emily programmed a stimulus on her computer-system, the actual injection or electrical charge (say, into the liver or the thymus) took place thousands of miles away simultaneously, and within considerably less than a second it showed up on the face of the experimental animal.

Macbride's job in London was to safeguard the liver from drastic toxic effects, monitor the change in tissue so that this could be compared with Emily's 'emotional' monitoring system, and keep contact with Sidney where the male genitals were so that any phallic

erection induced by thoughts in the experimental male head would touch off the right response in the female head and induce vaginal receptivity.

At the start of the experiment Emily's idea had been to prolong any state of pain, horror etc in the male head as long as possible. Her idea was to stretch the 'negative' emotion to where sexual union would suddenly become the only alternative to suicide or madness (flies will mate in the last throes of arsenic poisoning). For, hitherto, erotic thought-pictures had been doggedly absent from the head.

But again and again she only produced a state of utter prostration, equivalent to the last stages of life---so much that when she suddenly administered a 'positive' stimulus (a powerful aphrodisiac, for instance) the organism was too weak to use this energy for recuperation, and the sexual effect was lost.

So she was obliged to reduce the negative stimuli. Of course this endangered the strength of the hoped-for sexual impulse! For it had to be strong, almost vindictive---in order to influence the electronic system connecting it with the female head (and indeed with its own reproductive system).

But the results of administering smaller doses and subtler combinations were, to say the least, impressive. No fewer than 16 times in as many days remote-controlled coitus almost took place. And on the seventeenth day it happened.

9.

Emily is a Sprade-Taylor and of course this made her a good 'catch' for the ROOV experiment. Her

family was high on the Democratic party's list of campaign-funders and fund-raisers. Martinez-Holstein rightly figured that a word from her might improve the federal funding for ROOV.

This in spite of her present low standing in the family. A few years before I met her she had sued her father for molesting her sexually when she was a child. She asked \$1.8 million and got an out-of-court settlement for \$1.3 million. Her attorney threatened to argue that she was sexually frigid as a result of her father's attentions (which she told me she had enjoyed 'wildly'), to which her father had said to his attorney, 'Damn right! I was trying to knock the horseshit out of her!'. He was all ready to enter a long scandalous case but the family stopped him. Or rather Sprade-Taylor Holdings stopped him, on the grounds that it would be bad for business and Emily would inherit around \$1.5 million anyway. So the settlement was made and he cut her out of his will, which lost her \$0.2 million on the inheritance but a) meant she didn't have to wait for her father's death, b) the money she got wasn't in trust but ready to spend.

She was 14 or 15 at the time of the molestation. She told me her breasts were well-formed at that time and she passed for 18. Her father had married her mother when he was eighteen, and her mother had given birth to her the following year, so when Emily was 14 he was a handsome and irresistible (her own words) 32. She said he would smack her lightly on the butt, 'chuck' her under her tits and sit her on what he wryly called his 'knee'.

'It was a riot!' she screamed. 'Everybody knew about it. At house parties the guests would say, there they go again, Sam and Emily are just made for each other!'

'Still,' I said (because I knew she wanted me to

say it), 'child molestation is child molestation.'

'You're damn right!' she bellowed, following it with one of her laughs that scared the cats next door.

I told her my father had given me a clip round the head when I told him to go climb a wall one time, and the blow sent me flying down the back stairs and I was out for an hour.

'What? What?' She rushed to the phone and called her lawyer Tim Spilman and his car was turning into our driveway within twenty minutes.

'Tell him what you told me!' she said.

I told him the story. How my father had been a strong man and had knocked me down the stairs, which had been concrete.

'Where was this?'

'In Houston, Texas.'

'Is the building still there?'

'I think they pulled it down to make a freeway.'

'I'll find out,' he said, making a note.

I thought it was all ridiculous but he said we might be able to sue the realtor whose building it had been. He couldn't sue my dad because the poor man was dead. And anyway he'd never had 2 cents to rub together.

'It's a long shot,' Tim said, departing with an arm-full of documents, 'but I'll do my best. Happening as it did over thirty years ago makes it mutton instead of frisky lamb. But if I can prove mental disabilities which have only just surfaced we might pull off a couple or three million.'

I paid several visits to a clinic of his choosing but they couldn't find me anything but sane, which provoked Emily to say (not entirely in good humor), 'They didn't damn-well look hard enough.'

But she was secretly impressed that three analysts had declared me unusually high in IQ and so stable as to make them suspect schizophrenia and search (unavailingly) for the 'other' personality which the stable

one was hiding.

10.

I was desperately anxious to take part in the ROOV experiment. It was all I could do during a veterinary operation, when my mind wandered, not to make vivisections of the kind that had made ROOV IV a scientific wonder, only this time the experimental animal would be someone's adored cat or dog!

In fact I suggested to Emily that from my point of view ROOV had one serious flaw---namely, the choice of rats as the experimental organisms. I argued that a cat or dog, or at least a Rhesus monkey, would have been far more suitable in that the facial expressions---of horror, anguish or whatever---would have been so much easier to decipher in a creature nearer, in both size and temperament, to man.

She saw the point at once.

She said, 'It's great to hear you talk that way, honey!' She grabbed my hand. 'I had a chat with Martinez-Holstein at the faculty meeting a couple of nights ago. Know what he said? He said, this project is a design for outer space!'

'Outer space?' I echoed.

'Just what I said,' she said. 'We can implement our decisions by computer-link and record the results from Mars or Jupiter or wherever we site the organisms!'

'Site the organisms?'

'You still don't see!' she said with a laugh which sent the cats next door bolting down the street with flattened ears. 'We can create organic life on these planets irrespective of conditions there---below-zero

temperatures, zero gravity, zero oxygen. Don't you see we'll have to have larger organisms for that? We can have the respiratory and reproductive organs here and the rest on other planets.'

We felt so spaced out by this conversation that we held hands all night. I think we talked till dawn came round. Euphoric tremors kept us staring into the dark, almost scared. Yes, it was scary being involved in an experiment of such dimensions! But isn't any really new idea, any revolution, scary? Can anyone claim that enlarging human awareness is a safe and comfortable transaction?

11.

She said to me one evening, after we'd had contact on the back seat of the Portsch (No 27), 'I feel I don't know enough about emotional reaction, period.'

She sat there thinking.

Then she said, 'I want you to go down that manhole across the street.'

'What?'

'Pacific Bell have a manhole over there, right by the church.'

'So?'

'I want you to go down it.'

'What the fuck would I want to do that for?' I screamed (having learned to raise my voice---and language---with Emily).

'To plant a loudspeaker.'

'To plant a what?'

Our house lay behind a sloping lawn, with an unimpeded view of the whitewashed Dominican church, Mary Magdalen, behind a line of young spruces.

A couple of weeks later I spotted a black guy going down the manhole and nipped across the street at once.

I said, 'Hi', gazing down into the darkness.

'Hi!' came a voice. His teeth and eyes lit up the darkness merrily. 'How ya doin'?'

'Fine. You OK?'

'Gotta problem down here. Aside from that, everything's cool man.'

And he bent to work again.

'Pretty day we're having,' I said.

'Sure is! You havin' a day off?'

'Yeah! I'm a veterinary surgeon.'

'Well listen to that! An animal lover, great!'

'That's right,' I said. 'Is this a regular visit of yours?' I asked him.

'I do a routine check Wednesdays. Phone wires is mighty complicated!'

So Emily had a week to complete the amplifier. She was constructing this at her lab. It was the size of a pea. This was her plan. I would engage the phone engineer in conversation on his next visit. I would express interest in Santa Rosa's telephonic system and he would invite me down the manhole. Once down there all I had to do was plant the amplifier on the manhole wall, having warmed it in my hand so that its adhesive surface would hold it fast to the concrete.

The following Wednesday I waited for him.

He said, 'Jump right down.'

I planted the amplifier in the first three minutes, while he bent down to show me Santa Rosa's telephonic landscape. He kept me down there another ten minutes. I pleaded jogger-lust and at last ran off. When I

returned he was gone and the sidewalk looked as clean as a whistle.

The amplifier in the manhole was tuned to Emily's hifi. All she had to do was to wait for a passer-by and depress a button, and watch the emotional reaction on the opposite side of the street.

By this time the reader will want to know what all this was about. I must say it staggered me, but I went through with it, absurd as it seemed. Emily's idea was to scare the daylights out of passers-by by amplifying certain noises under the sidewalk. She wanted to watch their reactions. She wanted to be able to predict certain reactions from certain stimuli. And I have to hand it to her---it was a success, mad as it seemed at the time.

She found a radio station in Michigan which sold sound-effects tapes, and she chose a set of their ghastly screams. It was these she put into the amplifier.

Coming up from a manhole on a serene Californian morning, it could knock the hell out of anyone unprepared for it. One such golden morning when I had a day off it started. We sat together at the window and watched.

There were few passers-by. But enough for our purposes. After an hour we had observed every possible variation of the fight-or-flight response---curiosity, panic, resentment, paranoia, disbelief, fury. And she seemed able to modulate the response by the sound she put out (also by the timing and intensity). Our unfortunate neighbours went through a whole theatre of responses.

One victim (Emily preferred to call them participants), a woman in her early middle age, already---before the sound was on---demonstrated nervous disability. Her walk was unsteady, her head shook slightly from side to side.

'Perfect,' Emily said.

'Why perfect?' I asked.

'I need the abnormal facial landscape. Don't you see? ROOV exnims' ('exnims' is lab slang for experimental animals) 'aren't exactly normal either! And this one!' She nodded toward the woman. 'Do you dig the walk?'

Just as the woman put her right foot on the manhole Emily pressed the button. One of the ghastliest screams I've ever heard echoed down the street.

The woman faltered, gasped, stepped back, almost lost her balance. She managed to recall enough presence

of mind to look behind her, then, finding no one, she began trembling so violently that we both thought she was going to have a fit. Her mouth open, her eyes wide, her cheeks oddly swollen, she went absolutely stiff.

Emily observed this with what I can only describe as ardor, her long hair falling to her shoulders in delicious, snake-like cascades. Suddenly she pressed a second button. A variant of the first scream emerged--- a moan so long, forlorn, that the daffy lady this time crashed to the ground. She lay on her back and began uttering short, stark, mechanical screams of her own. While her eyes stared wide at the sky and her legs went through violent spasms, she screamed with every breath as if being tortured.

'We'd better call the hospital,' I said.

'Cool it!' Emily yelled.

I realised she was recording the woman's screams. Then she let me call an ambulance. I rushed across the street to assist the lady but she thought I'd come to murder her. People started collecting. Finally, after about an hour (they'd been directed to Santa Ana instead of Santa Rosa by a drunk despatcher), the ambulance crew appeared and gave her an injection that put her out.

'How did it happen?' they asked with the minimal interest.

I shrugged. 'She just had a fit. Started screaming.'

'I never heard such screams in all me damn life!' a neighbor with two teeth yelled from across the street.

In the next few weeks Emily learned an awful lot about emotional reaction. But quite soon of course the neighbors began asking each other where the ghastly screams were coming from.

We thought it best to close the experiment before the tiny amplifier was discovered. And she'd got what

she wanted. Her observations showed her how and when, and in what sequence, she should apply her stimuli at the Sonoma County lab. The result was that phallic erection took place in Sidney, Australia the following week, and 17 days later, as I said above, coitus and triumphant conception took place.

I waited for her to feel bad about this street-experiment. All her highs were followed by terrible lows. It came after the usual two to three day interval. She puckered her brow and bit her lip and looked like a big helpless child. When I attempted contact she pleaded menstruation, though normally she welcomed penetration at that time.

Luckily Susan Riven called round.

12.

After marrying Emily I purchased a handsome medical complex on the outskirts of Santa Rosa, among spruce and eucalyptus trees. I took the 'Pet Hospital' sign down and replaced it with 'Cat and Dog Clinic'. It had two consulting rooms and a large well-equipped surgery, with an Italian-style kitchen and two bathrooms, and a shaded patio at the back where I could take snack lunches.

I put out enquiries for a business partner, and Susan Riven showed up among about five applicants. We drew up contracts and she bought me out of half the property (I meant to invest the purchase-money in an enlargement of the surgery, should our partnership go well).

Susan had black hair flecked with gray and wore her clothes very tight and (without going overboard

into teenage sexiness, for she was a mature mother of three) provocatively. A smart dark suit with a white poplin blouse and a full silk bow at the neck would be formal wear on any other woman. By clever tailoring she managed with this kind of outfit to suggest a ripe body under severe constraint, so that the sense of constraint intensified the ripeness and vice versa in an upward spiral that sometimes made me giddy.

At work she took her jacket off and slipped a white surgical smock on, but even this she managed to wear with a certain loose forgetfulness like a dressing gown, except that it was perfectly formal too.

By concealment Susan revealed more than most other women do in the nude. Her almost-primness, her manner of seeming to eschew intimacy of any kind, suggested intimacy of the most clandestine nature.

She got into the habit of visiting us, and she and Emily got quite friendly. On the day when contrition about the street-experiment hit Emily I heard their voices in the kitchen as I was passing. I was just off for the evening jog. I could hear from Emily's voice, its falling intonation, that she was telling Susan the whole story, and being (if I could judge from Susan's silence) only half-believed. I decided against the jog and joined them over a Johannesburg Riesling from one of Emily's Napa Valley vineyards.

Susan made a slight stiffening when I came in. It announced, by forbidding contact, the urgent importance of contact, so I made as much brazen contact with my eyes as I could. My gaze dwelled on her belly, her legs, her neck, avoiding her breasts as too obvious.

I tried to give Emily's disjointed and college-girl account of the experiment some degree of dignity. After all, Susan's husband ran a big corporation (in so far as any one man runs a corporation), and we couldn't have

Emily seeming the vulnerable little girl she was.

I said that ROOV IV was the most significant experiment for human evolution there had ever been. It was natural therefore that Emily should be carried away by it from time to time. And then, despite the distress of the victim (who was still in hospital), Emily had made many useful observations about emotional response which had crowned the experiment with its first success.

Susan nodded vaguely. My impression was that she didn't get the story anyway and thought that by showing silent sympathy she would help draw the conversation to a close and bring another bottle on to the table. As I was of the same mind (there was no limper lump than Emily in one of her 'states') I went to the cellar and brought up a better year than Emily had provided (the standard of the wine always indicated her valuation of the guest---Susan was clearly vintage but not grand cru).

As I uncorked the bottle Susan gave me a glance so brief yet pregnant that I nearly dropped everything. The atmosphere warmed considerably. But not enough to revive Emily.

The only thing that really helped Emily when she was in this state was her membership of the local QFBDA (Quick Fix Blood Donor Association). She would arrange to go round to the Kappa Epsilon hospital on Mount Shivar, to give blood. They knew her, had her medical track record, as they did all other members of the QFBDA, and her visit took up no more than an hour of their time. I often remarked that it was her modern version of blood-letting. Certainly she returned from the hospital looking serene. And after a short nap she was herself again. By the evening her sexual interests---a sure barometer of her health---had begun to awaken once more. She always said that giving blood was like the guilt passing out of her body.

'And it's good to help somebody, right?' she would scream, disturbing the next-door cats again.

But this could only happen after she had squeezed the juices of moral self-recrimination to the last drop.

'Do you realise what I made that woman suffer?' she asked me in the lounge when Susan had gone.

She raised her voice above Haitinck's interpretation of Schubert's 'the Great' which I'd just put on.

'Jesus Christ, man,' she went on, 'I invaded that woman's privacy, I abused her rights, I maybe took ten years off her life---!'

'OK, OK,' I said.

'OK, he says. She ended in hospital, man! Did you know I went to see that woman yesterday?' (Of course I knew). 'Ma'am, I said, I saw them take you away and I just thought I'd drop by and see how you were, and oh fine she says, except they don't believe me, but I'm telling you somebody was screaming so bad from under the ground, some murder or torture was going on for sure! And they don't believe me, they have three shrinks hovering round me all day!'

I was just about to say something comforting when she burst out with, 'That was my contribution to an innocent woman's life! She'll maybe end up in a half-way house or worse, she'll be made to feel a nut whereas all she had before was a nervous tic! Don't you see what's troubling me, man? what keeps me awake at nights?' (she slept so soundly you could have had a party in the bedroom).

I switched the hifi off and beckoned her to the water-sofa.

'Let's have a talk about it,' I said, putting a dozen pillows under her.

My job was to present the objective point of view. I'd had a heavy day with two Dobermann bitch hysterectomies and a lot of irritating phone consultations, one of which

had culminated in me putting the phone down on the caller, a foolish if pleasureable snit-show on my part.

Still, I launched into one of my quiet monologues which always had her wide-eyed in a matter of moments. I abjured her to remember her calling, to recapitulate for herself some of the breakthroughs already achieved by ROOV IV, and to remember that truth and evolution do claim victims and that there never was a bold new idea that didn't incur suffering for innocent people. It was regrettable but sometimes facts had to be gathered quickly and efficiently, for time was short---time always had been short in the halls of science where a breakthrough today was obsolete by tomorrow.

Yes, we were in a hurry! We wanted to get there! For thousands of years the world had hung about dreaming of getting there, but with us the buck had stopped, we were actually on the job and Emily was privileged to be one of the chief actors in the drama.

'Think of that drama first and last,' I told her, realising with annoyance that it was too late to go jogging, 'think of the fact that the whole world is waiting for this drama to unfold, that the future of humankind depends on people like you and that without you we return to the old dull ignorant existence people used to have! You know,' I said, squeezing her to me, 'you may call your feeling for that hospitalised woman empathy, but I call it squeamishness, and in this work, Emily, you can't afford squeamishness.'

She was already asleep. There would be no contact tonight, and probably none tomorrow. But then, on the third day, I would enter the kitchen and see a changed woman before me, her bra removed, her blouson zipped low, as if by accident.

13.

The following week, on Monday, she got a call from the office to say she was to fly next day to New York, meet up with other ROOV personnel and then fly on to Amsterdam, where there was to be a conference with the Australian geneticists (they were the key characters in the drama at this stage).

The fact was that the six rats born of ROOV were showing signs of depleted immune systems. There had been two deaths in as many days, due to hypoxia. The surviving exnims were certainly not fit for vivisection.

It was a top-secret event in Amsterdam---but I knew what the secret was. The new rat-sections were to have been space-capsuled, with only the heads on the earth (probably at Stanford University). A quick change of plan was necessary.

Naturally Emily was excited---she would have charge of the new heads, or one of them, and there was talk of offering her a lecturing semester at Sidney (this was spilled in a quiet phonecall from Arthur Schendt, the physicist, who while he had no part in the experiment knew all the gossip).

Emily was worried that for a week or more I would be without sex contact.

'Maybe Susan!' she said. 'Do you like her?'

And she called her (I sat smiling to myself).

When we were settled on the water-couch that evening I said, 'Listen, you mustn't be open with Susan.'

'Why not for god's sake?'

'To get from one point to another Susan never takes the straight line,' I told her.

In bed that night we were about to enter fantasy No 17 (strangers on a crowded train, nighttime, standing in the corridor etc etc) when Emily stopped and asked me

what the hell I was going to do for the next week if Susan didn't pay me the visits she'd half promised.

I said, 'Leave it to me.'

She lay biting her lip and said, 'You mean you've already made it with her huh?'

'Right!' I said proudly.

And I began telling her how it had happened.

Emily had been so busy with her exnims and the birth of experimental progeny that she just hadn't noticed changes in Susan and me (though maybe there hadn't been any changes to notice).

'It started at our first dinner together,' I said. 'At Peccadillos on Market in San Francisco. To celebrate our business partnership. It was the way she sat there, glanced up at the waiter, never crossed her legs or leaned or used her elbows. And her glances---so quick and elusive. Our talk was very formal, Emily---but the more formal it was the more provocative it became.

'Afterwards, sipping coffee a block away from my office, all alone, I got in a real excited state. I figured it was the way she seemed to deny any possibility of contact between us that made contact with her an immediate must for me!

'This happened,' I went on, 'the day after we all drank Johannisberg Riesling in the kitchen. Contact took place behind a half-open door, suddenly, with three pet-owners in the office. She didn't disrobe in the slightest.

'We got into the habit of choosing times when the waiting room was full.'

'Wow!'

'Or contact would take place at my desk after office-hours. When contact was over formality at once returned. We straightened our clothes and returned to business.'

'My god!' Emily breathed. 'What a number!'

'I believe she maintains the same modesty (if this is the right word) with her husband. Indeed, from one

or two hints she's given me it appears that even in bed his approach has to be clandestine. The bedroom door has to remain open so that one of the children might pass. Excitement rises when there are visitors in the house. Mostly her marital contacts, it seems, are outside the bedroom, whenever a moment's privacy can be snatched.'

Emily, trembling with excitement, gripped my hand and asked me, 'And the climax?'

'Like she's trying to hold it back but it runs away with her,' I said. 'Like breaking the law, outraging decency and the laws of propriety. You see,' I went on, 'she underpins her pleasure with the rigidity of her domestic life. She must always return home at the same time---never a date, a weekend away. And yet he knows exactly when she's been undergoing a contact.'

'How?' Emily screamed.

'The same way I do!'

'How?'

'From her extra guardedness and formality. And then of course once he's achieved penetration himself he can feel it physically---again as I do.'

'But can you be sure of that? I mean, if she never talks how do you know the husband penetrates?'

I said, 'With Susan it doesn't matter what the subject of conversation is, she always has a subtext. She might say---this is just an example---how demanding her husband's work is---it's a little breathless phrase---quite trivial, you understand, but it gives you the picture---the sudden penetration just when she's calling the kids in for lunch---a quick elicited hand as she bends to make the kids' bed.'

'My god,' Emily screeched, 'what you're saying is she has just one number! But oh my god what a number!'

She squeezes the juices of just one number!'

'We have 172,' I said. 'Shall we squeeze one too?'

So we did.

14.

We had just achieved penetration when a ring came on the waiting-room bell. That morning I'd seen Emily to the airport. After a hard day Susan and I had closed up and it seemed the most natural thing to do to make contact. We did so standing up, fully clothed, then comes the ring on the bell.

I opened the door and a female stood there with a basketful of cat.

'Is it an emergency?' I asked.

'Yes.'

I stepped aside to let her in. I was still half in erection and could see that Susan was equally aroused.

I took the limp cat out of the basket.

There then followed a conversation between the three of us which from the standpoint of the client was a professional discussion about feline symptoms but which for Susan and me was an unbearably provocative erotic dialogue, with its 'she's a little hot', 'just open her legs a little' and 'it doesn't feel at all congested' etc etc.

When the woman left, her cat already sleeping peacefully, I found that Susan was receptive as before, indeed more so, I knew of Casanova's advice, not to climax in the standing position, and after a time I led her into my office. There she sat on me, still buttoned everywhere, her lips closed---for we never kissed direct

on the lips. I was allowed access to her breasts only as a final, snatched treat, and then not always. I say we 'never' kissed direct on the lips but in the first shudders of climax, when all caution was thrown to the winds, her resistance melted for an instant and I could breach her defences.

I believe my climaxes with Susan were more copious than with any previous woman. Her gasps as I gave way to my prolonged ejaculations were alarmed, outraged, and this facilitated both her and my discharge. This is not to demean what I was doing with Emily. But the reader has to remember that Emily and I were in constant contact, and secondly that our pleasure depended strictly on a scenario and therefore cerebral control, and this inevitably restricted the climax too.

Removing all evidence of any contact between us after it had taken place was part of the ritual Susan and I observed, and even this had its erotic function. We shifted away from each other with hushed, eye-averted movements, hastening for kleenex, towel etc. Only the rustle of paper, the zipping of jackets, pants, skirts, was heard. Frequently this was enough to stir new excitement, so that we found ourselves in renewed contact, less cautious than before but, because of that (thrilling contradictions!) more repressive too, with gasps of disapproval or movements threatening immediate withdrawal, which of course only quickened the pleasure.

I remember on one occasion, after repeated contact, she had to phone home to explain her delay on professional grounds, and she did it still in maximum penetration. I was astonished at the control in her voice, as I was too by the quickening of excitement in the penetrative area while she talked.

I was still far from experiencing pleasure (as opposed to a perfunctory sense of genital release) with Emily. After contact with her I felt only irritation and a certain resentment. My mind was at once set on

activity---a swing in the hammock, a dip in the pool---preferably far from sight or sound of Emily. This was no rejection of her. I knew we would be in contact again soon, that we would be chatting within moments, busily preparing coffee etc. I'm only describing the first fleeting post-coital emotions. They were ones of withdrawal and acute distaste.

I noticed also that if she and I had too frequent contact over a period of days we would both experience outbursts of rage, always with good apparent reason, though the outbursts never happened when we were moderate in our penetrality. It was by now a regular and expected feature of our marriage, this rage, so much so that we set aside a room for our scraps. Since during a rage I would sweep the entire aftermath of a meal off the kitchen table, smashing plates, cups, glasses---and since these came from the Sprayd-Taylor household and included Wedgewood and Sèvres---we thought we should call a halt and I hit on the somewhat self-deceiving idea of organising the room next to the kitchen as what we came to call the 'Two' room (Tension Workout). There we placed furniture we set no value on, we filled the cupboards with theatrical crockery that cost a song, and we put pictures on the wall that we preferred to see smashed than hanging.

Emily was amazonian when she went in that room. I've never seen such ferocity in human eyes, or witnessed such wholehearted destruction.

But the sense of release was terrific. And in this way we didn't hit, bruise, bite or scratch one another as we had been doing.

One time I got in such a state I locked her in the Two room. She was banging on the door and screaming abuse at me. Meanwhile I dragged a crate of cheap red wine from under the kitchen table and began uncorking furiously.

'Let me out you motherfucking vagabond!' she screamed.

'I'll let you out!' I shrieked back. 'In my good time!'

She nearly pushed the door down---kicked it, ran against it with all her might.

When I had all the bottles uncorked I replaced them in the crate and carried the lot to the Two room door. I unlocked it and ran straight to the table armed with the crate while her fists pummeled my back. I managed to throw her off and get a couple of theatrical tumblers out of the cupboard.

'I want you to drink, you drooling cow!' I hissed at her.

I poured out two full glasses with quivering hands so that the wine slopped all over the table as she pushed and pulled at my naked flesh (for by now we had torn every shred of clothing off each other's bodies).

Then I turned to her and thrust one of the tumblers in her hand---'Here!' I screamed, 'drink to me! Marinate your stinking guts in this!'

And I suddenly tipped her tumbler so that its contents went full in her face. She gasped and spluttered. I threw the contents of my glass in her face too. I took out bottle after bottle and emptied them over her head, her tits, poured them over her hips so that the red liquid trickled down her legs as if coming from inside her, and she on her side, once she saw the name of the game, began grabbing bottles too until I was just as drenched as she was.

We were slipping on the floor, there were pools of it. But when she grabbed a bottle and instead of pouring the liquid out took it by the neck to hit me over the head with it I thought it was time to stop. I got hold of her wrists and held them down until she dropped the bottle and it **smashed on the floor.**

'OK, OK,' I panted. 'Pixie, pixie!'

We had long ago agreed that this word would end all fights, at whatever cost to pride.

She lowered her head and whispered, 'Pixie.'

We went upstairs and took showers. Then we had a quiet supper on the back porch, gazing at the apple trees and the humming birds that hung and sucked at the jasmine blossom. An owl hooted liquidly from a redwood tree.

And when it was quite dark and the neighbourhood hushed (the reader will never believe it) we returned to the Two room and began fighting again. Once more the clothes were torn off. The rest of the wine was poured.

And so it went on. The more fighting we did, the more we wanted to do. The more anger released, the more anger manifested. In fact we had to be careful that this didn't supersede and finally drive out our nightly contacts. But in a strange way it was similar to the contacts, almost more satisfying.

After those two fights we took another shower and retired to bed. Just before I got between the sheets she said quietly, 'Just one moment'. And she gave me the hardest smack in the face I've ever received. I did nothing. Only got between the sheets. Then when the lights were out I quickly, without warning, achieved penetration from behind and without the slightest reference to her pleasures, Without kiss or manual preparation (so important to her, especially the latter), I went about my business. Almost at once I came to climax. This was the deepest insult, from Emily's point of view, that a man could inflict on her. By the way, 'pixie' meant, apart from pax, mutual or shared climax, and she would often murmur it while we were climaxing. That was its power in ending our fights. Its utterance produced an immediate reversal of our aggression. The concept of mutuality in orgasm was most important for Emily. She might cry for an hour afterwards, if she 'missed the plane', as she called it: by far the deepest humiliation she knew. Better than a smack in the face, I thought.

15.

Two remarkable things happened while Emily was away. First, my office was allocated unexpected night-surgery duties which in the normal course of events would have come round a month or two later.

I and seven other veterinary doctors in the Santa Rosa area maintained a rosta by means of which one of us was available to the public every night of the week. I had been on graveyard duties only twice in the past six months so that when two of the other clinics became short-staffed due to illness, and the 24-hour service at San Rafael was unexpectedly closed after an earthquake cracked one of the walls, the first call was on me.

Now here's the second remarkable thing. The rosta secretary rang me and asked could both partners be on graveyard duties in case one was required for emergencies (in the lack of the San Rafael establishment) and one for handling the calls coming into the office while/if the other was operating on an animal.

I already had a couch in my office. Susan didn't. It was a matter of moving one in.

Emily left the Tuesday morning. News of our night-commitment came Wednesday afternoon. Susan's couch was moved in at seven o'clock that evening--- her husband and a neighbor brought it round while I was with a client.

There were two coffee shops and an eatery nearby on the plaza and we had our own kitchen facilities for any cooking we might want to do. I brought six vintage Beaunes from the house and a couple of bottles of champagne in case there was something to celebrate.

It seemed natural that we should have our meals together. Or rather, on the precedent of the first evening (when I impulsively opened a bottle of Dom Perignan) it turned out that way. Her husband called from time to time, and she talked to each of the children just before bedtime.

The astute reader will already have suspected what I am about to narrate---the fact that contact between Susan and me, now that we were to all intents and purposes living together, seemed if not out of the question, at least mighty difficult, given the fact that clandestinity was no longer necessary or even possible. Any overt penetration would have argued a relationship, an affair, and we both wished to avoid the semblance of either (on behalf not of the laws of propriety but those of pleasure).

We had a problem---how to continue contacts without disrupting the clandestinity. With classic feminine genius Susan managed it. From the outset she established an even greater formality than before. She said, 'This is a good chance to go over the accounts.' She repeated it to her husband in a breathless way, 'We're going to do the accounts---it's a heaven-sent opportunity.'

And do them we did. We worked without a break the first evening from eight till ten. That was when I brought out the Dom Perignan---'to celebrate our partnership' (the financial outlook for the company was considerably brighter than we'd thought). We ate sandwiches in the kitchen. At half-past ten we returned to work. Not until midnight did Susan look up from the calculator. We were surrounded by piles of invoices and receipts.

'Perhaps you'd better look at this,' she said, tearing off the last foot or so of the roll on which the monthly balance had been calculated.

I drew a chair to her side and looked over her

shoulder. She began pointing out certain discrepancies from an earlier calculation we'd made. As she leaned forward on one elbow I found my hand travelling under that leaning arm toward her knee. We went on talking figures. My hand lifted her skirt a little, gradually, while she went on whispering the figures. Carefully the hand sought its target and received a surprisingly warm reception despite no outward change in Susan's demeanor. To add excitement her husband phoned at that moment and she was obliged to hide her gasps as best she could while conversing with him.

The question arises here, did I feel differently with Susan after a climax than I did with Emily? Certainly I felt no distaste, much less resentment. And the reason was perfectly clear to me---that Susan and I weren't all that close and therefore negative emotions of intimacy were not provoked.

All I felt was a sterile sense of repletion (quite normal after orgasm). It was much like depression. The office looked bare, pleasureless. The future momentarily collapsed. That was why her quick return to formality after a climax was welcome to me. We had nothing to say to each other: sex-contact was our only form of communication. But this very fact---that we were in all else complete strangers---was what made the contact exciting, renewable. She and Emily had plenty to rap about between them. Not she and I. Hardly a word.

After the champagne, having discussed whether or not, in view of our improved financial position, to expand our business, we went to bed, she to her office and I to mine.

I must say that as I undressed and waited for her to leave the main bathroom I had a burning curiosity to see her and if possible touch her without the clothing that had hitherto intervened between us. I heard her go to her office and not only close but lock the door.

I went and cleaned my teeth. Then I returned to my office. I closed my door and switched out the light. For an hour or more I lay there thinking up a formal way of doing the most informal thing a man can do to a woman. But no solution presented itself. Then I fell asleep.

16.

On the Thursday, that is the day after our graveyard duties started, I was sitting at home (Susan and I had arranged to give each other half the day off during the graveyard period) when the physicist Arthur Schendt and his violinist wife Lucy came by.

I was surprised at the visit because I'd met them briefly at a ROOV LV party where a champagne bottle was broken over a cage containing the two ROOV heads (before the despatch of one of them to Sidney). We had hardly exchanged two words.

I sat them both down with coffee and he told me that Clemens Martinez-Holstein had urged him to come and see me during the absence of the ROOV LV team.

'He called me from Amsterdam last night,' Schendt told me.

It was the first I'd heard that Martinez-Holstein had gone too.

'Oh yes,' Schendt said. 'No ROOV conference could take place without him.'

'He wanted you to contact me?' I asked (the news had really blown a hole in my seat).

'Yes,' he said. 'It's about the possible use of domestic animals as exnims.'

A second hole in my seat!

I found myself trembling slightly, flushed. As always I held my shoulders taut and square and pulled in my abdomen, to hide this state.

'Like Clemens,' he went on, 'I've always felt that rats were OK as animal resources because of ample availability but surely domestic animals, being close to the human being, are much better at providing familiar responses.'

Almost my own words! I couldn't believe it!

He sat there puffing out cool shafts of light-blue pipe smoke.

When he started uttering concern as to whether I, a veterinary practitioner, could be seen to be participating in an experiment involving domestic animals---well, it was almost too much for me. For in one sentence he showed me that they were a) going to use me and b) going to hide the fact that they were using me. It was in exact detail the post-coital dream I'd been having for six months past!

'Do you think the Humane Society would help there?' he asked me.

'Well,' I said, 'the Humane Society's all for animal experimentation if that's what you mean' (which I knew he didn't).

'I see,' he said, tapping the tips of his fingers together.

He was a very dark man, thickset, quite pale, with a full, rather putty face. He looked a trifle overfed. Though still in his early forties he was too thick round the middle, and my judgement was that he took no exercise. He had sharp, dark-brown eyes.

'It's an absurd situation,' I went on. 'You can use as many Rhesus monkeys as you like but you have to be careful about cats and dogs. You get nutcases coming into the labs and taking photos and trying to interfere

with the grants.'

'Exactly,' he said.

'I mean,' I said, 'Rhesus monkeys make just as good pets as cats and dogs---for the spaceheads who need pets. I must say, of the creatures who come into my office, the ones who need most attention are the human ones.'

His wife Lucy smiled.

'Anyway,' I went on, 'I think I can arrange for cat or dog exnims without the Humane Society being involved, not officially that is.'

'Does the Society do that kind of thing?' he asked.

'I don't know about the Society,' I said. 'I do know about humans, and Society officers are humans.'

He seemed to like that remark. I noticed his wife's eyes gleaming, and she looked at me from under her eyebrows, always a telling sign in a woman.

Apparently a ROOV V lab was being established to deal with the next stage of the experiment, probably at San José. I undertook to have three standard poodles (as among the most intelligent dogs available) and three German shepherds (as the most powerful and courageous) delivered to the Sonoma County lab within six weeks.

Schendt said he knew this would make Clemens real happy. The public need know nothing about it (that is, he said, the media). By the time ROOV V was completed we could quickly switch to guinea pigs and publicize it that way.

'It's a funny thing,' he said. 'The public seems to think guinea pig is another name for experimental animal and it actually likes being experimented on!'

We had a good laugh.

As they were going his wife Lucy turned to me and said, 'I've just got a kitten. It's for our son who's

going to be ten next week. Could you examine it and maybe give it a shot?'

'Sure,' I said.

It had been a pleasant morning. I knew what joy Emily would feel when I told her the news. From now on I was as much part of the ROOV experiment as she was.

For Clemens wanted me to do the vivisection as well. The third, and biggest, hole in my seat! Schendt spilled it just as he was getting into his car, very cool and urbane---I wanted to hug him!

17.

Next morning Lucy Schendt came to the office with the kitten and we talked quietly while I did the examination. She hardly said a word but I had the uncanny impression that she was telling me all about herself. It was the feeling that you suddenly have a sister. She stood leaning against my desk in a custom-built track suit. When I'd finished the examination and done the shot she continued to stand there. I invited her to sit down while the kitten played around on the floor pissing everywhere.

I said, 'Don't worry, the floor gets swabbed every hour.'

There were clients everywhere. I asked her what it felt like facing a big audience for a solo and she just shrugged. I never saw a person so natural and unforced in behavior.

I said, 'Why don't you have lunch with me?'

'OK,' she said. 'I'll take Snakebite back and see you later---what time?'

I said, 'Why don't we meet in the carpark behind

the plaza at one o'clock?'

I planned to take her to a Mexican place outside Concord. I had the afternoon off, so we could hang about if we wanted to. Life seemed to have decided to work smoothly on all fronts in Emily's absence!

It was a most contented lunch. We found ourselves holding hands. I drove her back to my place and there was no wimpy talk about how her relationship with her husband wasn't working out etc. Whatever that relationship was doing it didn't stop her falling in love with me, or me falling in love with her. This is what happened.

I took her to the bedroom and we were naked in a second. It was the first time I'd done that with a woman. I'd always started fully or partially clothed. Nakedness didn't turn me on. In fact I didn't like to look at a naked woman. The very secretiveness of sex was dispelled by nakedness---or rather I would say it was wantonly dispelled.

But it was different with Lucy. She was pleasantly plump, soft, her skin alluringly dark, her breasts full and maternal. It made me giddy, like seeing my own mother. We fitted each other like a glove. I actually looked at her. I found myself gazing at the vaginal lips, the first time I'd ever dared to do it. We were looking in each other's eyes during the climax. I was crazily in love---it was the first time I'd actually looked at a woman, I was amazed, I spent the rest of the day in space.

I could think of no one else. With Susan I pleaded a lower-back problem and hobbled about the office. As her taste was for unbroken formality there was little she could say or do. She was stymied. She kept talking to her husband on the phone. She almost told him about it---maybe she did. Meanwhile Lucy and I were together half of each day.

Emily called me from Amsterdam but I didn't tell her about Lucy. When she asked how it was going with Susan I said enthusiastically, 'She's too much! She's a riot!'

She laughed deafeningly and then said, 'Hey, I want to tell you about Clemens. He's coming on real heavy. He took me to dinner last night, he's so traditional it's outrageous! He said, I'm falling in love with you, may I call you Emily? Can you beat that? And he's building up to THE moment!'

'I can't believe it!' I yelled at her.

'Do you realise this means I get not only the Sidney job but maybe visiting lectureships in London and Paris? He's pushing my name everywhere! And here's something else you won't believe, he keeps on saying how bad he feels about his wife, because of him falling in love with me, I mean it's outrageous, it's like being back in the 1800s, and he's an animal underneath! Huge!'

All this came as the best news possible. Maybe Emily, despite her self-defensive amusement with the old-world Clemens, would hook up with him permanently. I hoped so because, to my bafflement, I intended to marry Lucy as soon as possible.

Lucy and I talked it over. At first the obstacles seemed insuperable. She had two kids, and her husband seemed to be looking forward to another twenty years of marital life with her. There was my connection, through Emily, with the ROOV experiment (I couldn't afford to have Schendt turn against me).

But we saw that with a rational approach it might all be arranged in time.

Then Lucy told me, very quietly (so like a woman), that Arthur Schendt had for some time been in love with a Cal student called Diane, a dazzler who wanted to marry him at all costs. I could have danced with joy (ofcourse Lucy had been saving it up for me).

Was there a real chance of olde worlde Clemens wanting Emily for life?

18.

The reader may have noticed that I make no attempt to describe my naked hours with Lucy, though I spent paragraphs describing clothed hours with Susan. The reason is that with Lucy lovemaking passed like a dream, I can no more recall the details than I can those of my own birth.

One evening we vowed to marry each other whatever pain we might cause others, and she bit my finger (in a Union Square bar in San Francisco), then hers, and rubbed them together and said, 'Our bloods are now mixed honey.'

Susan had begun looking at me strangely during the night-shifts. We still ate together, drank wine together, revised the accounts and talked about company policy. Once I found it impossible to contain myself. It was the way she was sitting opposite me, demurely crossing and uncrossing her legs. Because of Lucy I now felt much less subservient to Susan's laws of outward propriety. I went over to her and simply drew up her skirt, making her gasp with astonishment. In a moment I had uncupped her bra and her luscious breasts stood bare and swollen in my grasp. I could gaze at them to my heart's content. It was the realisation of at least two nights of dreaming on my part---the first two nights of our graveyard duties. I kissed her on the mouth, in a moment I pulled her to her feet and achieved penetration. All she had on were her shoes.

19.

I find myself about to describe those silent hours with Lucy while blackbirds sang in the apple trees---but a sense of modesty forbids me, a protective reluctance to expose her to a stranger's scrutiny. Even now, when she, or part of her, is at least eight thousand miles away, I feel the same desire to shroud our lovemaking in an aura of secrecy.

I could describe certain touches, gazes, and kisses of such bewildering enjoyment that we almost fainted--- indeed, I believe we did faint, often, because I can recall so little of what went on.

It was on our third day together that she came to my house carrying her violin.

She said, 'I've got a recording at Palo Alto and, you know something, on the way here I felt a desire to practice here, with you, because that's what I shall be doing when we're married!'

Now, though I hadn't experienced violin practice, especially the intensely advanced and complicated practice required for concert performance, I did realise that even an hour, let alone years or decades, of violin practice (of however expert an order) would drive me well and truly up the wall.

But I shrugged this off as being churlish of me, and a leftover from the Emily marriage.

Emily by the way had phoned the previous evening to tell me that she and Clemens Martinez-Holstein had made full contact. Rather oddly, he had asked her to put an overcoat on and had penetrated with it still buttoned up.

Lucy began practicing in my workroom and I couldn't stand it. I mean I couldn't stand a moment of it. I walked in the garden but it pursued me through the windows. I returned to the house and closed myself up in the Two room but it pursued me there through the walls. I strolled upstairs trying to look casual and forced a smile as I entered my workroom. I hadn't realised quite how deafening a violin can be at close range. I stood there, fixing a distant gaze of admiration on my face and hoping against hope that she would stop. Not a bit of it. She saw me and just went on. Perhaps she thought I was enjoying it. Well, maybe Schendt enjoyed it. His head was in particle waves and quantum leaps, and no doubt earthly sounds, even maddening cat-like sounds, didn't get through to him. But my ears are sensitive. And while Emily could sometimes be loud, she never reached this decibel level.

I could see it was going to make domestic life quite impossible. Every cell in my body was an electric battery.

I quietly left the room again and went to the front porch. You could hear it whining and squealing between the trees. What the cats next door thought of that I don't know, but I wager they preferred Emily's laughter.

There was nothing to do but leave. I jumped into the Porsch and went downtown to Safeways. After an hour I returned and to my everlasting joy she'd stopped. She was in the lounge, on the phone to Schendt. I heard her say she'd finished the recording. That was odd. Then she said, 'It went off quite well, the orchestra was really together.' There were lots of yesses and nos. She said, 'I must say the brass was a bit strong. And the beat!' A pause. 'Oh yes! Very strong! He wields one of the firmest batons in the music business.'

I realised, less with shock than a slow dawning

perplexity, that she was talking about me, about us, about the thing no words could describe!

I walked into the lounge ostentatiously weighed down with Safeways bags. She put the phone down and gave me a smile.

'I hope I didn't drive you out of the house with my practicing,' she said.

'Not at all,' I said, on my way to the kitchen. 'It gave me a front-row seat at a great concert!'

I couldn't resist her as she strolled into the kitchen behind me and watched while I put the provisions away. Later we had contact but all the time I heard the violin. It whined and it squealed in my ears every time she moved or sighed or kissed me.

She wanted to discuss marriage plans again but I said, 'Let's have coffee near my office, I'm due there at three and it's half-past two already.'

In a dark corner of my local café I told her, 'I don't think I could live with your violin practice.'

She looked up, 'Oh?'

'Maybe you could get a studio some place. I think we should keep our professional lives separate. I'll promise not to bring sick cats in the house if you promise not to bring your violin.'

She nodded and said nothing.

I knew it had touched a steel chord in her somewhere. We kissed gently and parted.

I worked like a maniac from three until Susan came at six. Then we closed up. I realised I felt relief to see her. We ate the won ton soup and beef dish she'd brought along. We drank wine. Then we returned to our accounts. Before she sat down, however, I put my arms round her from behind and cupped her breasts in my hands. I unbuttoned her blouse, still behind her, unclipped her bra and then took every shred of clothing off her. I drew her to my couch. She had her eyes averted. Her nakedness was the most naked nakedness I'd ever seen.

It really seemed illicit, therefore all the more painfully exciting. It was Lucy, as I suggested before, who'd given me the courage to break Susan's formality down---or rather the skill to break it down without destroying it. For where clothing had created formality, nakedness now did so with even more exciting effect. Still we didn't kiss, still I had to snatch my view of her breasts, not because she resisted me but because, knowing my intentions, she managed to turn away and with a subtle movement that suggested both pleasure and withdrawal thwart my mission. Which only produced a cleverer attack on my part, until finally I was outrageously, scandalously successful and we joined forces for the grand finale.

20.

I had a serious problem. My ejaculations were increasingly small. After climax I felt an irritation similar to what I felt after Emily. Sometimes, after a climax, I would avoid seeing a client for a time. You have to glad-face people if you handle their pets. Part of the job is making them feel their pets are candidates for sainthood. So you don't want to be feeling nauseous or tetchy.

I got worried enough to consult my shrink, and we had a session dealing with impotence and the primal scene. He said I felt bad after a climax because I was terrified to displace my father in the parental bed. He pointed out that the son enters the parental bed, symbolically, whenever he copulates, and he takes his father's place. He penetrates the mother and this entails guilt and remorse in precise proportion to the

fear he felt toward the father, and proportionately to the extent to which he was rejected by his mother on his first libidinous approaches to her.

He also said I should fry some eggs with unsyruped dates as an aphrodisiac. He said the Arabs had been doing it for centuries 'and they screw the whole time'. He said to up my ingestion of protein. Also vitamin B and megadoses of C, buffered to avoid the acid effect.

It did the trick. On the other hand, while it bettered my performance and I no longer felt depleted, the post-climax irritation remained. I realised I was missing the tension workouts with Emily in the Two room. Sometimes I would have to stifle a desire to hit people in Safeways.

Schendt called me and started talking about the ROOV project again. I realised he was telling me that whatever relations I might be enjoying with Lucy, my commitment to supply six dogs remained, and that I was to do the vivisection as already hinted.

This was a great relief. Every time Lucy and I made love it felt like I was saying goodbye to the ROOV project and missing my chance to compete with Emily for precedence.

Emily and I were in competition about most things. If she had a raise I arranged to take a similar amount out of my own profits, to equalise our incomes. If she knocked ten seconds off her two hundred meters record I trained until I could do better (and she expected me to). If she beat a girlfriend at tennis in two sets I had to do the same with a man in three.

Schendt came to see me alone during office hours. Without anything very direct being said, he gave me to understand that he was willing for Lucy to sue for divorce on condition that she didn't claim alimony and kept his dazzling Cal student out of the court proceedings.

'Could I suggest a settlement between us?' he

asked. 'Something we could keep out of court?'

'Sure,' I said. 'It's a waste of time and money settling things in front of a judge.'

'I agree about that,' he said with a smile that swelled his cheeks in a way that made it seem he'd had three cholesterol-loaded breakfasts.

Lucy and I then had a meeting to discuss final details. Emily and I had been sensible enough, when we'd gotten married, to draw up property contracts for the eventuality of a divorce. I was to take the Santa Rosa house and two Palo Alto properties while

Emily would take the holdings at San Diego, Lake Tahoe and Los Altos. Her other properties in Emeryville, San José, Santa Cruz and Napa Valley (the wine concern) were to remain exclusively hers, like two other properties in Maine and Houston, Texas.

Schendt's problem was much easier. His contract gave Lucy their house in the Berkeley hills while he kept a more valuable San Francisco property in the much-coveted Presidio area. She and I agreed that we should sell the Berkeley hills house and with a 50% contribution from me purchase about five acres in the Danville area where we would build a house. I would be entirely responsible for the construction, decoration etc of the house, and a separate agreement would give one-fifth of the finished property to Lucy and the rest to me in the event of our divorce.

Lucy preferred Danville's hot, dry climate to the damp and pollution of the Bay Area. She said the latter took her strings down a whole key sometimes.

I must say, those strings, up or down a key, were decidedly bad news from my point of view, the one block in our marital discussions.

'Are you going to practice at home?' I asked her.

'Of course,' she said.

'Then you'll have to build a soundproofed studio on the Danville property.'

'You just don't respect my work,' she said. 'You're fixated with love for animals but not for my work. But I make more money than either you or my husband!'

'That's beside the point,' I said (it irked me, however).

'It's just another example of men putting down women!' she said.

'I'm not putting you down!' I replied. 'In fact I can't imagine anything better than coming to one of your concerts because you'll be accompanied by an

orchestra and presumably the music will follow some kind of design instead of being a formless wail!

Of course I shouldn't have said that. It was too much for her. She jumped up, her otherwise serene gaze flashing with fire. She was out of the house in a moment.

Happily Emily was due home the following day.

21.

She did a dance on the tarmac when she saw me. Her hair was wild as always---flowing and unruly as she walked with long strides from the New York plane.

'The mother-fucker!' she screamed at me almost before she was through customs, 'he's got herpes! I said my god you've got a fucking nerve! Now he tells me!'

Other passengers were looking round with interest, not that she would have minded discussing it with them.

'But Emily,' I said, pushing her luggage cart toward the carpark, 'didn't you ask him first? With thirty million cases of herpes in this country didn't you ask him? I always ask first!' (I never do).

'Oh come on, you don't ask the top boy in nuclear physics if he's got herpes!'

'Listen Emily I'm not touching you until I know you're clean, no way---!'

'OK, OK, I'll get a hospital check right away!'

In the car I said, 'Does this mean you're out of the ROOV project by any chance---you've had a row with

him?'

'Are you crazy? I'm further in it than I was even 24 hours ago! There's nothing he won't do to cool me off! First he wants my respect back, then he wants me back!'

'Great!' I said. 'Great! By the way Schendt dropped by---'

'I know. I sent him. I told Clemens, call Arthur Schendt and tell him to get his ass over to my house and talk about these dog-exnims my husband is driving me nuts about. I thought, I'll get something for being gyped!'

'So it was you!' I said.

I felt two ways about this. It meant that however successful my work in ROOV turned out to be, I would still be under an immovable obligation to her.

'Did you discuss money?' she asked as we turned off the freeway.

'No.'

'Good. Because I found out in Amsterdam that federal funds have been doubled---in fact that's why the Amsterdam conference was called, because Clemens and Macbride in London got the OK to move on to ROOV V, VI and VII.'

'Wow!'

'So you'd better get those dogs delivered,' she said as we drove into our driveway. 'Before somebody changes his mind.'

When we were in the house I told her that Susan and I still had two more nights on graveyard duties, which had been extended.

All she did was laugh.

Then I said, 'I've got a couple of hours before I'm due back at the office.' I looked at her closely and asked her, 'What was all this about you being in an overcoat when you made contact?'

'That's right!' Emily screamed. She was bubbling

over to tell me. 'I couldn't believe it! He's got a thing about overcoats. Every woman has to be in an overcoat. He says he thinks it's because he was born in Russia in January. But, man, it was Amsterdam's annual heatwave! I said does your wife have to do this? What are you talking about, he said, you don't think I have sex with my wife, do you? After all, he said, I love and respect her! That gave me a lot to think about. I thought hey wait a minute! Where does Emily come in? Does he take me for a hooker? But it sort of got me, know that? It excited me! We had to leave all the overcoats in Amsterdam. I ain't taking back 200lbs of excess luggage in overcoats, I said!'

'And buttoned up?' I asked, fascinated.

'Right! Right! I couldn't believe it! I said but how is this done physically man and he said don't worry about that, I've been doing it for as long as you've been born.'

Well, this conversation naturally excited us, particularly as Clemens's number resembled so many of our own. We went upstairs and did No 57. We chose it spontaneously. For me there was an added reason. No 57

(the sudden fully clothed encounter of two strangers) was similar not only to Clemens's scenario but to Susan Riven's too. I remarked on this to Emily, which raised not only our excitement but our sense of having had a common experience in the last few days. It made us feel close.

I must say, if I'd had worries about my potency before, they were dispelled now. I got to the office at one minute to three like a marathon runner.

I said to Emily before I left, 'I'll tell you one good thing about fantasies.'

'What's that?' she said.

'They don't have herpes!'

She laughed louder than Lucy's violin.

22.

When I walked into my office Susan was on the phone with Emily. They were rapping like sisters. The subject was Amsterdam and canals and how it rained the first two days but cleared up and she saw the pictures she wanted to see.

I heard Susan say, 'I think I looked after him OK. To the best of my ability!'

It tickled my desires, barely recovered as they were from Emily's deprivations.

But there were more urgent things on the agenda. I called my Humane Society contact, or rather the friend whom I took to have a cooperative Humane Society contact, and in circumspect language which he understood at once asked him to speed up the delivery of the dogs. He promised them within five days. I leaned back in

my swivel chair feeling satisfied.

It was good to have Emily home again. The last few days had been alienating, strange, and I was glad to forget them.

Clients started arriving thick and strong, and I did two minor operations. I wasn't through until seven, by which time Susan had arrived back for the night shift. I felt pleasantly exhausted. I found myself greeting her like a longlost friend. We'd no sooner closed the office than Emily called.

She said Clemens was still 'coming over heavy', in fact from a pay-phone in a Santa Rosa bar. He was urging her to come to the bar---'in an overcoat' (it was climbing 85 degrees). She was flustered, that is really enjoying it.

'My only concern is the herpes,' I said.

'I told him he'd have to wear rubber and he said he'd wear tarpaulin if I wanted him to. He's a fanatic. He wants us to take a room at the St Francis. For two nights! Didn't you say you were on graveyard duty for two more nights?'

'That's right,' I said.

'So maybe I ought to at least go and see what he wants.'

'As a double check, you mean?'

But she didn't hear this. 'Where's the Brief Encounter bar?' she asked.

'Take a right on Abbot, left on Twain, right on Market and you'll see it on the left, opposite 17th.'

'Well,' she said, 'I'd better get dressed.'

'In an overcoat,' I said.

I was decidedly worried. When men of Clemens's age started losing their heads they brought not only themselves down but everyone they were closely associated with. That now included me. And I had my neck stuck out with these dogs. Of course it might be that he'd been playing this sort of game for all his sixty-three

years. But if federal funding and the public image depended on him the danger remained.

Secondly, again on the assumption that he had lost his head, he might start turning Emily's too, and she might sue for divorce at just the wrong time. After all, my connection with ROOV depended on her, not on Lucy, so what the hell was I doing marrying Lucy? Also I needed Emily. She could keep a leveller head than I. Unless she was in one of her victim-syndromes, which hit her as de^{pression} does others.

But I mustn't seem to oppose a divorce if she really wanted it. In that case I should play the injured party to whom she must make amends (remember that as Clemens's wife she would have twice the clout in ROOV). He also might feel guilty toward me, being ye olde worlde, and I could play on that too.

Then wasn't divorce an ideal outcome? My head was in a whirl.

I was in no mood for contacts with Susan. I felt that my home, suddenly reinhabitated an hour ago, was now doubly empty, because I might not be living there as Emily's husband much longer.

I've often heard my shrink say that fear and sex are impossible bedfellows. I was certainly as limp as a rag, and though my mind wished me to take action my genital area seemed to feel otherwise.

I made an excuse that I needed fresh laundry for the night and drove back home. The bedroom looked like after two burglaries. Every drawer was open. She must have tried every overcoat in the house, spring, fall and winter. A desire to please so intense surely argued passionate interest on her side?

I hurried downstairs and ate as many fried eggs and dates as I could, then raced back to the office. Susan had dinner ready and I picked at it without saying I'd eaten. I drank more wine than usual to stimulate an appetite but it only bogged down in the dates.

I suddenly realised: if he wanted her in overcoats he would never want her for life! If he wanted her in overcoats he didn't want her in his bed.

Remember that while Emily and I had a range of 172 fantasies, which we were revising all the time, he had just this one. That is, instead of fitting his woman into numberless roles, as I did, he fitted her into overcoats. It could hardly last.

I decided to verify my hunch. After our meal I again excused myself, saying I had a spot of phoning to do, and went to my office. There I dialled Clemens's number, knowing he wasn't there. One of his sons answered first. Then his wife came.

I said, 'I'm Emily Sprayd-Taylor's husband' (the name opened doors like a remote-control garage-door button).

'Oh,' she said, as cool as a Rockefeller. 'He's away for a couple of days.'

'I thought he'd just got back from Amsterdam,' I said crudely.

'He is back from Amsterdam but, you know, he's an awfully busy man. If the press isn't after him it's the university or one of the Washington committees. I always tell him his journeys abroad bring him twice as much work at home, it piles up in his absence.'

'You mean,' I said, playing for charm, 'it isn't all roses being a Nobel Prize winner?'

'That's right! I just wish they'd give him a little leisure sometimes! Mind you, Mr Sprayd-Taylor' (~~I~~decided to let that one go) 'I don't complain. I get a lot of flattering attention which I really don't deserve. And we have a good life on the whole. We've never missed a vacation together. We're off to the Bahamas next week. We have a little house outside Blue Haven. From there we're going to a physics conference in Helsinki which will take up two days. Then we shall spend a couple of months in London,

reviving old friendships you know. My husband once held a visiting professorship at King's College.'

I let her rattle on without listening, for my mind was at ease. I knew all I wanted to know. I was just dying to see Emily's face when she got a card from the Bahamas. And another from Helsinki. Then London.

My hunch had been devastatingly correct. A man with only one fantasy had to be a pervert. And a pervert in his position had to have a wife who wiped up after him. That had been my hunch.

I left my office meaning to join Susan in the kitchen. She'd gone to bed. I went to her door and listened. Not a sound. I pushed the door open. No one was there. I waited in the kitchen. Half an hour passed. Then I heard her car. She came in and said, 'I had to slip back home for something.'

It was pretty obvious to me what it was. She was flushed and her hair was slightly tussled. Useful that her husband was back from Nebraska.

'Let's do some accounts before we go to bed,' I said.

She looked bewildered by this statement. In a moment we were in contact. My excitement was almost frantic. Especially when I became aware of her recent visit home---I mean the gushing evidence of that visit.

23.

I was at home the following day getting some order into the bedroom when I was stunned by a phonecall from Mrs Martinez-Holstein.

'Could I speak to your wife?' she asked.

'She's not at home right now,' I said. 'Maybe you should try the lab.'

'I did,' she said. 'Were you trying to tell me something yesterday when you called me?'

'Tell you something?'

'My husband phoned me from San Francisco just now to say he's going to Sidney, Australia, with your wife. He said it was to do with the ROOV project but when I called Arthur Schendt about it he didn't seem to know what I was talking about. I wonder if you do.'

'Well, I'm sure if your husband said there's work to be done in Sidney involving my wife, it's correct. Is there any reason on your side to doubt his word?'

'Only the fact that nobody else on the project seems to know about it, and you don't seem quite as familiar with your wife's movements as a young husband might. When you called me last night was she at home?'

'I was on night duty at the office. I assumed she was.'

'Do you assume she is now? Did you find evidence on your return home this morning that she'd slept in her bed?'

'Well, no, but then she's often on night duty too.'

'Like hell she is! With my old man!'

And she slammed the phone down.

I could see not only my home and marriage going for scrap but---once Mrs Martinez-Holstein got her feelings aired---the entire ROOV project as well. The fact is that however independent a scientist may feel of public opinion he can get sudden and unpleasant surprises for the simple but much overlooked reason that federal funds have to be justified politically, and a scandal is what every politician big or small goes in daily, even momentarily, terror of.

I called the St Francis but there was no one by the name of Martinez-Holstein or Sprayd-Taylor. I called Arthur Schendt and told him that Clemens's wife

had phoned me.

'What's the woman worried about?' I asked him.

'As a matter of fact,' he said in a particularly dry way, 'I think she might be worried on account of her husband going to Sidney with your wife when he's due in a matter of days in the Bahamas with his own.'

'You mean his own wife.'

'I mean his own wife.'

I could see nobody was even trying to prevent a scandal. Somehow I had to reach the only person in all this who I considered to be level-headed. Namely the cause of it all, my own wife.

It was by now twelve noon and I only had three hours before I was due to take the office over from Susan. I drove onto the freeway and made for the Berkeley hills, in search of the Martinez-Holstein house. I was amazed at how peaceful the streets looked up there, considering the number of lethal physicists and chemists living on them. Quiet, terraced houses sat among trees, with a fine view of the Bay far below. I wondered how many of the Nobel Prize winners living in the vicinity were putting overcoats on in the heat wave.

But with Nancy Martinez-Holstein in one chair and you in another and a coffee table with cookies and the best chinaware in between, the last thing you thought about was sex---anybody's, not just Nancy's.

I thought I would go to the point.

'Emily went away with all her overcoats,' I said quietly.

'Oh shit...'

This was Nancy's reply, her head lowered. She stayed like that for a considerable time. Then she looked up.

'I thought Rosenfeld had got rid of that,' she said.

'Rosenfeld?'

'I'm surprised you don't know his name, he's the most prominent Freudian analyst in the Bay Area. George was with him for five years. I threw out every overcoat we had after we moved to California. I only wear sweaters and zip jackets.'

'You mean---?'

'Never mind what I mean. Suffice it to say he has a thing about overcoats and that's why your wife's wardrobe has no overcoats in it at this time.'

'I see.'

'You probably don't see, being a faithful and unsuspecting husband,' she said. 'We all thought it was a thing of the past. In the old days he used to find secretaries, types who thought it amusing to dress up in overcoats.' She gave me a piercing look from under her eyebrows. 'You mustn't believe there's anything prurient in what he does. He simply likes to see young women dressed in overcoats.'

'I see.'

'He tried it with me. But I soon showed him he was barking up the wrong tree.'

She then, to my astonishment, mimed a spitting motion at the floor.

'All we can do is wait,' I said.

'Wait?' I thought she was going to throw the coffee pot at me. 'My son's already at the St Francis! Wait my fanny! Let me tell you this, young man. Your marriage is in danger, and I think you'd better know it. I think your wife had better know it too. Because he always makes marriage proposals, which I then have to drag him out of. But this is the first time he's paired up with a respectable housewife and a famous name!'

'Are you afraid of a scandal?' I asked her.

'I'm afraid of nothing except your wife.'

She rose. This was the sign for me to leave.

'She may think the name Martinez-Holstein better than yours, or even than her own!' she added.

Then: 'Good morning.'

You old cow, I thought on my way to the car. I've half a mind to push Emily into marriage just to spite your face.

24.

I drove back to the office in fairly good spirits, for I was devising a cute little plan. Suppose I flew to London to see Macbride, the genetic brain behind ROOV, and apprise him of Martinez-Holstein's flight to Sidney, his proposed divorce and the likely revelation of his overcoat fantasy?

Surely Macbride would take immediate steps to protect his project---and me---by contacting the right echelons in Washington?

I didn't think I would carry this out but it served to buoy me up for an afternoon horribly bereft of news from Emily.

I buried myself in my work and found an odd satisfaction in standing side by side with Susan at the operating table---a difficult hysterectomy required us both. When we threw our gored smocks into the laundry basket we breathed a common sigh of relief and slipped into the kitchen for a cup of coffee such as only Susan makes.

We closed up at seven with the last night of our graveyard duty before us. I thought I might phone Macbride instead of going there but when I settled down at my desk to do it the words wouldn't come, it

felt ridiculous.

Susan was in her office cleaning up her files and I found myself walking in there and sitting down. To my surprise I began telling her what had happened. I said nothing about my interest in the ROOV project but just intimated that Clemens Martinez-Holstein was the eminence grise behind it all, and that all of Emily's ambitions were caught up in it.

'So what are you worried about?' Susan asked me.

I couldn't believe how cool she was. It lightened the load at once.

'If she gets on with this man,' Susan said, 'why shouldn't she pair up with him? It seems natural enough to me. He can bring her a lot of good. She's the kind of woman who lives in her work and a marriage of this kind will give her the chance to really dedicate herself.'

'And what kind of woman are you?' I asked her.

'What do you mean?'

'Do you want to live in your work?'

'Sure I do,' she said. 'My husband's very supportive about that.'

He was in computers, she said, making close on three or four times what she made. He was buying real estate in Nevada, had opened three exclusive restaurants in Contra Costa county as a sideline.

I was fascinated by the matter-of-fact way she had of talking about things. She barred the speculative in all discussion. In this way the only problems were surface ones---whether to get to Safeways before lunch or after, whether to invest in an enlarged surgery etc. There was something comforting in this. All of a sudden the Emily question seemed not simply emotional and unreal but self-solving.

A call came from the rosta-supervisor who said he'd arranged for another station to take over duties for

that night, we could go home and needn't expect graveyard duties for at least three months.

I said to Susan, 'Why don't you come home with me?'

She didn't give me an answer, simply packed her night-things and put them in her car. In the carpark she said, 'I'll follow you, OK?'

There were no loose strands with Susan. I drove along feeling neat, resolved. I meant to squeeze for myself such a cosy place in the ROOV project---squeeze it from two sore consciences---that I too might be flying round the world soon---Sidney, London, Cape Town. The night sky looked crisp and orderly. The tyres hummed on the tarmac. Susan was behind me.

When I turned onto the driveway I saw that the house was ablaze with light.

I jumped out quickly as Susan braked behind me. I ran into the house. Emily was there, upstairs, packing.

There were suitcases everywhere. I almost collided with Clemens. He was standing outside the bedroom. He came forward to meet me with a smile, his eyes like dark grapes, as innocent and joyous as a child's. His appearance was unusual. He had long black hair touched with grey and white almost down to his shoulders. He looked like a leftover from the Sixties, and his costume confirmed the impression. He had narrow black leather pants on and a sweeping white cloth jacket that swung loose and well-cut round his haunches, and one of the most elegant black-and-burgundy striped shirts I've ever seen. He was agile, fairly straight in the back, and at first glance I would have given him little more than half his reputed years. Compared with him his wife Nancy was an abbotess excommunicated for witchcraft.

'I hear you had a nice chat with my wife,' he said as if peering into my thoughts.

'That's right,' I said.

'Oh there he is!' I heard Emily cry from inside the bedroom after she heard my voice.

Susan was standing behind me and I had time to introduce her to Clemens before being hugged by a radiant Emily.

'Come downstairs,' she said.

I followed her down. Susan remained on the landing with Clemens and the absurd thought crossed my mind that if left to themselves they might make immediate contact, since an overcoat fantasy is but one step from a formality fantasy. So I called out to her, 'Why don't you come too Susan?'

'Oh sure!' Susan said, following us.

'I'll go on with the good work here,' Clemens called out, presumably referring to the packing.

'So,' I said to Emily, 'you decided?'

'Decided what?'

'Well, I mean throwing in your lot with Clemens?'

'We're going to Sidney but that's still professional,' she said ambiguously. She looked at Susan. 'How are you honey?' Then she turned back to me (Emily was mistress, in moments of emergency, of a striking theatrical style) and said, 'I've been working hard for you. We were down in LA most of yesterday and I saw the ROOV surgeons. I told them about you and they said they had complete confidence that if V and V1 get off the ground you could do the job. Does Susan know about this?'

I said with alarm, 'Of course she doesn't. You know ROOV's confidential!'

'I think you should tell her.'

'Why? I mean, fine, I can tell her but---!'

'Anyway,' Emily went on, 'that's for you to decide. We're going to Sidney to clinch a few of the details on V and V1. The organs are going to be launched from an Australian site, by the way.'

'Wow!'

Susan was watching us intently. I had a heady feeling that I would tell her about ROOV. Also I knew better than to cross Emily's advice, especially when it was thrown out as casually as that.

Emily returned upstairs and we heard drawers being opened and suitcases being closed. The house fairly buzzed with Emily's presence. I looked at Susan and found myself wanting immediate contact. I believe she felt the same.

Was this passage of erotic current between us Emily's doing? I couldn't winkle this peculiar thought out of my mind.

25.

When they came downstairs again they were dressed and ready for a long journey.

Clemens strolled over to me, detached, easygoing and said, 'When Emily and I are back you must come and sample my wife's cooking. She makes the best souffles in the Bay Area.'

Emily was talking to Susan.

I heard Susan say, 'He's in Nebraska, Looking for real estate. He'll be there at least a week.'

I turned. 'Jerry?' I asked (this was her husband).

'Yes.'

'When did he leave?'

'A couple of days ago.'

I gazed at her in wonderment. She was just about as dead opposite to Emily as you could get---contained where Emily was explosive, tight where Emily was loose, reserved where Emily was a bull in a chinashop. It wasn't that she hadn't thought to tell me about Jerry,

much less that she'd been withholding the information. It just hadn't served any purpose to tell me. The only reason she did mention it was because Emily asked her where her husband was (did Emily really ask that question for me?).

Apart from the fact that it meant we could be together at nights in my huge bed if we wished, Susan's information released in me an oddly determined desire to---I can only say ravish her, plunder her, ruffle the carefully ordered hairdo. Even upset her life. For ever. Yes!

Emily and Clemens were on their way to the door. I helped with the bags. Every time they looked at each other the world seemed to sing. I was as sure she'd found the man of her life as I was that rats have tails.

Yet they were behaving like two delegates at an embryology congress. Was that part of their overcoat number?

After they drove off I found myself saying to Susan, 'What say we go celebrate?'

What exactly we had to celebrate I didn't know and she didn't ask. We left her car in the driveway and I took her to a smart French place in Santa Fé. It was a long drive but with the help of a Brahms quintet it went quickly. Susan and I had no great need to address each other. She had a stillness which I began to perceive was maybe wild, eventful and varied just like Emily's ebullience.

I also found myself telling her during the first course (an Italian dish of smoked ham and melon, so why the French names and dynamite prices?) about my role in the ROOV experiment. It was reckless, I thought---but an inner self more authentic than the thinking one urged me to describe the imminent delivery to the Sonoma County lab of six dogs from Mike Borovitz.

She absorbed everything without a twitch of the

eyes, which simply gazed at me, great deep dark-brown pools of---what? Tranquillity, thought, concern?

She said quietly, 'The experiment should be renamed.'

'Why?' I asked witlessly.

'It now concerns dogs. So it should be DOOV.'

'That's right,' I said with a laugh. 'You're damn right!'

She didn't laugh and I wondered if she was serious.

She went on, 'Emily said we should work together.'

'But we already do.'

'Exactly. I couldn't see what she was driving at. Now I do.'

I leaned forward. 'You mean you'd be prepared to be co-surgeon?'

She nodded.

The fourth hole in my seat!

I was excited, thrilled. I wanted contact.

'Come back to the office,' I said, my voice trembling, 'and I'll show you the designs.'

These were important blueprints showing the sections required for ROOV V. The Palo Alto lab had sent them to me. It had been decided some time back that since the tail of a dog is such an expressive and immediately understandable part of the anatomy it should be retained at a new station, perhaps in East Germany, and I wanted to indicate to Susan some of the difficulties in keeping the nerve structure of a tail alive in the new conditions.

She was fascinated (I think). We pored over the colored sections until past two in the morning. Then we returned to my house. I got her to the master bedroom by inviting her to my workroom which was two doors down from it. There I made very quick and unexpected entry and managed to ease and half-carry her to the bedroom. When there we sank onto the vast bed and within moments every shred of clothing was off her body. She made shocked gasps, resisting each of my

bold movements by turning on her side, her back, her belly, increasing my excitement to an unbearable pitch. She didn't resist in such a way as to provoke rapaciousness or force in me: no, her resistance was a delectable double statement, designed to protect her against too great exposure on the one hand and too great a thrill on the other. The gasp was both shocked and narcotized. Therein lay her electricity, or rather its two poles.

26.

The next evening she had to stay at home because her mother would be returning to New Mexico soon and she couldn't leave her alone too often. Her husband Jerry continued to look for properties in Nebraska.

I got my own house back to its former impeccable neatness. It was good not to have Emily yelling from every corner and room. On the other hand the silence was distressing. No phone calls. Odd how a phone's silence can reflect the silence inside.

I was getting happier and happier to see Susan in the morning. I felt childish elation at the sight of her car parked in its usual place.

Now we'd settled back into our former routine our contacts were even more thrilling (i.e. more snatched). Sometimes I yearned to take her in my own bed and in nakedness but I knew that the opportunity would come round if I left matters to her.

To my surprise she brought her moustached mother to the office. She was a jolly Middle Westerner with a hatchet jaw and the eyes of a scraggy hawk. I could see the way she'd brought Susan up. Rules had been laid down. Not because they were good rules

or because Mom believed in them. Not at all. They were simply the rules you went by, and apart from that you could do or think what you liked. And the rules were only there so that you could have complete freedom in every other respect.

I remember a guy at college who became quite an expert on life behind the Iron Curtain. He said political suppression produces an intense personal life. It's the only area in which you're free to act.

This was the case with Susan.

Emily, for all her freedom, never knew the kind of sexual thrills Susan achieved.

Susan began calling me up in the evenings. Always about some matter of the accounts or the design of the new wing. And whatever we said turned into another language. Even while working with our minds we were playing too. It was really neat. We agreed---on the evening before Jerry's return---to call in an architect right away. That decision, over the phone, our speech heavy with breath, was like a climax.

The following day Jerry called me, believe it or not. The husband!

'Hi!' he said (a little roughly, I thought).

'How's Emily these days?'

'Fine!' I yelled back. 'Just fine! As a matter of fact she'll have been in Sidney nearly two days already.'

'Business trip, right?'

'Right!' I screamed.

'Seems to me,' he said, 'you and me have things to talk about. You know, you and Susan working so close---'

'Right!' I bellowed. 'Why don't you come around tomorrow evening?'

'Just a business chat, right?' he said.

At the office next morning I told Susan, 'Your husband's coming over this evening. Any idea what he wants?'

She smiled. A smile on Susan's face was an event, not because it happened seldom but because it was a good-luck, all's-clear-ahead sign. I trusted this because I knew she never arrived at any verdict by thinking (any more than Emily did). She simply registered the verdict with her face, as Emily did with her mouth. Susan showed it in a flash of teeth, as Emily vocalized it in a yell. In both cases it bore an unchallengeable authority.

We had a heavy day and couldn't spare time for a sit-down lunch. She made coffee. I did three minor operations, got bitten by a labrador. As the day proceeded I found myself getting nervous. I imagined Jerry to be one of those 300^{lb} Wasps who get rich at 25 because they have deep voices.

I left the office late because of a hysterical client. She thought her cat was going to die (which it deserved to) and I had to reassure her for nearly an hour that Michael was in a healing crisis, not the last crisis. I sped home and found him waiting in his car. He was one of those lanky, long-striding men like the late Hank Fonda, and wouldn't, clearly, hurt a fly unless it threatened to reduce his dividends. And by the way he smiled at me and nearly wrung my hand off, I wasn't going to do that.

'Come inside,' I said, 'I have some Dom Perignon on ice.'

As he followed behind me he said, 'Nice outfit you have here.' Then: 'Seems to me Susan's pretty attached to you.'

He certainly didn't beat round bushes.

'That's right,' I said, opting for idiot enthusiasm.

'Thing is,' he said, dropping into my water-couch like a dolphin at play, 'you two are working together real tight, and maybe your personal lives should be integrated too.'

'Integrated?'

'You have a thriving business between the two of you, you're expanding, there's nothing like two people who are partners in everything.'

'You mean---?' I knew exactly what he meant of course. He didn't even bother to reply, gazing at me steadily (I was still hovering on my way to the kitchen to fetch the champagne).

I said, 'Attachment doesn't constitute marriage.'

'That's a hundredweight of bull,' he said succinctly. 'You've got more of a marriage there than most men have.'

'But you're always on the road!' I said.

'Just what I'm saying! You and she have more of a marriage there than I've got---and that Emily's got.'

'Is this the business chat?' I asked.

'I'm coming to that,' he said.

'OK, I'll get the champagne.'

I prepared the bucket. Some smoked salmon canapés were ready in the fridge. As I wheeled it all into the lounge I saw he'd taken a bunch of documents out of his pocket. I thought at first they were divorce proceedings but when we were settled with a drink he began explaining.

'I've consulted Susan,' he said, 'and she says it depends on you. Now this is what I propose. I'll give her the house, and maybe a slice of a hotel in Florida, but I need something from you.'

'What's that?' I said.

'Emily and Martinez-Holstein are involved in an experiment which I happen to know about quite independently of anyone in this area. As a matter of fact a close friend of mine has a hand in the federal funding for this project, we grew up together. And now I hear you're involved in the ROOV project too.'

'That's right.'

'And Emily seemed anxious before she left that you

bring in Susan on the surgical side.'

'That's right.'

'And now we're talking of dogs as exnims.'

'That's right' (I decided to throw discretion to the winds).

He said, 'I want you to initiate a new computer-system for the project.'

'Me?'

'Yessir. I flatter myself that one of the companies I'm involved in is producing the finest electronic equipment for this kind of purpose in the world. If our system is adopted at every ROOV station in the world I think the federal funding apparatus will view the project even more favorably than before. OK, they recently doubled the funding on ROOV 1V but they're stroking their chins about these plans for V, VI and VII. I can say definitely but strictly off the record that the key people there see the adoption of our ware as essential to progress on V, VI and VII.'

He left me stunned---chiefly by the power I'd suddenly been endowed with (the documents Jerry Riven put on the table, by the way, were lengthy descriptions of the software).

As if scenting something in the air Emily called from Sidney at about midnight.

'Clemens and I married yesterday,' she said.

'What?' I screeched. 'That's bigamy! You'll ruin the whole project. Don't you realise that the State Department can't be seen to be financing bigamists?'

She laughed. 'It was a Maori ceremony,' she said. 'They married us spiritually.'

'Oh that!' I said with relief. I went on: 'I've been thinking about the computer systems on the ROOV project and it seems to me we could do better Emily.'

'That's Clemens's province and I'm sure he'd know if it was inadequate. Anyway keep your nose in the surgical section.'

'But I've got much more elaborate programs in mind,' I said.

'It's too much for me to handle at this end!' she said. 'Listen, why don't you go to Arthur Schendt? He can twist Clemens's arm on most things. Also we'll be travelling for our honeymoon, so we won't have an address for a fortnight.'

She rang off.

27.

My first thought was that contacting Arthur Schendt was a great idea. I might even put him together with Susan's husband and they could talk software together.

Lying on the water-couch I called him and got Lucy and saw it wasn't such a good idea after all.

'How are you?' I asked her.

'I'm playing in LA tomorrow. Why don't you come? I'm staying at the Walton.'

'Well', I found myself saying, 'I might do just that.'

She gave me more details and I rang off without making a firm promise. Perhaps, I thought drowsily, I could more beneficially get Lucy to influence her own husband than try to do the job myself.

When I got to the office Susan was standing in the kitchen.

'Did Jerry tell you what he wants from me? The computer deal?' I asked her.

'He did, yes. It sounds OK to me.'

'How---sounds OK?'

'We're partners already.'

'Did this suggestion come from you?' I asked her.

'What suggestion?'

'That we team up completely, you and me?'

'No.'

'He came to see me without consulting you?'

'That's right,' she said.

'And he only told you afterwards?'

'Yes.'

'And when he told you it seemed the right idea to you?'

'Doesn't it seem the right idea to you?' she said.

She was standing right in front of me, erect, with those dark still pools of eyes dwelling on me, peculiarly innocent; and this moved me. She really hadn't played a part in Jerry's plan (until I met Susan I didn't believe a person without guile existed).

I suddenly realised I had to marry her because she would otherwise belong to someone else and wouldn't be able to protect herself. I felt I had to protect her with my guile (which was surely enough for two).

'I just don't like the idea of our marrying because somebody else said so,' I told her. 'Least of all your husband.'

'He knows what's good for me.'

'I don't doubt it,' I said. 'But when people marry they have to love each other.'

'That's what I mean. He knows about these things.'

'He knows we love each other?'

'Yes.'

Still she stood there---while those pools lighted me with their non-committal darkness.

All morning I had the question in my mind, did I love her? I realised this wasn't a real curiosity as to my feelings: I wanted to know if Jerry was right. As to feelings, I didn't know, but maybe he saw something. And Emily too---yes! She too had pushed us together. Strange, to act in a scenario made by others.

I resolved to find out the answer by leaving. I needed, in any case, a change of scene. I called Susan in the next office and asked her, 'Mind if I take the afternoon off tomorrow?'

'To think it out?'

'Yes.'

'You won't think,' she said.

'You didn't give me an answer.'

'Oh sure!'

Next day I left the office at noon and was on a plane to LA by two o'clock, feeling perplexed that somehow jurisdiction over my life had been ceded to others, and they---even more perplexing---they possibly knew better than I did what was good for me.

28.

On arrival I called Lucy and asked her to book me a room in her hotel. By the time I got there through the rush-hour traffic she'd already gone to rehearsal. I had a decent snack and returned to my room to sleep (I ate fried eggs and asked for dates but they didn't have any).

Later I called Susan.

'Everything OK?'

'Emily called. She couldn't find you at home. She says Martinez-Holstein is spending most of his nights out.'

'Oh my god.'

'She's disillusioned, she says. They didn't go on the spiritual honeymoon. She wants you to phone her. She says she's tired of buying overcoats. Even a mink didn't interest him.'

'Did she remember to keep it buttoned up?' I asked facetiously.

'I suppose so.'

'Did you know about the overcoat business then?'

'Oh sure,' she said.

'Do you have any fantasies?' I asked her.

'Me? Of course not. You know that.'

I was fiddling with the phone cord, biting my lip.

'Anything wrong?' she asked when I didn't speak.

'I just can't go back to being married to Emily!' I said. 'I'm used to other things now.'

'Well, then,' she said quietly, 'you've got your answer already, haven't you?'

29.

I went to the concert and was so spaced out I missed all but a few bars, though I heard enough to realise that Lucy was in the top class.

I made a faux pas at the reception afterwards by saying I was a sucker for anything by Brahms when she'd actually played Schumann. She kept close to me as the champagne went round, making it clear that she'd be returning to the hotel with me, not with the first violin who drooled over her lustfully.

During the concert (to which I would normally have given my full attention) I'd been occupied by the worry that Emily might not be contemplating divorce after all. And if she wasn't I couldn't marry Susan. Which I wanted to do. Desperately perhaps. All this made Jerry Riven the wisest man on earth. I was determined to push his computers with Schendt. Also I resolved to phone Emily that night to sound her out.

---as soon as I could decently get out of Lucy's arms.

By the time my mind had stopped running round in circles the orchestra was off the platform and everybody was leaving (I thought it was the interval). I must have sat through the interval in the belief that an orchestra was still playing. I only hoped Lucy didn't want any comments on her performance.

Luckily she had other things on her mind. We broke away from the reception and jumped into a cab. She took me to her room, actually a suite. Without a word we undressed and for the next three hours I lost consciousness. It was the same state as before---melting into a perfect natal glove, so fitting in all respects that any sense of boundary disappeared. We lay there unable to distinguish whose limbs were whose. Cunilingus (which I had never attempted with Susan, I was saving it for a spectacular scene I had in mind, but more of that later) featured greatly in my contacts with Lucy. It was like sipping divine juices and the moment it began my mind shut down and I was once more floating in the amniotic sac.

She dozed off and like a mouse trying to push a boulder I heaved my exhausted body out of the bed. I'd warned her that I'd got to phone Emily, so she knew I was going (I believe that if I hadn't gone at that moment we would have drifted back to the old intimacy and married, violin or no violin).

I staggered along the corridor, my eyes half closed. I collapsed on my bed and almost fell asleep. I tore myself from sleep, douched my face in cold water, ordered some coffee from the thankfully allnight kitchen and finally I was ready.

She picked the phone up after one ring, a sure sign of being on edge.

'Yeah?' she yelled (she must have thought it was the itinerant Clemens).

I was very quiet with her. I said, look, it may seem black now, but he'll come back, and remember, once you're married you'll have his name and then he, and incidentally you, can do what the hell you like. After all, you may live to thank him for his nightly excursions---you may want to do the same!

'I suppose you're right,' she said. 'It's just damned unfortunate that it's winter here. I overlooked that one! Everybody's in overcoats. It drives him frantic!'

'Why don't you get him to somewhere like Cape Town?' I said. 'They're in bikinis there.'

'And bikinis are a big turnoff for him!' she said. 'But he's such a crafty old bastard he sees round all the corners.'

'Impossible,' I said. 'Not even Einstein could see round your corners.'

'Oh well,' she said. 'I'll try. And how are you? Arthur Schendt told Clemens you really hit it off with Lucy.'

'He did?' I said biliously. 'It's more of a friendship.'

She laughed.

I'd no sooner put the phone down and started unbuttoning my shirt when it rang again. It was Emily.

'Listen,' she said, her voice soft and breathy this time, 'do you remember No 15?'

'No 15?' I asked her. 'What are you talking about Emily?'

'Listen', she whispered, 'I haven't had a thing for three whole days and I'm frantic!'

'Emily! You should have told me right away!'

'I thought it'd pass off but it didn't. I got No 15 on my mind. Could you oblige me honey?'

'Sure I could! Shall I tell you just how it happened?'

'Yeah!'

Her voice took me right back. I found myself excited too.

'I've got my vibrator right here!' she whispered.

'Well,' I said, also breathing differently now (I could hear this in my own earpiece), 'I'm sitting working on a veterinary paper, right?'

'Right! Right!'

'It's a paper on the removal of the spleen in rats and its implications for the lifespan of domestic animals.'

'Right! Right!'

'Now I'm sitting at my desk and the window's right in front of me---'

'Yes!'

'And it's open!'

'Yes!'

'I can see the lawn and the shrubbery with the peonies and the tall rhododendrons and the wisteria trained over the vine pagoda---'

'Oh yes!'

'And you're standing there.'

'Yes, yes!'

'It looks like you're hoeing.'

'I am! I am! I'm hoeing.' She was breathing strongly now and I could hear a lively electric buzz in the background (she eschewed silent ones, saying that the buzz was a 'good controbasso').

'You have gardening gloves on---'

'I do! I do!'

'And a long skirt.'

'That's right---I need it against the prickly weeds and the poison oak.'

'There isn't any poison oak in our garden but you're cautious in this respect.'

'That's right!'

'So you're wearing a long thick skirt.'

'That's right!'

'You've been neglecting that part of the garden for some months---'

'I have!'

'So there's a lot of weeding to do.'

'There is!'

'And some of the weeds have grown tough roots and you have to bend down to grip them with a strong gloved hand---'

'I do, I do, I do! It's no good trying to get at them with the fucking hoe, I have to use my hands, bend down and use my hands!'

'I'm just starting a paragraph about the reduced function of the thymus gland and underproduction of T-cells when---'

'Yes?'

'When you start bending more---remember you've got your back to me---'

'Yes!'

'Your long skirt rises slightly at the bottom when you bend down---'

'Yes!'

'So you bend---'

'To get hold of the weeds!'

'That's right. And this reminds me of No 62.'

'Oh yes!' she said.

'And I can't stand it any more. You bend and bend---'

'Yes!'

'And the sight of you bending---bending and bending---'

'Yes?'

'It's too much for me! I'm no longer interested in the removal of rodent spleens! And the window in front of me is open---you bend and bend---I'm frantic---I can't contain it any more---I can feel my heart beat down in

my crotch---I try to hold myself in but I can't---!'

'Oh!'

'I jump out of the window---'

'No, no!'

'I jump out of the window and race across the lawn---'

'Oh!'

'You can't hear me because I'm running on grass!'

'And I'm bending!'

'Yes, you're bending! And I'm running across the lawn. I run and run and when I get to the shrubbery I pull up your skirt from the back and I---I---I---!'

'Yes?'

'I force an entry!'

'Oh!'

'And suddenly I see the sherrif's wife is standing right by you---'

'Oh!'

'She was talking to you all the time, I didn't see her---'

'You didn't!'

'She was hidden by the shrubbery---'

'She dropped by for coffee!' Emily said.

'That's right! She dropped by and she came in by the garden entrance and I didn't see her and she said don't stop your gardening, I can talk to you while you're on the job---!'

'That's right, she did!'

'She said while you're weeding there honey we can talk but I couldn't see her from my window because she was hidden by the shrubbery---'

'Yes!'

'And there she is, standing right by me, her mouth is open, she can't say a word, she's so shocked, and I can't say a word and you can't say a word---'

'No!'

'And she goes on standing there, she can't take

her eyes off us---and I can't stop what I'm doing---

'No, please don't!'

'I have to go on doing what I'm doing---and you're almost falling over---!'

'Yes!'

'You have to hold on to a redwood sapling to keep your balance, you have to plant your feet more firmly in the ground, you have to widen---!'

'I do! I do!'

'And she's watching us, she can't take her eyes off us and I can't stop doing what I'm doing---!'

'You don't have to!'

'And then it seems like she's egging us on! Yes! And you start rolling with the movement---

'Oh!'

'Backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards---!'

'Oh!'

'Backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards!'

'Please!'

'And now I'm lifting you off your feet, and she's watching harder and harder, and she starts shouting go, go, go!---I've thrown the skirt over your back and she's breathing heavily and shouting faster, faster, keep at it, go faster, go, go, go! You're getting there, you're getting---!'

There was suddenly an awful lot of noise at the other end. And then it was quiet. It was a long, long pause.

And finally she said in a whisper, 'Thanks honey. Talk to you tomorrow.'

And she rang off.

I arranged for a morning call and fell asleep at once, still in my clothes.