

My wife

EMILY

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He is invited to do all these things. We see that he can see no arguments against anything, so long as the arguments we put by a person in an authoritative or in any way enviable position. The conditions of the situation is always satisfactorily looked after by the use of a word.

MY WIFE EMILY

A Novel

by

MAURICE ROWDON

For in much wisdom is much grief

Ecclesiastes

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 ^{his} ~~it~~ being so small, I ~~am~~ referring to the therapist's) but in fact if there was any sexual ^{surfaced} 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 ^{and} seven hours. It beat other flirtations hundreds of percents. In no time we were married. It seemed right after the long self-denial ^{that} 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 ^{tuba} 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 ^{that} 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.

X
ENLARGED
ON TMS

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 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 Sydney, 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 1V 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 1V 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 Sydney, 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

if that's the word & she
is almost public,

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---Sydney, 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 abbottess 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 wrinkle 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 mouthstached 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 Perignan 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.

30.

I woke uncannily fresh, to the beep of the phone.
'Eight-thirty sir.'

By a quarter to nine I'd taken a brisk hot-and-cold shower and shaved. I called the office and spoke into the message minder. I was held up, I said, and wouldn't be in the office that day. Could Susan come for a meeting there at nine this evening? There would be news for both her and Jerry.

I had no idea what news it would be but it sounded good.

I then booked my return flight for six that evening, and went down to breakfast. Lucy was already there, darkly radiant in a lilac track-suit which would never see a track. She had some nice pearls round her neck, without earrings, and looked as serene as a Mendocino beach.

I said, 'I'm staying till late afternoon.'

'Oh good. Tired of dogs and cats?'

'I'd like to talk to you.'

'Oh!' She looked surprised.

The coffee came and after a few sips we were relatively human (why the word is used to denote empathy I shall never understand).

'As a matter of fact,' I said, 'I think I was being childish about your violin practice. When I think of your concert last night---and how all that practice at home builds up into something so moving and complete--- I must have made you real angry the other day!'

'Your attitude's not unique,' she said, getting to grips with two sunny-side-up eggs and some layers of ham. 'Most people take exception to the catgut.'

Arthur does too.'

'You mean he can't stand to hear you practice?'

'That's right.'

'Is that why he doesn't flinch at a divorce?'

'Could be.'

'Listen,' I said, 'it's Arthur I want to talk about. There's a great plan afoot to adopt a new computer system, with much more elaborate instantaneous-feedback programs for the ROOV project. Have you heard the latest about Clemens and Emily?'

'No,' she said, showing interest for the first time.

'You know about his overcoat fantasy?'

'Who doesn't?'

'Well, he's cheating on her already, in Sydney.'

'So what?' Half a slice of ham went down.

'Do you realise that if it gets to Washington these two people are using ROOV funds to waltz around the world on spiritual honeymoons there's going to be a scandal?'

'Are you sure they're using ROOV funds?'

I wasn't. But in my experience a bold guess was better than no guess. People hate uncertainty. A false guess will often so insinuate itself into a situation, if expressed with certainty, that it may in the end prove correct.'

So I said, 'Of course I'm sure.'

'Did you have sex when you went to your room last night?'

I stared at her. 'What are you talking about?'

'I came by your room and I heard you whispering, you sounded very excited.'

'Oh!' I said. 'I'm an inveterate sleep-talker when I sleep alone.'

She smiled. 'Inveterate something, anyway.'

'May I go on?'

'Why not talk to Arthur about all this?' she said with impatience. 'It bores the shit out of me.'

'I want it as part of our marriage settlement, I want you to persuade him to persuade Clemens to adopt the new computer system for ROOV.'

She looked at me slowly. A slice of ham that a moment before seemed designed to enter her mouth returned to the plate.

'What marriage settlement?' she asked. 'I thought we'd agreed that the violin makes that impossible?'

'After your performance last night---both at the concert hall and in bed---I just can't let that instrument stand in my way. This is the best sex I've ever had, and that violin solo was the best I ever heard.'

She gazed at her plate and the rejected ham was once more lifted, once more thwarted of its destination.

'Are you serious?' she asked.

'Do I look serious?'

She gave this some thought and seemed undecided.

'I've left a message for Susan that I shall be here for the rest of the day,' I said. 'Suppose we go back on the same plane?'

'OK.' She looked at me with slightly narrowed eyes.

We took a swim, then drank more coffee under a sunshade. I showed her Jerry's blueprints of the computer programs, which of course didn't mean a thing to her. But she took them and stowed them away in a music case.

We went upstairs and once more melted into each other's---I was going to say arms but really it was bodies. Just a complete melting experience. I had difficulty connecting it even with sex. We caught the six o'clock plane by the skin of our teeth.

31.

Susan came to the office fifteen minutes late, which was unusual for her. She looked flustered and the reason was clear.

Normally the thought that she'd just enjoyed contact with her husband would have excited me. As it was, not a murmur came from the genital area---no tingle of cautious interest before the onset of lavish warmth, no firm beating rhythm of the heartbeat in the totemic organ itself, no incredible fast rise to full proud enthronement.

Was my old complaint back again? I'd neglected to eat fried eggs and dates before leaving LA. What to think of a hotel that has no dates?

I gazed fixedly at her buttocks when she turned to consult our files but it was hopeless. I was genitally as dormant as a winter field.

I thought of ringing my shrink again, or maybe, this time, a doctor at the Haydock Smithers hospital who'd been something of a buddy of mine at college called Jock Turner, but it was late and maybe a good night's rest would do the trick.

I knew this condition would continue for a day or two, perhaps more. During that time I would increase my vitamin B intake, my megadoses of C, with plentiful salads and all but raw beefsteaks. And then the organ would come to life, not slowly but with that sudden springing motion which never ceases to astonish me.

What worried me was that this present attack had come so soon after the previous one.

'By the way,' I said, 'the plan to substitute your husband's software for the present system seems to be going well.'

She looked at me with what I thought was pride.

'Good!' she said.

'Have you talked to Emily lately?' I asked her.

'No.'

'She's getting cold feet with Clemens.'

I couldn't quite meet her eyes. As I knew I wouldn't be making contact with her there seemed something dishonest about looking straight into her eyes.

An idea occurred to me.

I said, 'Listen, I'm going to take the office over for a couple of days. After all, you've had it very heavy while I was in LA.'

'Why did you go to LA?'

'For Lucy Schendt's concert. I got her to take your husband's blueprints and she's giving them to Arthur, you know they mean nothing to her at all but she only has to hand them over with a certain look in her eye and, you'll see, he'll be on the phone to Clemens in a matter of hours.'

She said nothing to this. Women are like that. They don't believe in things until they happen. As this is how I feel too I accepted the silence.

'Maybe you could call Emily,' I went on. 'Tell her Arthur Schendt's worried that she and Clemens are using ROOV for overcoat jaunts all over the sub-equatorial world.'

With these two brisk speeches I managed to hide my sexual inertia. On her side, horror of any direct statement forbade discussion.

She said simply, 'Oh thanks,' to my offer of a two-day vacation.

I told her, 'I'll be making the final proofs of the ROOV sections, so I'll be working flat out, I shan't even be taking phonecalls.'

'Good.' She smiled.

'I'll be showing them to you on Friday' (in three days).

I saw her to her car and we didn't even kiss. I was aware---or rather I was abjectly hoping---that this detachment between us was building a wonderful energy for its spoliation---on Friday.

32.

Besides soliciting my help in selling his computer systems, Jerry Riven had lent me a bunch of the most intriguing video games I'd ever seen. They were right up my street, animal battles. Cocks armed with sharp spurs, bulls interlocking horns etc.

'I thought these might be in your field,' he said.

He was damn right. I played them most of the evening and they took my mind off my personal problem.

Next morning I called my shrink and he said, 'Can't you see it's a matter of having betrayed the primal scene by sleeping with someone other than your mother?'

'Who's my mother?'

'Emily of course.'

'But I thought every woman I slept with was my mother.'

'Exactly. And even if you slept with your father you'd still be sleeping with your mother.'

It was the sort of remark that made him the most expensive shrink in northern California. I tried to puzzle it out but couldn't. And he wouldn't say any more.

33.

I worked on the ROOV sections and estimated they would involve five operations separated by several hours. The electronic apparatus would have to be on tap for immediate takeover the moment I tied up the arteries and was ready to cut.

The most complicated part would be the reproductive system, especially in the bitches. Also my mind paled at the thought of the digestive section and the respiratory section and the meticulous work they involved which the slightest error could altogether ruin. I felt I needed more surgeons but knew that Clemens wouldn't contemplate extending the sensitive secrets of ROOV V and VI even further.

I thought it would be good to stage a rehearsal with Susan, using a dog, and to this end I called Mike Borovitz and ordered another male German shepherd. We could either jettison the sections or embalm them so that we could study what went wrong, if we did go wrong.

Arthur Schendt phoned me and said, 'I've looked at the computer material you gave Lucy and I've made a few enquiries on my side. All in all' (I took a deep breath) 'I feel this new software might well give ROOV a shot in the arm, and that our storage of data, our emergency-response system and our collation system for immediate-research data will all be enhanced.'

Translated from Nobel prize language into English (he even imitated Clemens's olde worlde accent) it seemed like good news.

'Moreover,' he went on, 'I've talked to Clemens and got his approval. I'm not in a position to contact the federal end of the experiment but I expect Clemens to

do this by telephone the moment he leaves Sydney for the bush.'

Before I could ask him what this meant he went on, 'Lucy says you think Clemens and Emily are using ROOV for gallivanting. Not at all. They went to Sydney to try to save the last two surviving ratlets. I'm afraid they failed. And the reason I liked your new programs was that the present ones were probably what killed the exnims' (had Jerry Riven known this?).

'What are Clemens and Emily going into the bush for?' I asked.

'Well,' he said, 'probably so as to get him away from Sydney. There'll be fewer overcoats in the bush. But I don't think Emily has much to worry about. He always comes back to roost.'

'Which roost? His wife's?'

'You've got a point there,' he said. But he wouldn't elaborate.

Of course I was brimming over with the good news and wanted to call Jerry Riven at once. But something stopped me. Susan was due back in the office the following day and my fires, apparently responding to this good news, were rekindling. It would be most opportune to let her into the secret while approaching contact.

This contact was going to be special. I had plans for it burgeoning in my mind.

Before I left for the office next morning Emily called to say that although Clemens had agreed to go into the bush he was still looking strange. The previous evening he had invited her to put on her mink but it had come to nothing. He'd simply said 'It suits you awfully well, you know' with a little twinkle.

'I'm going crazy all alone!' she screamed.

'Yes, Emily, but I haven't time for any numbers, I'm just off to the office.'

'Fuck your numbers!' she said. 'And don't start strutting round like a cock, I can cut you out of this experiment at any time, and just remember that!'

'Just try it!' I shouted and slammed the phone down.

Instead of cooling her off as I should have I reacted, always the worst thing to do with Emily.

I was given to these short sharp anger waves, which usually started long before they manifested, and which for my money were connected with the impotency problem. It had started that morning on waking, an unpleasant stirring in the solar plexus, an intense feathers feeling.

On these occasions the genital area is so dormant that the phallus will all but disappear, approximating to the size of a child's, so that its former ability to swell to a posture of several inches seems hardly short of miraculous.

But I felt good about putting the phone down on Emily because whenever she threatened me like that it meant she was feeling insecure. With her future husband on the prowl for fresh overcoats and ROOV at a very shaky stage due to the demise of the exnim offspring, together with my almost insulting approval of her divorce, she must have felt less than impregnable, especially in a city where the name Sprayd-Taylor was just another.

At noon Nancy Martinez-Holstein called. She was all steamed up. Could I come as soon as possible? It was on the tip of my tongue to say irritably 'And what about you stepping over here?' but I curbed myself and replied quietly, 'I'll be over.'

I slipped out at lunchtime and the moment I was on the freeway with the hifi on and the San Francisco lanes clear and sunlit before me I felt better. I hummed a snatch from Tristan and Isolde.

34.

She was in her lair as usual, with the leaf-blown terrace and redwood trees outside, and the view of the Bay far below. There was no coffee today.

'As you may or may not know,' she said, 'I'm an active member of the Humane Society and my husband is president of the Colonial Heights branch in Virginia. Now Lucy Schendt happened to tell me yesterday that you propose to use three German shepherds and three standard poodles in the ROOV project. Now apart from the fact that Clemens and I have four dogs and an uncountable number of cats---'

'I can smell them,' I said in response to her nasty tone.

'Apart from that, we can't either of us be seen to know about this and approve of it. Also I've spoken to a number of people connected with the Humane Society and they describe you as a knife-happy dog butcher!'

'Knife-happy my foot!' I said. 'I'm the gentlest surgeon in the Bay Area. Anyway what does Lucy Schendt know about it?'

'Only what you told her yourself!' she said with a flash of steel in her eyes.

I resolved to stop her idle rhetoric at once and pulled my chair close to hers.

'Listen ma'am,' I said. 'Lost cats and dogs are either liquidated or left on the streets to pick up killer diseases from the trash cans. This is why they end in the experimentation labs! They're at least fed there and in the warm, and everything is done to see that they suffer as little as possible. To experiment you cannot take account of feelings, Mrs Martinez-Holstein. Give me one item in the long list of biomedical triumphs

in the last few years which hasn't. in some way emanated from experimental data, and ask yourself what would have happened to this data if the experimenter had had any feelings! I know the ethical question is a subtle one, Mrs Martinez-Holstein, I know that on the face of it we all risk looking ridiculous when, having injected a virus into an experimental dog so that its limbs will atrophy and it will be robbed of its sight, we then go home and with great solicitude pet and coddle and brush another dog of the same breed! But this is what we do---'

'We? You the dog butcher have a pet?' she screamed.

'I happen not to have a pet. Pets are a source of fleas in California as you well know, Mrs Martinez-Holstein, or perhaps you don't. Perhaps you enjoy having them all over your house!'

'Use a flea-bomb once a week.'

'Quite ineffective, Mrs Martinez-Holstein. Also fleas are disease carriers. But to return to our subject. The ethical question is difficult. No doubt Clemens, holidaying in the Australian bush with another man's wife and happily provided with overcoats against the chill---'

'You son of a---!'

'What a lucky thing we don't need overcoats in northern California isn't it, Mrs Martinez-Holstein? When you were living with your husband in London was your wardrobe as bereft of overcoats as it is now? Why, at that time you flaunted them, changed them a dozen times a day! Beaver, mink, duffle, cashmere, tweed---don't the very names make you pine for the colder climates now? What wouldn't you give for a month of unseasonal snow, with icicles hanging from the eucalyptus trees? Imagine how it would feel---muffled up, buttoned up---just as he likes it---so that with a quick---'

She tried to speak, livid in the dewlaps, but I held up my hand.

'Let a word of these dogs reach the press,' I went on, 'and every newspaper in the nation will be peppered with overcoat stories for a month! And secondly, ma'am, every newsdesk will know that the gentleman who first suggested using domestic animals for the ROOV project was your husband. I'm simply following his directions!'

I swept out of the room and was back in my car in a moment.

I took a quick, satisfying lunch of roast chicken and ricotta stuffing at a North Berkeley restaurant. Then I returned to the office.

A message was waiting for me. Mrs Martinez-Holstein had called. She wished me to know that she fully understood my position, and thanked me for supporting the ROOV project so loyally.

In my heart I was planning war on Lucy, but then I decided to treat it as a joke. It was so like her to make trouble as a sexual ploy. For surely it was that?

35.

It was a busy afternoon and I didn't see Susan until the last client left. She was sitting in her office reading a report, her door open.

'Well,' I said, 'I hope you had a good rest.'

She looked up. 'Oh yes, thanks. Jerry was happy to have me home for a change. We picniced on Mount Tamalpais, then spent two nights at the Jericho Inn.'

She was tanned. I was again aware of my deficiency. She seemed to contain in her orderly person, in her dark, almost oily hair, in her lips (so clear and

wonderfully set) all the warm treasures I lacked.

I was desperately aware as I stood there that Jerry's accumulated seed was inside her. I could almost see the numberless contacts that had taken place between them---at snatched moments on the road, at the beach, the hotel room---I vicariously enjoyed the anguish of risking the impermissible. But I couldn't feel any excitement on my own account. How long would it last? I avoided her eyes. The genital awakening I'd experienced the previous day during Arthur Schendt's good-news call had fizzled out.

I thought for a moment that a slight smile was hovering on Susan's lips.

'You have some news?' she asked.

'What?'

I was bewildered, couldn't think.

'The dissection designs,' she said. 'You promised---'

'Of course! I'm an exhausted man, Susan! You can look at the first draft tomorrow. I've also been handling the negotiations over Jerry's computer programs with Arthur Schendt. More about that later. Nancy Martinez-Holstein threatened to expose us for using pets. Phew!'

She looked at me earnestly. 'You've been through a lot.'

'Anyway you can tell Jerry it's OK. It's been cleared with Clemens. He's going to take it up with Washington.'

'I'll tell him.' She touched my hand, though in a 'safe' way, like a secretary. 'I think you ought to get some sleep.'

'See you tomorrow,' I said.

When I got back home I went straight to the Two room and smashed everything I could find. The floor was covered in debris. I was chiefly furious at having failed in my plan to tell Susan the good news about the computer programs while in contact---a formula I'd

been fantasising about for days. The more furious I became the smaller my little totem seemed, until I thought it would look fitting only on a three-year-old.

I found myself yearning (like a three-year-old) for Emily's return.

I decided to call up my buddy at the Haydock Smithers hospital.

'You need a change of woman,' he said.

'You think so?'

'I get into the same jam. Too much one scene no good. As you know I've got a thing about hookers, so it's easy for me, I just take off to San Francisco and drive down Broadway. As my shrink says, it's therapeutic if costly. You know, Emily's a great girl and I'm sure a sexual tinder-box, but you still need a change from time to time.'

I thought about this. Had I been getting in a rut with Susan and Lucy? The trouble was that once I scented excitement in a woman I went after her to the exclusion of all others, and I could now see that this singlemindedness or fidelity got me into trouble.

I lay on the water-divan feeling the vast emptiness of my genital zone. I tried a couple of hard-porn videos but the figures on the screen could just as well have been chopping meat for all the interest I took in them. My belly feathers had subsided. But I had no appetite. To make sure of my protein I ate two almost raw steaks and fried some eggs with dates as a dessert. It produced no result except to make me vomit.

Another fact was that I needed an erection to sleep properly. Yes, if that area was dormant I was definitely not. Of course the erective state is a feature of all male sleep (to the astonishment of virgins, who think it's all because of them), due to the concentration of blood in that area.

When a man hasn't got an erection in a warm bed he knows he's either sick or about to kick off. For me it

was in truth much like dying. The erective totem was for me a constant friend---in crisis, fatigue or solitude. If you could rely on nothing else, you could rely on him. At the end of a traumatic day, there he lay. When you retired to bed he awaited that gentle cupping motion of the right hand which was a pure autonomic response: were the two---the organ and the hand---genetically constructed with this mutual fellowship in mind? How harmoniously those two extremities function together---the one responding to the other in what must surely be nature's most ingenious do-it-yourself kit.

Yet, for all this totemic proudness, my climaxes were sadly disappointing. They were never more than a genital release of a narrowly anatomical order. Paradoxically, this lack of real enjoyment at the highest moment prompted me to another climax as soon as possible. Because in a sense I never had a climax. The emission would no sooner begin that I would want to recall it, restrain and restrict its flow. You might say it was this that guillotined my satisfaction. Not at all. Whenever I allowed it full rein (during extreme physical fatigue for instance) there would be a sense almost of pain, and perhaps of falling too, falling into an endless giddy space.

I was often led to ask myself, do the women feel th^e same? Is it the preliminaries, the foreplay, the erotic anxiety, the sense of the impermissible that, like me, they really enjoy, while the climax induces giddy fatigue, emptiness, nausea, a horrible repletion, hatred? Why would Emily need so many contacts if that wasn't the case? Was she too 'chasing the climax'?

I once read that wherever there isn't love the climax is like this. And certainly I deeply disliked any endearments during contact, any direct appreciation.

Emily was the same. Lucy began gasped endearments early in our relationship but soon understood that they turned me off. Perhaps the entire lack of any possibility of endearment in my relationship with Susan was what drew me to it again and again.

To be exact I've never been close to a human being, and never intend to be.

36.

When I got to the office next morning Susan was on the phone rapping away. She signalled to me, pointed to the mouthpiece and mouthed 'Emily!'. .

My heart did an excited leap. Was it Emily, simply, I'd been lacking? Was our repertoire of fantasies my one guarantee of continued and unvarying sexual energy, because, in a word, no feelings were involved?

I walked into my own office, wishing to hide my jubilation from Susan. As I did so she called out, 'Take it on your phone!'

I quickly shut the door and switched on my speaker-phone so that I could sit there at my ease, and put my hands anywhere I wished.

There was a screamed 'Hi!' at the other end and my genital area performed what I can only describe as a pirouette.

'Where are you?' I asked her, reclining further in my armchair.

'I'm staying with Nancy.'

'You're back?' I asked with joy.

'Well sure I'm back! I had to get him out of that fucking winter, right?'

'And you're staying with Nancy? That bearded harridan?' (Scream of laughter). 'How can you stand it?'

'Oh Nancy's great,' she said. 'Between you and me the real eminence grise behind every NPW is the wife.'

'The what behind every what?'

Another shriek of laughter. 'The policy maker behind every Nobel Prize winner! Is the wife! Got it?'

'But what about the marriage?' I asked.

'Hers or mine?' she said.

'What's the weather report, are you marrying the guy or not?'

'Well Nancy and I are having a real heart to heart this evening, we'll be going over all the arrangements.'

'Arrangements for what?' I said.

'My marriage.'

'You're discussing it with her, the wife? Wouldn't she prefer to arrange your murder?'

'Oh come on,' she said with a chuckle like the rattle of chains. 'He's in Washington, so it's a good chance for us to get together.'

'And what about you?' she went on. 'Things OK with Lucy?'

'I'm after her blood,' I said. 'She talked to Nancy about the ROOV V dogs and Nancy threatened me with the Humane Society. Can you beat that? My future wife?'

'It's because she loves you.'

'Loves me?'

'Arthur Schendt's always complaining to Clemens that you don't treat her right.'

'I'll try and improve it,' I said cynically.

When I put the phone down my genital problem suddenly seemed childishly simple in origin. It was clear that Emily and I had an excellent marriage because we'd remained virtual strangers. Our repertoire

of fantasies had never eroded through over-familiarity. The same could be said of my relationship with Susan, except that we had but one fantasy---so strong as to be indefinitely sustainable. Our manner of working in the office, our very business partnership, was conducted as part of that fantasy.

Only in the case of Lucy was there no fantasy. Only with her, therefore, was there danger of a cloying element, or over-familiarity. Little wonder she wanted to take revenge on me, pull me down, for not responding to her primal passes. To hurt but not too seriously, to wound but not fatally---that was the way of primal 'love'. And I wanted out. I realised that now.

Contact with her had produced my sexual neutrality:
of that I no longer had any doubt.

Witness the fact that after a moment's conversation with Emily on the phone my pants felt as full as a city.

37.

As if to confound these thoughts Arthur Schendt called up during an operation and asked to see me 'straight away after work at the Sunset Bar' in Santa Rosa.

He was driving from the Oakland hills, so it was clearly a serious matter.

When I saw him coming into the gloom of the bar I knew he was in no mood for contradiction.

I won't bore the reader with an account of the most boring hour I've ever passed. The subject was my marriage settlement, which for him was desperately real and for me was a fiction. He'd talked with Emily and

they both felt I'd done Lucy wrong.

I said, 'I think you're dead right.'

I sat listening to his proposals and agreed to everything (so little did I intend even to lay a finger on her again).

From his point of view we settled that, as had been arranged before, the Berkeley hills house should go to her if she could have half my Santa Rosa property etc etc.

On the other hand, I was to have no call on the Berkeley home if Lucy and I divorced. The property would then revert entirely to her, and in exchange for this---as part of the divorce settlement---I was to receive a percentage of two years of her concert takings, with a stipulated minimum which would operate whether she actually performed or not.

I drove home with a lot of fury bottled up inside me. I noticed that this made me yearn to be in an illicit sexual situation. But with the office closed and Susan safely at home, with Emily locked in debate with the hairy harridan Nancy, and with Lucy being the opposite of elicited in all things, I was clearly out of luck.

I drove on to my driveway intending to visit Room Two when I saw Emily's Toyota. I nearly ran into the house (but running wouldn't do as it was customary between us not to show enthusiasm that might be construed as 'passion').

She was upstairs resting. She was lying on the bed in a lightweight summer overcoat, despite the temperature outside.

'Aren't you hot in that?' I asked.

'Oh,' she said with a smile, stretching her arms out in the wooden way she had on any reunion between us. 'I just crashed!'

I kissed her mechanically. No embraces, no

touching of tongues, no---above all---sighed protestations about how we'd been missing each other.

We both knew this would spoil our repertoire, which relied for its efficacy on our fitting into our roles as strangers.

She was looking a little blotchy. Her hair was still in fine form though---billowing out in blonde handfulls.

My need was so urgent I achieved penetration in a moment. Her response in the primal area was so generously manifest that it was all I could do to withhold climax.

We then went into what we called our 'open' fantasy, when we established a kind of business conversation which gradually drew to a climax using cool business terms as innuendo or suggestion. We chose my marriage settlement with Lucy as our starting point.

'Does it seem OK to you?' she gasped.

'Seem OK? It's great---great---!'

'You don't think it's too hard?'

'The settlement? The---settlement's pretty---hard!'

'Really?' she gasped. "Hard?'

'But Lucy's like that! She favors the hard approach.'

'She does?'

'That's right! We---agreed---to divide---this house---equally---you have residence rights---!'

'Residence rights?'

'Residence---rights---for one---one---one year after---after---divorce---'

'One year---I can come---!'

'You can come---reside---reside---!'

The bed began its deep scarcely audible clang (custom-built for just that).

'Clarify---also---Palo Alto property,'
I went on. 'Couple---couple hundred---acres---
forest---and Napa---Napa---Napa Valley wine---wine---'
'What say? What say? My---my---winery---my---
oh my!'

'She---she---wants part if---if---possible---
oh!'

'Just---just one---!' she gasped.

'Just---just one?'

'Just one proviso---on---on---on---!'

'On?'

'On winery! That---that Lucy---!'

'Lucy?'

"Lucy not---not---not beneficiary---beneficiary
beyond---beyond---beyond---!'

'Beyond---?'

'Beyond! Beyond!'

'Beyond?'

'Beyond this house---this---this---this---and
no---no---Palo---Palo---Palo Alto---Palo Alto interest---
interest---!'

'But---but---winery!' I gasped. 'Winery! Part
of---part of---!'

'The winery---wine---wine---oh wine!---fuck!'

'Wine---oh!'

At that very moment of release a car drove on to
the gravel outside, its headlights flooding the bedroom
with a silver glow. We lay there panting. We heard
the porch door open below.

'Anybody at home?'

It was Clemens Martinez-Holstein.

Emily yelled (without withdrawing---indeed she made
a comfortable contrary motion), 'I'm up here honey!
We're going through an inventory of the furniture.
You'd better leave us to it! I'll be home in a couple
of hours!'

'How are you Clemens?' I called out.

'I'm all a man can expect to be after a day on planes!' He added, 'See you later then! Maybe you'd like to drop by too?' (this to me).

'If I'm not too tired after these lists, sure!' And the door downstairs closed again.

The intrusion had served, with miraculous timing, to refuel our interest, and we recommenced our 'negotiations' almost at once.

This time I frequently altered position, and seized a rare opportunity, despite her resistance, to achieve cunilingus. Business negotiations from this new angle were even more exciting.

These negotiations were considerably longer because, having climaxed but recently, we were obliged to await renewed seminal reserves. This relative coolness gave us the chance to prolong and complicate our bargaining.

The reader must understand that in discussing terms we were by no means fantasising or playing roles, for a change. On the contrary. After four hours of it (which took us to midnight) we had determined almost every item of our divorce settlement---thirty parts in all, at least a dozen of these being subdivided into five or more clauses each. Our climaxes were, so to speak, our signatures.

We were well-trained for this by our fantasy-repertoire. Our negotiations resembled nos 83, 84 and 96 in which we made hard business deals with each other which required the 'loser' to submit to humiliating sexual 'spoliation'.

out the Martinez-Holstein number.

Nancy answered.

'Hi Nance,' Emily said. 'We finished the inventory about twenty minutes ago and we're ready to crash. Would you tell Clemens I'll see him tomorrow?'

We woke next morning in our clothes, half covered with the goose-feather overlay. The redwood trees outside were filtering the sunlight through and I watched a large bluejay flap brilliantly like a snatch of ocean across the window on its way, no doubt, to wreak havoc in the orchard. We didn't have a shotgun, though there were foxes around too. It wasn't good for a vet to be seen shooting animals. The local cats might get up a petition.

As always, until half a cup of coffee was inside us neither Emily nor I wished even to look at each other. I slumped downstairs and prepared the table. I cooked french fries, sausages, five or six sunny-side-ups, tomatoes, baked beans. Then I called her. We ate like soldiers, without a word.

As I went out of the door she said, 'We'd better do that inventory again---can you make it this evening?'

I got the message, and tiny flames of excitement licked my genital area.

'Sure,' I said.

I drove to the office in a decidedly mixed mood. It was becoming clear to me that I was getting deeper and deeper into a marriage with Lucy which only Arthur Schendt intended to go through with, and which Emily, by misunderstanding, supported. It was an imbalance I obviously had to redress.

When I got to the office I called Lucy's work number and put a message on the machine. She didn't call back.

So I called Schendt, meaning to try him with a new line---that Lucy and I wanted time to think this over. But in the course of the conversation I

weakened, sensing his unyielding disposition--- which in my case meant he would have me out of the ROOV project the moment I turned his wife down. And he was dying for his wife to get her hands on some Sprayd-Taylor property (at least this was how I saw it). I felt they had a private understanding. Lucy with her tranquil cow-eyes was a born manipulator. Look how she picked up concerts. She reminded me of a lithograph I once saw of a naked goddess sending six streams of milk from her vagina into the mouths of six waiting men. These were concert agents and musical directors. All on their knees. (How I resented her for those five harrowing days of impotence).

I also realised that there'd been no contacts between me and Susan for at least a week, though we passed within inches of each other many times a day, and spent at least an hour of each day together in the kitchen during breaks.

And I realised that my body (not so much my conscious mind) was experiencing a sort of shame where she was concerned. After all, I'd stood by and allowed her husband to take sexual repossession of her. She would come to the office each morning flushed, seemingly unable to contain herself, like a woman whose desires have been excited beyond all control, and who is harrassed, distracted, flustered by them. A woman likes to be in control where the feelings are concerned. But there comes a---for her---dangerous time when pleasure threatens her security.

Had I been able to contact her during those fateful sterile days---snatch her back in the full flood of her desires---all would have been well. But Lucy (yes, my mind was made up on that point) had prevented that. Now I was really out of step. I felt I needed a boldness to touch Susan again which I no longer had. Maybe I'd lost her as my future wife?

I sat in my office worrying.

Clients were getting thin on the ground---an additional source of worry, in view of the investment Susan and I were making for the enlarged surgery. They say troubles come in regiments. I sat praying for a cat-and-dog plague to strike the neighbourhood. Of course it was vacation time and domestic pets benefited from the better weather as the wimps who owned them did.

As if to remove the last dregs of optimism from my cup Lucy rang and started complaining that our divorces weren't proceeding fast enough. I said, yes, it had been on my mind too but there was a lot to settle.

I said, 'What the hell did you tell Nancy Martinez-Holstein about the dogs for?'

'I think it's terrible, that's why,' she said. 'You shouldn't use pets.'

'What should I use---guinea pigs, rats, Rhesus monkeys? Do you think only the animals you happen to like have souls? And I notice you don't mind eating them!'

'OK, OK,' she said. 'I guess I went too far.'

'This is science, Lucy,' I said. 'Why don't you keep to art? Anyway,' I added, 'there are no problems about the divorce- and marriage-settlements.'

'I see a very big problem,' she said crisply.

'What's that?'

'Jerry Riven told my husband that you were marrying Susan, not me. That's the problem!'

And she slammed the phone down.

As a matter of fact that cleared the air for me. I went straight to Susan and put my cards on the table.

'Did you hear about Lucy?' I asked her.

'No?'

'Well she got the idea I wanted to marry her, I mean we had a brief affair. She got her husband to make a divorce settlement and now your husband has wind

of it and thinks I'm pulling out of our marriage, I mean the marriage between you and me.'

'Are you?'

'Am I what?" I asked to gain time.

'Are you pulling out of our marriage?'

'No!' I said.

She could see how sincere I was (it surprised even me).

As a matter of fact the thought of not marrying her provoked something like panic in me!

'I've been sick worried about it for a week now,' I went on. 'I have Arthur Schendt and this woman calling me at all hours and I hear myself saying yes, OK, fine, we'll do it, just to get them off the line. I mean, that fucking violin alone---I couldn't stand half a minute of it! She's OK in all other respects---you know, it feels like being enclosed in a soft, yielding envelope, my mind used to go blank, the way she moves and---'.

I could see this description was stirring her, and I meant it to.

'Anyway,' I said, 'with these two on my back I wasn't able to think of marrying anybody---even having sex!' (I hoped that covered my sterile period satisfactorily).

'Susan,' I said, 'aren't our property agreements somewhere in your files?'

I glanced up at the shelves behind her, just out of reach. You had to climb a little ladder to get at them. She jumped up and pulled the yard-high ladder to the required place. Then she stepped up. It was the opportunity I'd been waiting for for weeks. Here was my coup de grace! Happily she was wearing a skirt.

I stepped forward to 'help' her as her right hand travelled along the files just above her head. Then I placed myself between her and the shelves. At first

she thought I was just squeezing past her. But when I was directly in front of her, my head roughly on the level of her navel, I remained there, and began lifting her skirt, while I gently lowered myself so that my knees were resting on the ladder-platform.

I was suddenly engaged in cunilingus. The office door was open, so there was the exciting possibility that a client could walk by or even inadvertently enter. I was almost concealed within her skirt. I could hear her gasping. She was swaying and I thought she might fall. She leaned against the bookshelves, obliged now to display her riches more openly to me. She leaned her whole weight on me. She addressed herself wholly to what I was doing while managing to appear not to yield at all, maintaining her position so that anyone entering would at first take her to be searching for a file, alone. Yet she was relishing my work fully, even brazenly, under the relative immobility of her situation.

At the climax she almost fell, and I had to support her whole weight for a moment. We stayed there for a little time, I concealed, she still apparently searching for files.

A few seconds later she was stepping down from the ladder, the wanted file in hand, as if nothing had happened, and I took a seat in front of her desk.

'Here's the final agreement,' she said, handing it to me. 'We ought to register it right away.'

'I agree,' I said. 'Right away.'

I do believe that business oscillates with the mood of the person doing it. Promptly, as Susan and I were taking coffee that afternoon, clients began pouring in. It seemed every pet in the county had a snuffle, an itch or an ache. Hot noses, suppurating ears, dull fur, the runs---it was wonderful. When we closed up at seven o'clock we were pleasantly exhausted.

I hurried to the phone and called Emily at the place I guessed her to be---our house.

'Ah you're there,' I said. 'I've just seen the last client out so I'll be right by.'

Susan was standing in the corridor and I called out to her, 'Emily and I are doing the inventory this evening.'

'Oh yes---sure!' Susan said.

39.

Despite my multiple contacts in recent days I was still not back to my usual form. While my appetites had returned, my capacity for a reasonable quota of emissions had not. And those that did take place were by no means abundant.

My latest contact with Susan therefore fitted my book perfectly because it gave her entire (indeed, transfixed) satisfaction, while my participation was purely oral.

Also I'd wanted to save my resources for Emily.

When I got home that evening I was astonished to find my medical friend, Jock Turner from the Hayward Smithers hospital, sitting at the kitchen table with Emily (he'd never previously met her, as far as I knew, and I'd certainly never given him my address).

There was a bottle of Johannisberg Riesling from our Napa Valley stock on the table, half empty.

'Nice drop of urine you've got here,' he said to me as I came in.

I sat down irritably.

'Well how are you Jock?' I asked him without interest.

'I'm OK,' he said. 'Emily's been telling me about her Australian trip. Sounds great. Surrounded by Nobel Prize winners!'

I felt like pouring the 'urine' over his head. I'd come into the house all set for some more protracted 'negotiations' with Emily. Then I find his sturdy athletic body and thick neck and cropped blond head in the way. To add salt to my annoyance, Emily didn't seem to mind it at all.

In fact she was basking in it (I always knew when she was aroused because her nipples swelled: two things did it---boose and a man, and on this occasion she had both).

I'd deliberately not introduced Turner to Emily (or any other woman I knew) because he preferred other people's wives to his own. Like his fixation about hookers, it was a weakness stronger than he was.

'I've been telling Emily how worried I am about you,' he had the audacity to say (what a fool I'd been to open my heart to this death watch beetle of marital happiness).

'Oh yes?' I mouthed.

I glanced at Emily in gingerly fashion. Having Jock Turner in your house was as lucky as the last sacrament.

'How did you get my address?' I asked him as I poured myself a glass of wine.

'Phonebook.'

'And what worries you about me?'

'I'm a doctor after all,' he said irrelevantly.

'Yes but a children's doctor,' I said. 'Do they have such problems?'

'Children have worse sexual problems than adults---naturally, because they get so little of it!'

'How's your wife?' I said pointedly.

'Back with her mother in Philadelphia for a month.'

'Nice city,' I said. 'I'm surprised you didn't join her.'

'You wouldn't be if you knew my wife,' he said with a wink at Emily which set her going. Her idiot laugh went off like a fire-siren.

'Anyway,' Jock said, downing the last of his wine and rising, 'I have to get back to the hospital.'

'Well,' I said with relief, 'hospitals are good for something.'

'I hope so,' he said as I walked him to the door with an invisible gun-barrel in his back. 'Especially as your wife's coming in tomorrow morning for a checkup.'

'Is that right?' I asked Emily, swinging round on her like a glass door. 'Do you realise that when this man got his job the mortality rate among child patients rose alarmingly?'

The idiot woman wailed with mirth again.

'He said he didn't like the look of it,' she told me.

'Of what?'

'My rash.'

'He loves rashes if they bring him patients over six,' I said.

At the door I said, 'OK, Jock, don't call me, I'll call you.'

'What the hell are you going to that hospital for?' I asked her as his car drove away.

She was yelling at once. 'I'll go to whatever fucking hospital I like! He offered me expert service free of charge!'

'Oh you'll get that!'

'Whatever I get I won't ask your permission first!' she screamed, smashing her glass on the floor.

'Do the inventory yourself!' I yelled as I strode out of the house.

I slept at the office. Luckily I had my all-night kit there from the graveyard week. I lay there thinking

about that little episode with Susan on the ladder.
That was a triumph a woman doesn't forget.

40.

I was just entering delta sleep at about three in the morning when Emily called. The phonebell went through me like a redhot needle, while my mind grappled with the question of my whereabouts.

'You've just got to come over,' she said quietly. 'It's the best time to talk.'

'But Emily I have a hard day ahead of me.'

'You'll feel more refreshed by opening your heart than with two nights of sleep,' she said.

Emily always chose the hour of the wolf for heart-to-hearts. She was in the habit of saying that truth comes on the wings of silence.

I managed to get out of bed somehow and brewed myself a quick coffee.

I had to admit that the whispering breeze in the eucalyptus trees, and the gentle touch of dampness in the air (a balm after the sweltering day) made me almost appreciate having been woken. But I didn't look forward to our talk. I intended to let her do all of it (she usually intended the same).

As I expected, she was on her third or fourth bottle and showing not the slightest sign of that or fatigue. Her hair was still like a thousand vibrant golden snakes.

I sat down at the kitchen table and she said, 'Honey, I've been noticing certain things about you of late and your friend Jock confirmed them.'

'What's he been blabbermouthing about?'

'Well, he said you were having trouble with the

sexual energy. I'd begun to notice it too.'

'You had?'

'That's right. Nothing you could really put your finger on but nonetheless different from, say, a few months back.'

'It's something I ought to talk to you about anyway,' I said, already in the mercy position.

'I knew you weren't being open about something!' she cooed.

'I went through a number of days absolutely limp, Emily. I put it down to Lucy. Susan never has that effect. You see, I don't want to marry her.'

'Who?'

'Lucy. I want to marry Nancy.'

'What?'

She gaped.

'You'll have to protect me against Arthur Schendt,' I said. 'He made the computer agreement with Jerry Riven dependent on my keeping to the marriage settlement with Lucy. Or so I think. It'd be like him. You see, Emily, I made a tactical error. In order to push that computer agreement I used Lucy to influence him.'

She nodded. 'Naturally that got you right back in the marriage deal.'

'That's right,' I said.

'Does it have to be Susan?' she asked after some thought.

'Well she's the one I want. And Jerry Riven---'

'What about him?'

'He's more important to us than Arthur Schendt, I mean he has these strings in Washington.'

'Right,' she murmured. 'Know something? When that computer deal went through the federal funds were raised.'

'For ROOV?'

'Right! I tell you what,' she said. 'I'll get

Clemens to talk to Arthur Schendt. You see, Arthur's crazy to marry that pony-tailed student of his. Lucy's married to her violin anyway, she won't miss you.'

'Well, it isn't as if I'm going to be her enemy,' I said defensively.

'Damn right!'

Dawn, like a grey dust immaterial as thought, came as a suggestion at the window and gradually the garden took on texture and color. I think we fell asleep.

'Emily,' I said, waking. 'Do you really enjoy sex?'

'Well...,' she began.

'No,' I said, 'don't answer yet. I'll be more precise. Do you enjoy your climaxes? Do you always have a climax?'

The mascara round her eyes was running. For a moment in her bright brown gaze there was something grey.

'When I come,' she said quietly, 'it's a feeling I can't describe. I feel it up here.' She touched her chest. 'It's something hard, right there, behind. Inside. Hard. And black.'

I thought she'd fallen asleep again but she'd only closed her eyes.

'It's like being taken by the throat too,' she went on. 'It's a feeling that everything's finished. It's depressive. There's no future. No point. Then it passes off. I jump up and do something and it's OK.' She thought for a moment, then said, 'It's enjoyable too, in a way. Like peeing in company. It's allied to peeing. But also I want to hold the pee back.'

'It's the same with me---I want to keep it back---but it's always too late.'

She filtered some coffee and sat sipping it, the steam rising in her eyes with her breath. She cupped

her hands round the mug, leaned forward as she sipped, rather like a child.

'Emily,' I said in the seductive silence.

'Yes?'

'What do you like about sex?'

She sipped some more, gazing before her as the sun in the window unmasked the electric light as sterile and ineffectual.

She shrugged. 'I like thinking about it.'

'Just that?'

She nodded sleepily. She let her mug of coffee go and leaned back. Her eyes closed as if the eyelids had been pulled down by strings.

I left her there. At the office I shaved and showered, and drank more coffee. When Susan walked through the door I felt so happy I got hold of her and lifted her off the ground, though being demonstrative was against her rules. She gazed down at me in that position, perplexed, with a slight smile, very intimate.

41.

To my horror my earlier condition, which I thought had righted itself, continued despite my having had no contacts with Lucy.

Clearly Susan remembered my ladder-triumph of the day before---expressed it in her walk, in the keen way she glanced at me. I just couldn't respond at all. My genital dormancy was awesome.

Had I brought the condition back by talking about it with Emily?

Susan crossed the corridor and I gazed at her from behind, watching the firm buttocks and the tight skirt,

urging myself to react. But it did nothing. My associative faculty seemed to have lost touch with my genitals. I tried to think of Emily in certain provocative positions. Again to no avail.

I remembered those cosily enveloped hours with Lucy---I saw her ample breasts again, the hard protrusive buds of her nipples in their halo of dark skin. And to my astonishment I felt a rise of desire, contrary to everything I thought I wished! What was happening to me? Was Lucy psychically working on me, using forces that she and artistic types like her found it easy to manipulate?

This astonishment was compounded with impotent fury when Emily called me and said she'd 'settled everything with Arthur Schendt.'

'What are you talking about?' I asked.

'He'll let you off the hook about Lucy,' she said.

I felt a giddy relief---but it was mixed with, of all things, disappointment!

'I'm afraid I had to tell a white lie,' Emily went on.

'Oh yes?'

'I told him about your recent sexual troubles. I said you wouldn't maybe be able to fulfil the duties of a husband.'

'What?'

'I said I didn't know how important it was to Lucy, and do you know what he said, he said it's her only interest in the man, why else should she want to marry him, it's her only interest anyway.'

'Oh my god!'

'What's wrong?'

'You tell a man I'm impotent and then ask me what's wrong! I should ask what's wrong with you?'

'Listen honey,' she said with unexpected sweetness, 'you wanted Lucy out of your space, right or not right?'

'Right! But telling everybody I'm impotent---!'

'I didn't say that. I said maybe it wasn't permanent but in the meantime you couldn't as a husband supply the goods. Anyway honey---!'

'And stop calling me honey for christsakes!' (She only did it when she was up to something).

'My, my, you are cranky! May I say something? Maybe you really are ill---I mean---'. She hesitated. 'I noticed---when was it?---two nights ago! You know, in the old days, you were almost too hard. But now---!'

'Now?' I said, my teeth together.

'It's like it's all coming from your head---it's like you're forcing---'

'Forcing it?'

'I think maybe you need a holiday.'

'Or a change of scene? Was that Dr Turner's suggestion by any chance?'

'By the way,' she went on without answering, 'we never did get to the inventory did we?'

'I'll let you know about that later!' I snapped, putting the phone down.

I stalked into Susan's office and said, 'Why the hell is there this delay getting our documents ready?'

She looked up calmly from a pile of prescriptions. The sight of her sitting there in her own neat silence was like a cooling hand on my brow.

'There's no delay,' she told me. 'The attorney told us it might be a couple of days. You know that.'

I said to her, 'Would you come to my office for a minute? I have a problem.'

She nodded and went on signing the prescriptions. A dog barked from the kennels at the back (a hysterectomy to be performed the following day).

After a few minutes she came. It was my intention to go over some client debts with her. Our collector had rung me about them the previous day. I slipped my hand under her skirt, distractedly, as if unaware

of what I was doing but not only didn't it work--- an image of Lucy hovered in my mind! I was on the point of tears. I found myself, as I took my hand away and spuriously drew her attention to the accounts on my desk, cursing Emily as if she were responsible.

Suppose the story of my impotence spread to Jerry Riven from Arthur Schendt---suppose he warned Susan that I was sexually a flake?

I stayed another night at the office. I waited for Emily to call and she did.

'I'm at Nancy's,' she said. 'I knew you wouldn't be there for the inventory, so I didn't stay.'

'I'm not feeling too good,' I blurted out like an idiot.

'I just wanted to put your mind at rest about Arthur Schendt,' she went on. 'You know, he's been waiting in the wings for an NP for at least three years---'.

'An NP?'

'You're losing your memory too! Nobel Prize!'

'I see.'

'The last thing he wants is for any boats to be rocked in his vicinity. No trouble, especially with WIFE. A word from Clemens on the NP grapevine that he's wobbly and screwing his students and he'll never get within smelling distance of an NP again.'

'So what?'

'So you don't have to worry that he'll talk to Jerry Riven about you' (the witch!). 'That would be tantamount to telling Jerry that you'd been planning to marry Lucy, which wouldn't be good news on the Susan front would it?'

'No it wouldn't,' I said, my teeth tight together like a vice.

As she intended, that little phonecall, far from putting my mind at rest, had me trembling.

I called Susan from the office and got her husband.

I covered myself with a technical question about the data processing in his system. I felt childishly like insisting that Susan was my property and would he please sleep somewhere else. He talked casually, easily. Nothing seemed wrong.

As if to fill my cup of woe to overflowing Emily called me again at midnight (she really was becoming my persecutor) and said, 'Oh, I wanted to tell you about that very strange friend of yours Jock Turner.'

'Oh yes?'

'He examined my rash.'

'He did?'

'I was astonished at the audacity, he made me strip-- I had to do it because there were two nurses present. He had me lay down on a surgical bed and he examined me so closely I thought his eyes were going to pop out.'

'Oh yes?'

'Then he took me for a coffee across the street and said you just need a good purging.'

'Me or you?'

'Me. It sounded very suggestive. He said he'd like to meet some evening on Broadway in San Francisco, he said I had to walk along like a hooker and he'd pick me up in his car and we'd go to a sleazy hotel where all the whores go, he said this is a big fantasy for him and we could have a whale of a time, he said if you haven't ever tried it Emily it contains all the known thrills!'

'Oh yes?'

'Yes. Isn't he the whackiest space-head?'

I sat brimming with fury afterwards. I decided to call him up. It was half past midnight and hopefully he would be asleep. He was. It took him a whole minute of lip-smacking and noisy breathing to realise he wasn't being summoned by a dying patient. I cherished every second.

'No,' I said, 'it's me.'

'Ah,' he said and fell asleep again. But since a medico's livelihood depends on convincing his gullible patients that he's responsible even in the middle of the night, his instincts pulled him awake again.

'What the hell do you want at this hour?' he said.

'I hear you're planning a good time with my wife,' I said. 'On Broadway. In a sleazy hotel.'

'Oh for christsakes,' he said.

'Well are you?'

'Listen, I asked her to show me her rash and open one blouse button and she smacks me round the face.'

'She what?'

'And I told the nurses before she came that she was a Sprayd-Taylor. You were joking of course?'

'Of course.'

'At this hour? Are you drunk?'

'Yes.'

'Well tell your fucking wife I don't like to be made to look a monkey in my own hospital.'

'I will.'

42.

When Susan came in the next morning she asked me, 'Why are you sleeping here?'

'How did you know I was?'

'Because I can smell your Men Only aftershave.'

'It's Emily,' I said. 'She's making my life unbearable.'

'How?'

'Well she---just won't leave me alone. When is she going to marry ye olde Clemens, for christsakes?'

'Is that the real reason you're sleeping here?'

'No. I'm off her. Don't want to see her.'

She was standing there in a smart dark suit with a white chintzy blouse underneath, just a couple of feet in front of me, contained so neatly in herself as always, her breasts discreetly hidden under the blouse's folds, her waist tightly confined in a subtly pinstriped skirt.

What followed was one of the most provocative events of my life. It proved that Susan understood, observed all, while seemingly noticing nothing. What she did was to close the gap between us and take hold of me in the most intimate sense. In a moment---even now I can't say precisely how it happened---I was in penetration. And she must have prepared for that---foreseen and rehearsed it---for under her skirt I found no further impediment.

Casanova may have argued against emission while standing but on this occasion no power on earth could have prevented it. My need---so I learned in a fraction of a second---was so great that for a moment my entire body, not just my organ, seemed encapsulated within her purse of pleasures. The relief was as great in her, I believe. She gasped and rocked, her mouth open, breathing hotly on my lips, as we drew to the most simultaneous climax I had ever experienced.

So much for my 'wound'! With the right treatment, at the hands of the right woman, it ceased to exist.

As I waited for her to finish in the main bathroom that 'wound' seemed as historical and academic as the shooting of Abraham Lincoln.

The event was repeated at lunchbreak. This time I took the initiative, though in all other respects it was an identical experience, even in the matter of being in the same place as before, in the corridor between our offices (and still with free access, from the clothing point of view).

Surprise seemed to be the order of the day, for

Emily called me in the early afternoon to ask me to dinner at the Martinez-Holstein residence that very evening.

'It's important for you,' she said. 'Clemens wants to bring about a real reconciliation between you and the Humane Society.'

'Jesus Christ!' I said. 'Am I in conflict with the Humane Society?'

'Somebody tipped them off about the dog exnims.'

'Oh no! It's that bitch Lucy, I swear it!'

'That's why we have to pussyfoot round a bit,' she said. 'Keep your cool. When are the dogs due to arrive by the way?'

'In a fortnight, latest.'

'OK. Now Clemens also wants to clear up this Lucy problem.'

'That's great but why does he want to do all this for me?'

'He's doing it for me.'

I was intrigued. It was my first invitation to the Martinez-Holstein residence, at least as a wanted guest, and this meant I was now 'officially' acknowledged for my role in ROOV.

Also I was in the mood for a dinner party after my recent inner trials.

A wave of gratitude toward Susan came over me. After our two contacts that day she was as compact, cool and erect as ever, not a hair out of place (not even if you disheveled her did she look disheveled). With Susan, however much you ruptured the proprieties, these closed round her again at once like a protective woof. She thus allowed the conventions total autonomy over her, while subverting them more than anyone else I knew.

I told her I'd been invited to the Martinez-Holstein house and she said, 'So have we.'

'We?'

'Me and Jerry.'

'For this evening?'

'Yes.'

I couldn't believe it.

At home I took a shower and fixed myself a corkscrew (vodka to intoxicate, orange juice to vitaminise). I left in a cloud of Men Only aftershave with a loose cream jacket over black pants and an open-necked black shirt, with shining sand-colored winklepicker shoes.

When I got there I found not only Clemens and Nancy the Hatchet acting as hosts but Emily too. Arthur Schendt and Lucy were already there.

When Jerry and Susan came a few minutes later the lounge looked like the history of my life.

Strangely Lucy's presence didn't throw me. Her animal eyes rested on me, I was glad to see, without ethical overtones.

Clemens hovered over me in kindly fashion, dressed in dark blue pants and a white Balkan shirt with cloth bobble-buttons and lacing, from the Sixties. He went from one guest to another chatting. He smiled across at Nancy the Hatchet, and occasionally touched Emily on the shoulder as if to remind her of the fact that they were sometimes intimate. His voice was urbane and poised and I wanted to ask him 'Where are the overcoats tonight dad?'. I swear he would have answered me with a smiling twinkle of the eyes.

Yes, he was every inch a NPW!

I admired the way the evening was organised. Nancy never missed a beat---she was always there with more wine or the fork you'd lost or a second helping you wanted but were too shy to ask for.

Behind her vague smile and long, slow movements there was sharp observation. Considering we were six guests it was amazing how effortlessly she managed.

The conversation touched on the ROOV project. I was disquieted by two hints, one from Clemens and the

other from Schendt, that ROOV V and VI might already have been 'superseded'. I began to tremble---and to suspect that I'd been invited simply to receive the axe.

When Clemens took me aside at a certain point I felt my moment had come.

He said, 'I know you'd like to smoke. Let me take you to the library.'

We went down a corridor to a small room lined with bookshelves. He closed the door and invited me to sit down.

'I wanted a confidential word with you,' he said. 'The geneticists aren't ready with the machinery, so you can't start your dissection until at least the beginning of next month.'

'Why are the geneticists so remote from our end?' I asked.

He shrugged. 'This is a visionary kind of experiment. They're hiding behind us, we're hiding behind them. And so nobody quite takes responsibility. Everybody fears a public outcry where there's animal experimentation of this order. There's an increasing sympathy for rats in this world, believe it or not. Ever since it got out that thousands of rat-brains were pulped to produce endorphins. And as for cats and dogs being introduced---well, I needn't tell you, a vet, the possible consequences if it got out. No one of any reputation could be seen to be anywhere near it.' He put a gentle hand on my knee. 'Listen, all experiment involves a risk of this nature. Do you think the public would have let nuclear researches reach the level they did if the papers had printed lay descriptions of the experiments? And the chemical warfare researches, their toxic wastes poisoning people's gardens and wells and rivers? New knowledge has to be fought for, my dear fellow, but discreetly, because the public hates the new.'

As we went back to the other guests he said, 'You see, people fear the future. New ideas mean an unpredictable future. Quite understandably they only want the securities of the past.'

Mike Borovitz blew a hole in my seat by walking into the lounge after dinner. How my shady animal-contact had met up with the Martinez-Holstein circle I didn't know---and I instinctively felt I shouldn't ask too many questions. But my chin certainly dropped when I saw his sandy hair and long face with the rubber-tube nose. He leaned over my chair from behind, coffee cup in hand, and murmured, 'I'll be delivering Jamie tomorrow, OK?'

'The German shepherd?' I asked.

'Right.' He added, 'I'll deliver him to your house if you don't mind, not the clinic.'

'Why?'

'Clemens thinks it's better.'

'Oh sure, sure!' I said.

This meant that I could begin cutting in a couple of days. And Susan and I could do our 'rehearsal cut' in our own time, unfazed by the presence of the anaesthetists, technicians etc.

I disliked Borovitz's presence in a circle I thought exclusive and strolled on to the terrace. I stood there with my hands in my pockets blistering inwardly against Lucy for having brought all this on us. How many cats and dogs had she cured, patted consolingly, operated on at the vital moment? Why, I must have saved hundreds, thousands of lives! To how many pet-owners had I not brought relief and grateful joy! And this violin-scraping asshole goes round sentimentalising about six dogs which would die on the streets anyway.

'Hullo.'

It was said so quietly my heart did a jump---right from anger into peace. Lucy was standing just behind me.

'I really enjoyed our time in LA, didn't you?' she said.

'Your playing and the reception afterwards and what we did in your room are all of one lovely piece for me, Lucy---I shall never forget it.'

And a warm memory of those two days did stir in my mind as we stood there. I took her hand and we strolled down the slope between the redwood trees.

We held each other round the waist. The Berkeley lights were strung out wide below us, with the still Bay water beyond, and the highrises of San Francisco shining on the far horizon against a deep red sky as the sun took its last curtain of the day.

We sat down on the dry leaves and kissed. The night closed round us with its strangely inviting darkness, like an envelope nobody else could penetrate. The voices from the houses were muffled, indistinct, like a musical accompaniment obliging us to sing the only duet possible. So we did. We rolled over and over in the leaves, slipping gradually downhill. Penetration was as quick, smooth, easy, soft as slipping into dark water in the dead of night, unseen.

Here again, for the third time that day, there was no barrier to my entry within the skirt. How strange life was---two women had foreseen, mentally rehearsed the very same event!

How soft that bed of leaves was, how excellently it had all been stage managed from on high! We sank deeper and deeper until it seemed that the hill itself was being penetrated, that she had become the hill, in its cavernous depths, its entwining convolutions of roots.

43.

When we got back to the lounge the guests had gone. We heard voices upstairs.

'Oh god,' Lucy said, 'they're in the music room. They'll want me to play. There's a Strad in the house. And Nancy accompanies.'

She went off to the john while I plodded upstairs. Nancy was playing a Schumann piece. As I put my head round the door Emily jumped up and came over to me. Something was amusing her.

She whispered, 'Let's go to my bedroom.'

She had one of the guest rooms---full of cheerful printed cloth and fat cushions, with a low divan bed by the window.

As soon as we were inside she said, 'That's one crazy doctor you have!'

'What?'

'The one who's got the thing about hookers!'

'Oh him! I wouldn't bother about him. God knows how he ever qualified. His nickname's rigor mortis in the hospital. His prescriptions are feared like death certificates.'

'OK, funny man,' she said with a chuckle. 'You put him up to it, right?'

'To what?'

She made her fire-siren laugh, throwing her masses of hair back.

'He stood at the front door---'

'Which front door?' I asked in alarm.

'This one! I invited him in and he went through a long spiel about me walking along Broadway and he'd pick me up between Columbus and Keary at 8.30 in the

evening, he was real excited! It was all I could do not to crack up right in front of him! You see, I smacked his face for asking me to undress at the hospital, you didn't know that, did you?'

'Right,' I said.

'Now if you picked me up on Broadway, that might make a very interesting number, might it not?'

'Right!' I said, without conviction.

She kept chuckling. Then she locked the door. Oh Jesus, I thought, here we go.

'I'd like to show you a new overcoat I bought,' she said, walking to the wardrobe.

When she opened it I saw more overcoats than Macy's even stock.

'No Emily,' I said firmly, walking to the door and unlocking it. 'You're mixing your wires. It's the other guy you do the overcoat number with!'

And I walked out. I was spellbound by my acting prowess.

I actually heard her gasp behind me. She came to the door and said in a subdued voice, 'But several of our numbers entail winter weather, don't they?'

But I'd already turned the corner into the music room.

44.

I had an ugly feeling as I sat in the office next morning that I'd gone too far. If I lost Emily's protection my other protectors would decamp too. Suppose she urged Arthur Schendt to tell Jerry Riven about my impotency problem? Then, if Susan pulled out,

that would be the end not only of our sexual partnership but our business one too. I shuddered at the thought of spending the rest of my life as a lone cat-and-dog quack. And that empty house in the evenings without Emily. The lone evening swim in the pool. The lonelier drink at the edge of the pool in the dying sun.

But I just couldn't face contact with Emily again. And that put my career at risk. Apart from the fact that the earth knows no fury like that of a woman scorned, Emily's fury per se was enough to scorch a hole in your pants.

Of course I was depressing myself. I'd drunk a little too much wine the evening before. But I still had to face the fact that touching Emily was now, believe it or not, repugnant to me. That chat in the dead of night had done it. She should never have told me about her climaxes. Truth had come on the wings of silence alright, but it had taken 172 numbers with it on departure.

At one time, even a week before, I would have run a mile for a number with Emily. Just an oblique reference from her about one of our numbers would make me jump to attention in the genital area, unfailingly. Not now.

I would have to think something up. I simply couldn't afford that amazon as my enemy.

Susan on the other hand appealed to me more and more. Every time she passed my open door I felt a little better. I was beginning to miss her in the evenings too.

In two days time the building of our new wing would begin, which would mean noise and dust and me sharing her office (mine gave out on to the back patio where the extension would be made). A new sign would go up over the front lawn, in stone, on stilts---Domestic Pets Clinic.

I got home late and found a fine German shepherd wandering about on the front porch. He came up to me

wagging his tail (not a frequent occurrence where a vet is concerned). There was a note pinned on the front door---'I've left Jamie. He knows who you are---Mike Borovitz' (an odd remark, but no more odd than Mike himself).

'Are you Jamie?' I asked the dog.

He wagged his tail even harder and made little jumping movements toward the house.

'OK, Jamie,' I said, pushing open the door, 'make yourself at home.'

He dashed in and went round sniffing as if this had been his territory since birth. He had attractive fur with blond highlights, especially round the head. It seemed a shame to separate him from his limbs, however necessary. And I hoped that airhead Mike didn't think I was going to carry six more canine guests at home. He'd deliver them to the clinic or nowhere.

The dog dashed upstairs to the bedroom and started howling with pleasure.

'What goes on?' I called out. 'You like it up there?'

He came bounding down the stairs again, his eyes shining and his tongue hanging out. He jumped up at me, wagging his tail like mad. Animals are supposed (by animal intelligence dudes) to have intuition---they can tell when storms and earthquakes are on the way and can smell a nasty human motive a mile off. Well, all I can say is that this animal, due for chopping up in a couple of days, didn't seem to have his premonitive faculties working at all.

Young Jamie (I gave him no more than two years) was quite a companion that long evening. I made him some food, adding leftover steak from my plate to some lethal-looking dog mix from the clinic. He wouldn't touch it. I was amazed. He just walked away and slumped down in front of me and fixed me with his eyes in prolonged and silent criticism. I couldn't shake

his gaze off. Not until I rose with a sigh and pulled out some hamburger steak from the fridge and fried it up did he relax. I knew that was what he wanted just by the way he was sitting there. When I put the bowl in front of him he attacked it like a lion, threw it down his throat.

'Isn't that hard on your digestive organs?' I asked him.

And he gave me a look as if to say, don't make me laugh.

I put a porno video on but changed it almost at once for Stokowski conducting the Beethoven Requiem. Jamie sat there by my feet and every now and then, remembering what his fate was to be, I put my hand down and stroked his old ears, and I felt his quick, hot, rough tongue as he, like me, returned to contemplate Leopold's maniacal gesticulations and the open mouths of the Detroit Choral Society.

45.

My hope was that Emily didn't realise just how far my antipathy for her had gone. But hiding anything from her was like trying to escape a thousand watchful eyes. She had them all the way down her back.

I decided to back-track, and called her up.

'What about this inventory?' I asked her.

'Oh I put that in my accountant's hands,' she said drily. 'There are people who do that sort of thing for a living.'

A silence followed.

'I'd in any case like to see you,' I said. 'We have things to discuss.'

'What things?'

This was uphill work.

I couldn't even hear her breathing, which meant she'd gone beyond fury to the total-decimation phase.

Or was I mistaken?

She spoke my name very quietly.

'Yes?' I said.

'I'd like to do a goddess evening with you.'

'A goddess---?'

'Didn't you know I'd joined this goddess group? Oh, months ago!'

'I don't even know what a goddess group is,' I said, feeling emphatically more comfortable.

'They're all over California, honey. It's Mary Preylie's Network.'

'Who's Mary Preylie?'

'She runs Goddesses-in-America.'

'Oh yes?'

'I have to sit in the goddess position---and I need an audience. I need a man---'

'You need a man?' I squealed, wanting to bite my tongue out an instant after.

'Not for numbers. I'm off numbers.'

'You're off numbers?' I asked her, trying to suppress my relief.

'Yes,' she said. 'I'm sorry. I'm afraid Clemens took it out of me in that respect. I mean overcoats in this heat.'

'I quite understand.'

'I want to pass on to something else.'

'OK,' I said. 'What time would you like to come?'

'Oh, around seven.'

'Oh,' I said, 'I've got a dog called Jamie. The first delivery.'

'Great,' she said. 'I hope he cuts well.'

Around ten that same evening Susan called.

'I have the marriage settlement here,' she said.
'Registered.'

'Great!'

'Shall I bring them round?'

My heart did an excited leap. 'That's a great idea. Bring them round Susan!'

I switched the television off and patted Jamie. Amazing that though Susan and I were cooped up together all day at the clinic I was as delighted as a child to see her again.

She arrived in jeans and a sweater, but even in this casual outfit she looked as uncasual as visiting royalty. What was it about her hands-off attitude that invited urgent hands-on?

The dog jumped up at her too.

'It's like he's lived here all his life,' I told her.

She nodded, giving Jamie non-committal but nonetheless maternal, responsible pats. Everything she did had such finality. No vague edges.

She laid the documents on the kitchen table and I studied them.

I said, 'Can you stay the night?'

'Yes. Jerry's away.'

'What about the kids?'

'Mother's staying with us again.'

'You have a convenient mother.'

'Well, she really enjoys California.'

We went upstairs. I put out the light and lay listening to her cleaning her teeth in the bathroom. My excitement was so great I literally found it difficult to contain myself. She returned, silhouetted against the window, in a night gown with frilled shoulder-sleeves, cut in at the waist. It cupped her breasts so that they seemed to spill over. And the moment she lay down at my side the silent awed penetration that was in so many ways an assault, however gently and smoothly achieved,

began.

Hands-off struggled deliciously against, and thus further provoked, hands-on.

46.

At dawn, with Susan slumbering at my side, I woke thinking about the ROOV experiment---and especially of those two references at the Martinez-Holstein dinner party to ROOV V and VI having been 'superseded'.

Also I'd noticed at that party how every reference I made to my dog-exnims produced a discouraging silence.

And why had they invited Mike Borovitz, that Sonoma County strawhead? What an asset for a serious scientific experiment! I remembered how Mike had once started a meatshop in Petaluma called New Age Meats and had a tape playing to the customers while they made their purchases, it was a woman's quiet voice saying that no pain had been suffered by the animals, they'd been 'rendered unconscious in home surroundings' and had died peacefully far from the abbatoirs. I taxed him with it at the time---I said, 'Your fucking meat's the same as everybody else's!' He said, 'What's that got to do with it? I influence the mind. My customers eat their meat far more happily than other people do. That's the important thing--- what goes on in the mind!'

And the shop did well too. In fact he opened two more, one in Calistoga and the other in Mill Valley.

At breakfast I put it to Susan squarely: 'I'm worried this project might go off the rails---or rather that part of it that concerns you and me. Do you happen to know what's going on?'

She looked at me vaguely and I explained about

ROOV V and V1 already having become obsolete.

She looked down, biting her lip, seeming to withhold the very thing she was giving, as always.

'Jerry said the computer deal makes a difference,' she told me. 'Better funds mean more ambitious projects.'

'Are V and V1 definitely off then?'

'I don't know that,' she answered.

'Should I call Jerry to find out exactly what he knows?' I asked her.

'I think you should. I've got his office number.'

When I called him from the clinic later that morning he at first did his gruff international-businessperson act, then he realised it was me and climbed down to a Santa Rosa hot-tub self.

'You don't have to worry about our deal,' he said.

I broke in before he could go on. 'I realise that. It's the exnim question that bothers me.'

'Oh I don't think they'll use your exnims.' he said.

'What?'

'You mustn't quote me, and I haven't heard anything for definite, but it's my overall impression that your exnims have been superseded.'

'What the hell are they going to use---cows?'

'Are you that keen on the project, man? Do you realise your clinic would be up for grabs and Susan out of a job if it got out to the media what you propose to do? I've been trying to get that over to Susan for days but she keeps saying your heart's in it and that kind of crap.'

There was a pause at the other end. He went on, 'I think the geneticists feel that while they're building machinery to cope with your size of exnim they might as well be even bolder---'

'Rhesus monkeys?' I asked. 'I can lay my hands on them too!'

'Further even than that maybe.'

'Further? How do you mean?'

Again the pause. Then he said, 'I heard some talk about casting round for human volunteers.'

'Human---?' I gasped. I held my seat. 'Human---
volunteers---? For christsakes man---!'

'Cool it,' he said. 'You don't imagine that men like Martinez-Holstein and Schendt are going to take one step forward without testing the ground, do you?'

'But---!'

'Anyway, I might have got it wrong,' he said.

'I think you certainly have!' I replied.

After the call I sat there for some time, pulled in different directions by the wild horses of disbelief.

I went to Susan. But she was deep in a consultation. Even so she glanced up as if to say, 'Don't worry. It'll all turn out OK.'

I was unfit for work. A saluki bitch almost bit my finger off. A cat due for fixing arched its back. I was just bending down to lift the tail of a young chow to look at a leg wound when he farted right in my face.

'Clearly not my day,' I murmured to the gloating owner.

47.

When Emily arrived that evening I had the champagne on ice and eggs-in-aspic which Susan had got from a girlfriend who worked in a gourmet catering firm, supported by my usual smoked salmon canapés and boiled plovers' eggs. I made a nice color scheme with large lettuce leaves and slices of egg-fruit, tomatoe, and Greek olives and gherkins.

She breezed in on high heels, a transparent skirt

flowing behind her. Jamie gave her the same treatment he'd given me, as if she'd been his mistress for years. He made little squealing noises of pleasure. They made a good picture together. So outdoors.

In her car were, of all things, boxes of rose petals. I had to bring them in. They were every shade---tea-colored, purple, yellow, orange and bright scarlet. There were wreaths of heavy-scented Hawaiian pumeria.

The scent filled the lounge---wistful, lingering.

'What's it all for?' I asked her.

'I'll show you later,' she said, sitting down with relish on one of the water-divans. Emily loved her food.

I opened the champagne and the cork flew to the ceiling celebratively. Jamie barked and thought it was great fun. He got hold of the cork and started playing with it, but was bored almost at once.

'He's real cute,' Emily said without the smallest interest.

'He sleeps in our bedroom. It's hard for me sometimes---when I think of dissecting him.'

'Listen, honey,' she said, 'the exnims on ROOV have the same lives as before, don't you realise that? They may not move, and their limbs and organs may be separated, but they still have a sense of life. What is a sense of life anyway? You know what the French say---'I think, therefore I am'. Well, all we do, really, is think! Clemens says, as long as the same thoughts and emotions go through our heads, we live the same however far we may be from our bodies. If we think we're running, when we're not, it's just the same as running from our point of view. If we think we're eating then we are eating, even if our bodies aren't, even if the digestive system is ten thousand miles away from the head that's thinking. I mean, those rats in ROOV think, therefore they are!'

'I hadn't seen it like that Emily,' I told her.
'You're damn right!'

I looked at her proudly. We touched glasses and sipped the cool bubbly. She tackled an egg-in-aspic and made humming noises of appreciation as it passed down. I always enjoyed watching her eat. It made food doubly delicious. I felt my appetite quicken and I too plunged in. I made for the smoked salmon. With a few drops of lemon it went down like velvet. And when flushed with Dom Perignan it took a second bow, so to speak.

'And how's the forthcoming marriage?' I asked her.
'Have you come to terms with Nancy?'

'Oh, that's all on ice at the moment.'

'On ice?'

'The thing is Nancy's my best girlfriend at this time and I don't wish to disturb her domestic life, and Clemens agrees with me.' (I managed to hide my nervousness).

'Anyway,' she said, 'you're a bit behind schedule. I haven't been with Clemens for quite a time.'

'No?' I said, suddenly in a state of shock. 'Who have you been with?'

'Didn't you know?' she said. 'Jerry Riven of course! I thought everybody knew!'

'Jerry Riven?'

'Well of course. That's why Susan and I were always so close. I used to drive over to their place all the time, don't you remember?'

'So---me being with Susan---you asking her to look after me when you were in Amsterdam---that was a sort of wife-swopping, right?'

She shrugged. 'Give it any name you want. But don't forget he came to see you too---when I was in Amsterdam.'

'And why did he come and see me, apart from the

computer deal?'

'Not apart from the computer deal. That's why I sent him.'

'You sent him?'

'Of course! I told him, put the computer deal in my husband's hands, it'll give him some clout in ROOV. So he did.'

'Well for christsakes!'

'We thought it'd be good for you and for Susan, professionally. We wanted to help your clinic. But then you got interested in Lucy.'

'I feel,' I said, 'I feel I don't run my own life!'

'Who does?' she said with a smile. 'Didn't Susan tell you any of this?'

'Well of course not!'

'Not even that Jerry and I were madly in love?'

'She knew?'

'Well of course she knew!'

'It's no good saying of course because it was never of course for me. She never said a word to me!'

'But for Jesus christsakes man ain't you got eyes in your head?'

'With the best eyes in my head,' I said, 'how could I see an affair between you and a man I'd never met?'

'Because I went to their house three times a week! Can't you recognise a woman in love?'

'You were supposed to be in love with Clemens Martinez-Holstein!'

'He only started coming on heavy in Amsterdam. That was later! I asked Jerry what to do and he said hang on in there, it'll help you professionally.'

'So now,' I murmured, unfit for further eating, 'you'll marry Jerry?'

'Not for sure. You know, he's always in Michigan State or Houston or some place. And as Clemens said to me yesterday, Riven isn't much of a surname. He meant Jerry's dull, like a computer which isn't switched on.'

'But think of his influence in Washington,' I said sneeringly.

'That's right. But now there's Jock to consider too.'

'Jock?'

'Yes!'

'Jock who?'

'Jock Turner.' She popped an olive in her mouth. 'Your doctor friend. At least you know about him!'

'Do I?'

'Well you arranged it all!'

'Arranged what Emily?'

'Arranged for him to call on me and invite me out. I mean, it was obvious. You told him to do it. He said so. He said you'd told him I'd be interested in doing this number with him.'

'Which number?'

'The hooker number! When he said walk along Broadway dressed up as a hooker and I'll pick you up between Columbus and Geary I nearly freaked out! I mean, it felt like I'd been waiting all my life for this one number!'

'You did it?' I screamed. 'You actually did it?'

'Well of course I did!'

'Broadway, and the sleazy hotel?'

'Yes!'

'He picked you up between Geary and Columbus, and you dressed like a hooker?'

'Right!'

'Then why,' I asked weakly, 'why did you slap him round the face when he told you to undress in the hospital? People do undress in hospitals!'

'It was the way he said it. It was kind of suggestive.'

'And asking you to dress up as a hooker wasn't suggestive?' I spluttered.

'That was different. It was a number. And anyway he told me you wanted me to do it.'

'He told---' I couldn't find words.

She crammed some salmon in her mouth and said, 'Listen honey don't you see I only did it for that reason---to add to our numbers? Don't you remember me saying at Clemens's party, wouldn't that hooker number be great for you and me, and you just walked out of the room!'

'But Emily,' I croaked, my voice a barely audible rasp, 'shouldn't you decide between our numbers, Jerry Riven, Clemens and, now, Jock Turner?'

'That's exactly what I have done,' she said. 'When Clemens said about Jerry Riven's name not being good enough for me, my reply was, I like the name I got, that's the one I prefer---!'

'The name---?' I asked, blanching at the thought that she might possibly be referring to mine.

'Yours,' she said. 'The one I got. It seems absurd to change. Doesn't it?'

This was all I'd been fearing for days. I looked down, I looked up, I looked sideways---anywhere but in her eyes.

'Emily,' I said, 'after all these arrangements? The marriage settlements---two major settlements, including foreseeable-divorce settlements for after we're newly married---such a lot of work---first Lucy, then Susan---!'

'But don't you think it's such an upheaval?' she said softly. 'Changing houses, and bedrooms, and habits!'

'Yes,' I said, biding my time so that I could think out a convincing plan, 'you have a point there.' I got up. 'There are some little meat patties in the oven.'

I fetched them out as a diversion and they were the triumph of the evening. She wolfed about seven of them

in a row, feeding some to Jamie too.

Now that she had some bulk inside her I said, 'There's another thing. How certain are ROOV V and V1?'

'Certain? How can you ask that?'

'I mean, how sure can I be that dog exnims are going to be used? I've heard some pretty funny reports. There's talk that dog exnims have been superseded.'

She sighed. 'Isn't that the price one always pays in this field? The pace is so fast that a project finalised today is scrapped on the grounds of obsolescence tomorrow.'

I gazed at her. 'Are those your words Emily? I mean 'obsolescence' means something losing efficacy after being applied. We haven't applied the new exnim experiments yet!'

'Well of course I've had a lot of discussion with Clemens. You know, he's become a sort of mentor for me, my guru you might say---'

'I'm happy you can say that Emily. He's an altogether different class of man from Jock Turner.'

'Let's forget Jock Turner!' she said. Another patty went down. 'You see, honey, we never know how fast the genetic side of this experiment is going to go. I mean, if we're trying to find out something about intelligence---and I take that to be the scope of the ROOV project---it's human intelligence we're basically interested in.'

I slumped back in my seat.

'So,' I said softly, all the air leaving my body, 'Jerry Riven was right...'

'Jerry?'

'Is it possible, Emily, that the exnims for V and V1 may be human volunteers?'

'Well,' she said thoughtfully, 'not exactly that.'

'If not exactly that, Emily, what is it exactly? Is it Rhesus monkeys, exactly, or apes, exactly, or any of the other primates exactly?'

'No,' she said.

I leaned forward. 'So why don't you tell me what it is, exactly?'

'If I tell you anything, it's got to be confidential. Now even Susan, right?'

'Right,' I said. 'Not even Susan. Not even Jamie.'

'Jamie?' she squealed.

'The dog.'

'Oh!'

'OK, you have my promise, so what exactly are ROOV V and VI going to consist of?'

'There's talk of a suicide couple.'

'A suicide couple?'

'That's right. I mean---'

'You mean two people, a man and a woman, are going to be the exnims. Two people who've had enough of life and sign a document that they don't mind the post-mortem use of their faculties?'

'It's a possibility, that's all I'm going to say!' She looked all o'ercast with thought for a moment.

'Does that seem bad to you?'

'Bad? I don't know! I'm just shocked!'

'If they volunteered?' she asked in a tiny voice.

'You mean a couple has actually volunteered?'

She nodded.

'To whom did they volunteer?' I asked her.

'To Clemens.'

'Two friends?'

'Right.'

'He doesn't mind chopping up his friends?'

'Well,' she said, 'he wouldn't do the actual job would he? Anyway,' she added, it kinda fell through.'

'But it's murder for christsakes!' I said in a highpitched voice.

'That's why it had to be abandoned. That's the problem on everybody's mind right now!'

'What's the problem?' I asked.

'How to get round the law!' She pursed her lips and then burst out with, 'Dammit, all science has been against the law from the beginning! What about Copernicus, Galilieo?'

I nodded. 'OK. I see that. Yes, I see that!'

'Wow! You try my patience sometimes!'

'I'm sorry,' I said. 'Now why don't you just try and explain what's going on?'

'Listen, I know you've a good heart. I know you love animals and don't like to see them hurt. And as for human beings---! But don't you see, honey, these people aren't going to be killed at all! They're just being given a different kind of life!'

'But they lose their power of choice,' I said, unable to contain myself, despite my promise of silent attention. 'You're taking their rights away from them! That's equivalent to kidnap if not murder!'

'Listen, why don't you leave that on one side for a moment, because it's something Clemens and Arthur Schendt are going into in depth? OK?'

'OK,' I said unwillingly. 'OK.' But I couldn't hold myself back. 'You mean they're looking for human exnims?'

'They're looking for the right legal approach.'

'But if the legal aspects are made OK---if they can get somebody to sign up as a ROOV exnim---will there be a human exnim---I mean, will it be for real?'

'Listen,' she said compassionately, 'what are you so excited about?'

'Don't you see Emily? That means my exnims won't be used, that I have no role any more! It means human surgeons do the job, not me!'

She gazed down (was it contrition?).

'Seven dogs specially chosen!' I said. 'Look at Jamie here! What a specimen!' I was on the edge of tears. 'And all this effort being thrown away!'

'I know,' she said, 'I know.'

'You're helpless, is that right, Emily? You can't do anything for me?'

She shook her head.

'It just flew out of my hands all of a sudden,' she went on. 'I suppose somebody said at the genetics end, why not use the best exnims of all? They are the best exnims!'

'I agree there,' I said. 'Listen, this is a very great disappointment for me. Susan and I are building a new wing at the clinic---I realise now that we've been designing it with the ROOV experiments in mind.'

'Is the new wing going to benefit you and Susan as vets too?'

'Oh sure.'

'So? Updated facilities attract the best customers. You won't lose anything.'

Jamie came to my side and I patted him absentmindedly. I wanted to tell him about my disappointment, seeing that he wouldn't be chopped up after all. But of course he wouldn't have shared the disappointment exactly.

Emily rose and sat down by me, put a hand on mine.

'Can I start the goddess thing now?'

'Oh sure,' I said with a brave smile. 'I've been wondering what that's all about.'

'Could we clear the room? I need a space in the middle.'

I pulled the coffee table, the armchairs and water-divans to the sides.

Jamie thought this wonderful and jumped about, playfully trying to bite my ankles.

'Shall I move the carpet?' I asked her.

'No. I need that to sit on.'

She started to undress.

'What are you doing?' I asked her.

'Why don't you sit down and just watch?'

'OK.'

Together with Jamie, who looked as puzzled as I was, cocking his head to one side, I sat gazing at her.

She released her bra and her breasts made a soft fall in their plenitude. To my horror I felt no reaction. She took her panties off. I even felt some revulsion.

Breasts I'd once gazed at with 'the enthusiasm of a son whose mother at last gratifies him sexually' (as my shrink used to say) were now, if not precisely repellent to me, at least suffocating in effect, as if they might smother me.

Never before had I experienced such feelings with a naked woman. Again my mind returned to that ill-fated night when she'd told me about her climaxes. She shouldn't have done it, my mind clamored, she shouldn't have done it!

It was---almost---like being intimate with a man except that this man had boobs. There was a suggestion of sweat, body-odor, tiny defects of skin.

I ached to get away as she, quite naked now, sat on the carpet in the cross-legged position that you see in yoga.

She said, 'Now would you bring the boxes and sprinkle rose petals over me, and put the lei round my neck?'

I was sure she felt my revulsion as I moved round her sprinkling the petals, and especially when I put the two pumaria wreaths round her neck.

A peculiar relentless glint came into her eyes which I was all too familiar with, as if she'd struck me off her list. It provoked a sinking sensation in the pit of my stomach.

Then she launched into a sort of lecture. It was

really whacky. She started talking about the Goddesses-in-America Association and how she'd come to join it.

'I met the founder,' she said in a phoney hushed voice. 'Calcutta Sublime.'

'Calcutta what?' I asked her.

'Calcutta Sublime.'

'What's that?'

'She. The founder.'

'It's a name?'

'It's her name.'

'A real name?' I asked.

'Well of course real! I mean, it's hers. It's far more real than the one she got in an empty church ritual before she could speak.'

'Oh so it's a chosen name,' I said.

'Yes, but no less real for that.'

She really did look bonkers, sitting there naked with such a prim expression. At the best of times, clothed or unclothed, a prim expression wasn't for Emily.

'But no one can be called Calcutta Sublime,' I said. 'It's ridiculous.'

She reacted with a snarled, 'But maybe women goddesses are ridiculous in your eyes anyway!'

I retired quickly and said, 'Not at all! I think it's wonderful, I really do!'

'Good,' she said with a smile that made me feel she would like to slice my head off and send it to Sydney.

She went on, 'Fifteen years ago, when she was plain Muriel Fynger---'

'Muriel Fynger?' I cried, already regretting it. 'But that's unlikely too! Nobody could be called finger!'

'It's 'y' not 'i',' she said. 'I think her father was German. 'Fynger' is quite likely as a German name, isn't it?'

'So,' I said. 'What about her?'

'Exactly,' she said. 'Muriel, as she was then, travelled to India where she found a wonderful guru in Kashmir. I forget his name, it's on the tip of my tongue---'

'Snachabanana?' I asked facetiously.

I thought this foolhardy but (paradoxical is Emily's other name) she screamed with laughter, her breasts shaking, and yelled, 'OK, wisehead!'

I got up and sprinkled some more rose petals on her and that seemed to be the right thing to do. I straightened out the lei. Then I returned to my seat for the rest of the lecture.

'It was in Calcutta, where she met her guru, that she changed her name---'

'You said Kashmir.'

'What?'

'You said she found Snachabanana in Kashmir' (another cascade of laughter, quickly controlled).

'Oh well, wherever it was. She spent ten years with him and then she journeyed to Egypt. She came to know all those gods you see there, like Rameses, and she spent the night in the king's chamber, that's in the pyramids, and she made sounds---'

'What sort of sounds?'

'Coatings and hummings. She said the way they vibrated between the walls means something. Every chamber is different, and the measurements are according to the kind of sound that had to be made. Something like that. I mean, all this history is so male, so logical, and she was into the life thing. Anyway,' she said quickly as she saw another incisive question popping up in my mind, 'she came back to Palo Alto and started a retreat there. She's turned one room into an exact replica of the king's chamber and we all sit there naked and feel the vibrations going through us.'

We also dance and we feel the priestess growing in us---

'Priestess or goddess?' I asked.

'Well, sort of sacred,' she said. 'You let the goddess in you take over. Do you know I made a humming noise one time and all the other women got into it, and Calcutta Sublime told us we'd all become channels of the divine presence, and from then on we had to choose the higher sex because we'd found our true selves, and if all America joined hands, goddess with goddess, there'd be no more wars or crime or child abuse or rape.'

'Higher sex you said?'

'It means being in touch with the cosmos when you have sex, instead of just being with a man. That's part of living in the higher consciousness. Sublime says that one of the most powerful energies known to mankind is the sexual energy, it sends out warm vibrations to every part of the universe whenever it's enacted in the goddess-role, she says it's up to us to save the earth this way. She says in ancient Egypt the serpent was a symbol of sexuality, and when you see a bird holding a serpent in its beak on an Egyptian column it means sexuality under divine control. Don't you think that's so revealing?'

'I do,' I said. 'I think it's so revealing.'

'Right!' she screamed, bringing Jamie from nap-land to an alert position, ears cocked.

'Did you see the dog?' she went on. 'He's recognising the goddess in me! Animals were very important in ancient Egypt you know! Mystical powers were attributed to them.'

I looked at Jamie's stunned face and said, 'By god you're right.'

'Calcutta Sublime said we should always be in a command position when we do it.'

'Do what?'

'It,' she said quietly. 'The male should lie

down, and like Mother Kali----'

'Mother----?'

'Just keep quiet! Like Mother Kali I shall dance round you and when you show me you're ready I shall lower myself on you like in the temple carvings----' She looked at me sharply. 'Put some music on and take all your clothes off.'

'What?' I said.

'That's right!'

There was no escape, I could see that. But no way could I stay and do what she wanted. I really panicked in those few seconds. I opted for acting.

'But don't you see Emily?' I said, quivering at the thought of contact between us, 'don't you see this simply can't be done? Do you realise what power you have, just sitting there? If you could see yourself at this moment! The power radiates out of you like a blinding shaft! And you expect me----expect me to----? Don't you see you're beyond sex at this moment Emily? Why, Emily,' I said rising like a ghost, 'I don't think I'd dare touch you with my little finger in your present state! It's like looking into a blinding light!'

I even put my hand over my eyes to shield them (how ham can you get?).

Through my fingers I saw her gaping at me, her eyes wide. I swear she was wondering if it had happened--- if I really was seeing an effulgent goddess.

'I can't stand the light!' I kept on saying. 'Dt's the light! The light!'

Finally I dashed out onto the porch and then straight to my car, with Jamie close behind. It was a crumby exit but at least I was out of that room.

I swung the car round noisily and was on the freeway with Jamie at my side in a matter of moments.

When I got to the office I called Susan.

'Come to the clinic,' I said. 'There's a crisis.'

Jamie went round smelling frantically at all the places where cats and dogs had been, then he settled down in Susan's office. That demonstrated good taste on his part, I thought.

She arrived in about ten minutes.

'I had to run away from Emily,' I told her.

'She's going crazy.'

'How come?'

'She thinks she's a goddess.'

Then I did with Susan what I should have done with Emily (give or take a few details).

48.

Susan went delightfully limp when she slept, and rarely stirred all night. I admired this gift for immediate repose, especially now, when I couldn't close my eyes for worry.

I knew I'd blown it with Emily. I read one time that when you were excommunicated in the old days it was like being condemned to living death. You lost your job, your family, your friends. And that's how I felt about losing my connection with Emily. She was the equivalent of five inquisitions.

How, the reader may ask, did I come to marry five inquisitions? Because of our numbers. Our numbers personified all Emily was (they mostly involved my humiliation after all).

I knew I was not only out of the ROOV project but worse. And I couldn't figure out what this 'worse' was.

When Emily called me at the office next morning

and was all sweetness and coyness I knew I was right. With Emily sugar served as a coating for something lethal.

And when Jock Turner came to see me with a commiserating look in his eye I knew the inquisitorial sittings had begun.

I was just closing the clinic---Susan had gone early because Jerry was returning from Portland and she had to go to the airport. Jock followed me into the house and we settled down to a drink.

'Well,' I said, 'what's on your mind?'

'You,' he said.

'Oh yes?'

'I believe the complaint you were telling me about may be getting worse.'

'What complaint?'

'You know what I mean. Why else should you throw Emily into my arms?'

'Me throw her into your arms?' I asked him.

'You know you wanted me and Emily to get together--- that she needed something you couldn't give her.'

'Listen---'

'She was dying for it in that hotel room,' he said.

'So much the better for you then,' I said, patting Jamie who, being a loyal soul, was leaning hard against my leg and staring at Jock with disapproval.

'Listen, man,' he went on, 'Emily and I aren't quite decided yet but we've had a couple of evenings together and it feels good, it feels right, know what I mean? We've talked about marriage but we don't want to rush into it.'

'Quite right,' I said.

'Now Emily feels a heavy responsibility toward you---that's natural in a wife. And so do I. It wouldn't be my way to just go off and marry your wife and leave you with a big empty house like this to sit in and no women coming near you because, well, you're

temporarily out of service.'

'I'm not temporarily out of service.'

'OK, OK,' he said quietly. 'I promise confidentiality. Emily told me about her goddess ceremony last night and how you went out in a snit. Now---' He held his hand up as I was going to interrupt--- 'this particular distress of yours has its origin in the mind and if you need somebody good---'

'I wish you'd keep out of my affairs,' I said. 'Especially my mind.'

'OK,OK. But I don't think your shrink's going to help. I mean, he hasn't so far. You need chemical assistance and I know the man to provide it. You've got yourself into stress man, and you need a safe tranquillizer. You need a period of rest and at the end, why, you'll be dating women every day.'

'What the hell has Emily been saying?' I screamed.

'She's sick worried!' he said. 'She was telling me this morning---'

'You spoke this morning?'

'She was frantic! She said, Jock, you've got to help that man! After all you're a doctor!'

'That's a matter of opinion.'

'OK, OK, let's have our jokes but just the same, my friend, you're in serious trouble and you'd better face it.'

He got up slowly, to my relief.

'I've done my best,' he said. 'I've put my point of view.'

'But there's nothing wrong with me!'

'Listen,' he said, stopping on his way to the door, 'a month back you were doing OK with Emily, right? And suddenly it all goes wrong. You're not interested in her any more and she knows it!'

Afterwards I called Susan. She'd just gotten back from the airport. I gave her a breakdown of

what had happened, concentrating on the theme that my sexual interest in Emily had collapsed, and that was why she was bent on revenge.

She didn't see that. 'It doesn't sound like Emily,' she said to my astonishment.

'It does to me!' I said.

'Perhaps you're letting it weigh on your mind unnecessarily.'

That was a calming thought. I said, 'Could be.'

When I saw her at the office next day she said, 'I want you to take something.'

She had some kind of vitamin-punched sedative on her desk, in powder form, and dissolved some in water. I drank it off obediently.

It made me feel good. But then anything from Susan's hand would have boosted me, including a clout round the head.

She followed me into my office and said, 'She can't be all that bad. I think she's got your welfare at heart.' She added, 'Why else should she rush round to my house and give me this medicine for you to take?'

I swung round on her like a weather vane.

'What?' I screamed. 'What? She gave you this stuff?'

I clutched my throat dramatically. I slumped into a chair.

Yet I was feeling decidedly good.

I worked hard that day. I felt no resentment against Emily.

I even called her up and said, 'You know Emily all these stories you're spreading round are a little exaggerated, don't you think? You know, I really was convinced you were a goddess that evening.'

She was silent.

'Are you there?' I asked.

'I'm here.'

'I really was sincere that I couldn't touch you.'

A golden light was streaming out of you. Afterwards I asked myself why shouldn't I touch even a goddess if I wanted to. I wanted to Emily but I didn't dare. I drove away with overpopulated pants when all I had to do was---walk through that blinding light and take the divine fruits! Easier said than done, I can assure you!

She said, 'What the fuck are you talking about?'

'Can't we do that ceremony again Emily?'

Was she convinced? She seemed to waver.

Then my heart sank.

'I'll be at the house again this evening,' she said quietly, and put the phone down.

49.

She was already set up when I arrived, but in the bedroom this time.

Two boxes of rose petals had been unloaded and she'd lit candles and incense sticks. Jamie was looking on as if it was a game just for him. His tongue was hanging out, his eyes were sparkling.

I was trembling (was it the medicine Susan had given me?). I watched her undress with trepidation. Off came the girdle and off, with a smart snap, came the bra---and again that soft relapse of the breasts into their God-given positions. Again I felt no tremor of desire.

I saw I'd opted for an evening which would only complete my undoing.

I put the lei round her neck with a secret desire to throttle her. Her perfume, and a smell of healthy sweat such as would have had me in swoons not a month

before wafted up from her armpits.

When she was seated with the rose petals all over her she said, quietly, her eyes closed, 'Take your clothes off and ask for the honor of a visitation.'

I ought to explain that part of her previous lecture had been devoted to the phoney idea that once upon a time men, being crude and heavy brutes, had gone hunting all day while the women remained at home cooking and weaving and doing all kinds of peaceful and even divine things, like white magic. The men had worshipped the women as a higher biological order and if they wanted to have sex contact with them, or even speak to them, they had to put a claim in for 'visitation rights'. The claim was granted or not, according to how the woman felt.

Well, I was now to undress and ask for visitation rights. But, so Emily had instructed me, I had to do it with a 'biological sign', namely an erection. A month before I might have built this up into an exciting number but not so now. I undressed morosely, almost flinging my clothes on the bed. Then I lay down on the floor as directed---in fact on a bed of rose petals (if any of my readers hasn't slept on a bed of roses I can assure them it's uncomfortable, because the petals stick to your back).

She began dancing round me and I watched through half-closed eyes as she took tripping steps, her tits wobbling. She made little jumps over me, stood astride me waving her arms like a hypnotist, but I wasn't falling into a trance. She stood astride for a moment over my head, wriggling to and fro, giving me an underview of the most eloquent part of her anatomy. I wished to stammer absurd apologies. Every moment I expected to experience that sudden erotic interest that brings the male organ snapping into the erect state as if on springs but nothing happened. She danced and danced. I watched her buttocks, her hips, her powerful legs, I

watched her aroused nipples. Nothing availed.

She stopped. Slowly she put her clothes back on. I remained on the floor, my eyes closed.

She walked to the door and I heard her murmur, 'And you say you're OK? My, my!'

Her car started up outside. When it drove away it left an awful silence behind it.

50.

I cleared up the rose petals and pumaria. Jamie was scratching himself downstairs so that his collar tinkled. I called Susan but got Jerry and he said gruffly, 'This isn't the right moment.'

I sat on a water-divan and eventually fell asleep. I woke about five and drank some coffee. This made me sleepy. Then I slept on the bed upstairs fitfully, with abandonment-nightmares lining up to enter my brain. I yearned to talk to Susan and drove to the office half an hour earlier than usual. She didn't come. All day she didn't come. I called her but all I got was her answer-machine. I had to handle all her clients. Just as I was closing up she came.

'Jerry didn't want me to come,' she said. 'He's gone to Portland again so it's OK now.'

'Didn't want you to come to your own office?'

'He's making trouble over the marriage settlement,' she said.

'Oh no!'

I was real happy to see her again but I was too weak to have contact. I could see by her extra-formal manner that she wanted it.

'Let's go to dinner,' I said. 'I want to get to

the bottom of all this.'

We drove to a dimly-lit Moroccan place in Lafayette and, settled among cushions, watched a belly-dancer shaking in the middle of the room under a purple spotlight. She was a Cal student, she told us when she came round collecting tips, and doing her pre-med.

'Is Jerry seeing a lot of Emily?' I asked Susan.

'Quite a bit. They were at the house together last night. She drove straight over from your place and told us all about the goddess ceremonies. She's been doing them with all the men she knows, she says, and they all respond, so why don't you?'

'She doesn't attract me any more.'

'She says you started complaining of impotence long ago and you just don't want sex, period.'

'Have you seen signs of impotence?' I asked her.

'As a matter of fact, yes.'

I nearly fell through my seat.

'Little signs,' she went on. 'That's why I'm worried too. Jerry thinks you should seek medical advice.'

'I've got a shrink dammit, he doesn't see anything wrong!'

'Have you told him?'

'Of course I have. I mean, I did. When I was impotent.'

She looked at me doubtfully. 'What did he say?'

'Guilt. He always says that anyway.'

'Do you feel guilty?'

'What about?'

'About doing it?'

'Of course I don't!'

'Emily says you told her you don't enjoy your orgasms.'

'But neither does she!'

'She says it's because of your impotence---you took all her pleasure away.'

'I'm not impotent!' I hissed at her.

She looked away, maybe recalling the fact that we hadn't made contact for two days.

'Does Jerry want you to pull out of our relationship?' I asked her.

'Yes.'

'And the business partnership?'

'That as well,' she said.

I was trembling so much I could hardly talk.

'And what do you feel?' I asked her.

'I don't know.'

'Listen,' I said, 'Emily's going overboard about how I don't respond to her but she's going out with that bilious medico Jock Turner.'

'So what?'

'I just think it means she's playing a game. With your husband too. How hopeful is he of marrying Emily now?'

'That's what he was saying,' she said. 'He says maybe we should stay together. For the children.'

'And will you stay together?'

'I don't know.'

I tried to get her to spend the night with me but she wouldn't. I felt so weak I could hardly walk her to her car. It was as if Emily's stories about me were coming true.

Later that evening I got a call from Clemens. I let his voice hypnotise me with its quiet, urbane,

easy inflections.

'You must be awfully disappointed about the way ROOV has panned out,' he said. 'I'd really appreciate a chat with you about this. Are your evenings sometimes free?'

'Oh yes,' I said.

'Why don't you come over tomorrow evening?' he asked. 'Would that be possible?'

'Oh yes,' I said.

'We'll be alone. Nancy'll prepare something, then she has to buzz off to the Humane Society festival at Marin---did you know they were running a festival?'

'No I didn't.'

'It's part of the wildlife preservation campaign.' He paused. 'I'm surprised you haven't booked yourself a booth. Most of the other vets in the area have. But perhaps you forgot.'

'No,' I said. 'I just didn't know about it.'

Another pause.

Then he seemed to collect his wits and said, 'Very well, then. Tomorrow at six-thirty.'

That was Berkeley hills time for dinner (bedtime nine or ten). I opened a tin of ravioli and poured myself a glass of vodka.

I phoned Susan and said, 'Since Jerry's away why don't you come over?'

She said, after what seemed to me a gasp of hesitation, 'OK.'

I shouldn't have made that call. She slept at my side and we hardly touched each other. She fell asleep in my arms, still as always.

I felt two large tears roll down my cheek.

Because I knew now. I knew Emily was right.

52.

The Martinez-Holstein house was as quiet as a church. He came to the door in his loose Balkan blouse and as I passed him he gave my arm a confidential squeeze.

The table had been prepared with a big bowl of salad and pâté and little triangles of toast and chocolate mousse and a nice spätlese just out of the icebox. We sat down at once, and he poured the wine. We touched glasses.

He said, 'I get this direct from the vineyard.'

It was during the entrée (vol-au-vent with the best bechamel I ever tasted) that he ventured onto ROOV. He leaned back to do it (he always sat on a sort of throne with stout lion's-head arms at the end of the table).

'Of course we'd all like to be doing V and VI in vitro but that's impossible. In vivo it has to be. And I'm afraid that the geneticists decided that while the use of dog exnims would be a considerable advance on lll and lV it wasn't enough, so it was better to hold our resources for the real breakthrough.'

'I see,' I said (I didn't).

He got up and went across the dimly lit room to a wall covered with bookshelves. He took a volume down and returned to the table.

Then he fixed a pair of pincenez onto his nose (the first time I'd seen it done outside films).

'This book,' he said, 'is a transcript of the proceeds at a CIBA Foundation symposium in London. It contains a lecture by J.B.S. Haldane called 'Biological possibilities for the human being in the next ten thousand years'. In it he quotes words of his own

written in 1949. Here, read it for yourself.'

I read the following words:

'If King Charles 1's or King Louis XVI's head had been stuck within a minute or so on a pump which oxygenated blood to it, it would almost certainly have come around, after half an hour or so, enough to open its eyes and move its lips, and would probably have recovered consciousness.'

Clemens's eyes were on me, mild, yet uncomfortably concentrated. He was leaning toward me, his elbows on the table and his face---apart from that tranquil yet uncanny concentration of the eyes---was without expression. My impulse was to move further away but that might have looked rude. I could almost feel his breath on my cheeks. His eyes delved into me, though they were never really piercing. They maintained a soft, misty, unwavering fixity as if I fascinated him.

Yes, I could read detached fascination in them, all the more distressing for me as I felt that any movement or speech on my part would only fuel his interest further.

'Who---?' I began. Then I started again: 'I don't know the background on these two kings, could you fill me in?'

'I could indeed fill you in,' he said, his gaze unchanging, his proximity marginally greater than before. 'Charles was king of England, Louis king of France. They had one thing in common. They were both beheaded.'

'I see,' I said (my mouth was uncommonly dry and these words emerged as a whisper).

'You have to realise, my friend,' he went on, 'that essentially ROOV is concerned with what, for want of a better word, we must call immortality. And human immortality is only possible as the end-effect of intelligence. Isn't that so? What is the computer system we use in the ROOV experiment but the symbolisation of accumulated human concepts? Now I'm sure you've

heard of a man in Michigan called Ettinger---Bob Ettinger? You remember he caused quite a furore by suggesting that corpses be frozen, and human organs frozen, so that when a sound medico-biological technique for prolonging life indefinitely had been found these corpses could be thawed out and returned to life. Theoretically there's nothing against this. Low temperatures arrest growth in our organs as they do in our vegetables when we put them in the fridge. There are a few snags, chief among them the damage that freezing does. This can probably be eliminated. Are you beginning to see the core significance of ROOV---that one day a man may literally be separated from himself, both in space and time, but nevertheless continue to function? that he may one day be able to slip in and out of life, or lose and then remake an organ, yet remain a composite being? By the way, if you as an animal lover are concerned about the rat-exnims already used in ROOV, we're hopeful---if we can keep them alive beyond their normal three-year lifespan---that we can put them together again, so that they emerge from the experiment the same as they went in except rejuvenated and ready for a new life-cycle.'

A peculiar sensation arose in me---I was in a trance. His face was inches from mine. I would have liked a sip of wine but apart from the fact that he was obstructing my path to it with his elbow I seemed incapable of movement.

Worse by far than this, I felt a loss of even that little energy I'd previously had in the erotic zone. While he talked, my phallus all but disappeared. It was most eerie. The absurd conviction germinated in my mind that he'd had something to do with my whole impotence problem. Could he put the jinks on people?

'It must have occurred to you,' he went on, 'that if we could have access to two of those frozen corpses, ROOV V and VI could proceed smoothly tomorrow. The

computer linkup requires a few adjustments but otherwise we're ready to go.'

'So,' I said in a dusty whisper, 'what's the delay?'

'Well,' he said, moving even closer and lowering his refined voice, 'we've been into the legal aspects but---hem---' (yes, it was that sort of sound, a funny little giggle, most uncanny), 'there's the difficulty of getting signed waivers.'

'Waivers?'

'We have to have that. Not a lawcourt in the nation would countenance anything less.'

'You mean,' I said, so weak now I could hardly enunciate, 'frozen corpses have rights, is that it?'

'The moment they come alive again, they do.'

Theoretically all we need is to replace the organ that caused death, since, as I'm sure you know, most death is caused by the failure of one organ in particular. But when, in J.B.S. Haldane's words, the head has opened its eyes and moved its lips, it has rights like any other American citizen.'

'Of course,' I mouthed.

'Now if Charles I or Louis XVI had signed something before they lost their heads, they would have been ideal, perfect exnims, don't you agree?'

'I agree,' I breathed, 'but wasn't this quite a few years ago?'

'Indeed.'

'Well they don't chop people's heads off any more.'

'They electrocute them, inject them, gas them.'

A man who's going to lose his life anyway is bound to snatch at an opportunity of returning to life, even in a different form, even in several different forms. Isn't that so?'

'It certainly is,' I said.

'But again, a legal snag! Can you believe it?'

He shook his head. 'The Department of Justice won't hear hear of it! Give a man who has possibly raped, murdered,

or assaulted numberless people the possibility of starting all over again? Put a man through a lengthy and expensive trial, sentence him to death, electrocute him simply in order to bring him back to life again? No! Useless to tell them that he would have his bowels in Amsterdam and his sexual apparatus in Sydney. They won't listen! And one can understand them. After all, their job is the law!

'Exactly,' I said.

'We're brought back every time to our need for volunteers,' he said, looking at me even more closely.

A great hush seemed to fall over the house.

'A suicide maybe,' he went on. 'There the law might bend a little. And, as for the suicidist, we could promise him that all he found unbearable in his present life would be rectified chemically during both his ROOV and post-ROOV lives. All we would have to do is change an organ, reconstitute the blood, balance the chemical disposition in the neurotransmission function. I mean, take impotence!' he added suddenly.

I jumped a foot. 'Yes?'

'Take impotence,' he went on calmly. 'Can you imagine anything more wretched? Can you wonder a man would want to take his life? I would. Wouldn't you?'

I whispered, 'Well... Yes!'

'You would?' He leaned back with a sigh and gazed before him with what seemed satisfaction. 'This man would receive a guarantee that in his new state there would be no impotence. In effect he wouldn't be committing suicide at all, only opting for a better life. The suicide would simply be the legal formality.'

'Exactly,' I said, almost sliding off my seat.

'Would you like some music?' he asked me quietly.

'Oh yes,' I said. 'I'd like some music.'

He rose and the moment he did so I drank the wine in my glass in two gulps. I poured myself some more.

53.

We parted a little later. He went away for a few minutes and returned with a light overcoat on his arm. As day temperatures were high in the eighties, and the evenings still and sultry, I realised that the overcoat could have only one meaning. He walked me out to my car.

'I'm going to the city,' he said in his refined way. 'I've a few things to attend to.'

And he gave me that same intimate, bloodcurdling look as before. There's one thing about a man who talks quietly, urbanely and rationally. He has to be 100% sane. Otherwise, as in the case of Clemens Martinez-Holstein, he begins to seem as crazy as a cat in a storm.

I was happy when he got into his car and drove off. I too drove out of the little patio in front of his house. I didn't feel really safe until his rearlights had disappeared from view.

It was good to see Jamie again. I was so tired I went straight upstairs. He bounded after me.

I didn't even trouble to lock the porch door. I managed to clean my teeth and get into the loose shorts which are my only wear in bed. I was out before a count even started.

I couldn't have been asleep more than an hour when the dog started barking so frantically I jumped into a sitting position before I was awake. A car was outside.

My heart was pumping crazily and my throat was thick. A trembling had seized my limbs. Jamie had dashed downstairs and I heard someone coming up

slowly.

Jamie had stopped barking and by the sound was wagging his tail and making votive leaps.

Then I heard Susan's voice. I subsided into the lying position again.

'You scared the shit out of me,' I said.

'I was getting real worried.'

'Are you staying the night?' I asked her sleepily.

'I can't, Jerry's back and mom's gone home.'

She was standing framed in the dim light from the corridor.

'So what you come for?' I asked her.

'I have to give you this injection.'

'What?' I was sitting up again at once. 'Oh no you don't! Is that Emily's prescription?'

'Of course not!'

'You gave me Emily's prescription before and I haven't felt the same since---I don't seem to have any balls between my legs.'

'Well that's just why I want you to take this,' she said with a hint of impatience.

At once I felt better about it. She was worried about me, she wanted me.

'Jerry's doctor made it up,' she said.

'Hey wait a minute. Jerry gave you this?'

'Yes.'

I stared at her in the darkness.

'What's that you've got in your hand?' I asked her.

'It's the syringe,' she said.

'Intravenous?' I said.

'That's right.'

She came forward and sat on the side of the bed. Yes, I do need help, I thought.

She opened her little medicine case, which she used at the clinic. She took out a tiny bottle of spirits and dabbed the vein in the crook of my left arm. Then she filled the syringe, carefully sent a

squirt of it in the air and then jabbed me. I lay back and that's all I remember.

When I woke it was well after dawn. I lay there blinking, feeling like a thousand fogs. I was certain it was past eight---the time I went to the clinic. I drew the phone to me lazily and tapped out the clinic number. There was no reply. I called Susan. Jerry answered and handed her over to me.

'Whatever you gave me last night was strong,' I said. 'What's the time?'

'About ten.'

'Ten?'

'You must rest a bit more. Everything's OK. I closed the clinic for a vacation.'

'You closed---?'

'Yes.'

'What the hell are you doing woman? You can't do that on your own decision, you have a partner!'

'But you couldn't make it another day, don't you realise that? Clemens called me up about you. He said you were behaving like a ghost. And that's what I thought too!'

'It was Emily's injection,' I said. 'I mean powders. Anyway, I have two operations today.'

'I did them for you.'

'But today hasn't happened yet!'

'Your operations were scheduled for yesterday.'

'That's not true, just look at the book Susan!'

'It is true. I gave you the injection two nights ago, not last night.'

'What? I squeaked. 'You mean I've been lying here for---for---' I worked it out quickly--- 'around 30 hours?'

'Right. Now you know how much you needed the rest.'

'But what the hell was in that injection? It

might have killed me. What kind of doctor does your husband have---a horse doctor?'

'Just calm yourself. Don't you trust me?'

I subsided.

'OK,' I sighed. 'But I want you at the office tomorrow, OK?'

'OK.'

I looked round the room. 'Where's Jamie?'

'Oh I let him out. The back door's open. I thought he'll need to get out.'

'But he'll be starving.'

'No, I gave him a good day's supply. I left it outside the back door.'

'You're a real nurse!'

As I put the phone down I felt sleep drift over me again, a sweet misty shroud. I sank back into the pillows.

I awoke with Jamie barking downstairs. Another car had driven up. It was dark now. Was it the evening of the morning I'd fallen asleep, or the following one? The barking stopped, and I realised it must be Susan. Again the light went on downstairs and footsteps came up.

It was Emily. The terrors of my evening with Clemens were suddenly revived as I heard her calling me sweetly.

'I'm here,' I managed to say.

'I've brought the divorce documents,' she said. She had a briefcase.

'But I've seen them already,' I said. 'They're signed.'

'The attorney missed a document. He says you need to sign a flagrante delectis clause.'

'What's that?'

She sat on the bed and produced the document in the dimness.

'You see, honey,' she said, 'I feel you need Susan and the sooner you marry her the better for both of you.'

'You're dead right,' I said. 'Give me the pen.'

I signed at the bottom. It was too dark to see what was written there.

I suppose I must have fallen asleep right after.

54.

I woke in the middle of whatever night it was. At first I could only recall Susan's visit, and the jab in my arm. I wondered how many days had passed since the clinic had been shut. I was surprised to notice that I didn't care.

Then I remembered Emily. I recalled the document. I'd signed something. Suddenly I panicked. What had I signed?

Was it a waiver for christsakes? A waiver that could be---! I tried to sit up but couldn't. They were going to---! I was going to be the next---! the next axnim for ROOV for christsakes! Sweat was pouring out of me.

I thought I remembered some words on the document. They were 'in the event of my decease for whatever reason.'

I touched my chin and found a mini-beard. I raised myself painfully. Getting out of bed was the work of ten minutes. I tried three times before I made it, falling back again and again.

I shuffled across the room like an old man. I called Jamie and my voice was a croak. He came bounding

up. He went crazy when he saw me standing. I wanted to go downstairs and see about his food but I couldn't make it. I opted for a shower and not a bath because I might fall asleep in the bath. My eyes kept crossing while I was shaving, and it took twice the usual time. The bathroom clock said 3.45. I couldn't believe it. The afternoon!

I dressed and cooked a hamburger for Jamie. He didn't want it. Outside the back door I found his food bowl, and plenty of water. Susan must have come every day.

I drove to the office and found I couldn't steer properly. My sight kept going wobbly. I was trembling again. I returned home without going in the office. When I got out of the car I nearly fell. My fingers were jumping about.

I lowered myself onto a water-divan and felt I'd been jogging twenty miles. I was panting like a bitch in labor.

I drifted off to sleep again and was surprised to find it only six o'clock when I woke. I felt my chin and found it cleanshaven, so it must be the same day.

I tried to dial Susan but couldn't hit the right digits. After about ten tries I succeeded.

'Listen,' I squeaked ineffectually, 'did Emily have a hand in that injection? Is she trying to kill me? I mean, she's going out with your husband, how do I know they're not in cahoots with Clemens and want me as the next exnim?' (my words were all slurred).

'The next what?'

'The human exnim! They need a suicide. Clemens told me. I'm shit scared Susan.'

'I don't even know what you're talking about.'

'I was at dinner with Clemens and he told exactly where the wind lies.'

'The wind?'

'They're going to use frozen corpses!'

'Frozen corpses?'

'Just because they can't get corpses to sign on the dotted line, I mean unfrozen corpses,' I said.

'The corpses have to sign waivers first.'

'What's happened to your voice?' she said. 'Listen, I'm going to get a doctor.'

'You better had.'

I put the phone down and felt like crying. Jamie was all I had.

He gave me a forlorn look. It brought me new life. I managed to raise myself off the divan and fetched a bottle of bubbly. It wasn't on ice but to hell with it, I could add some icecubes. How I got the cork off I shall never know. After about twenty tries it flew at the ceiling and Jamie barked.

I poured it in a whisky tumbler and was just about to put it back when I saw Jamie looking at me in an affronted way.

I said, 'Wanna join me pal?'

I got his water bowl and filled it with champagne, and put it down by the hearth.

'There you are, you German lush,' I said.

He lapped it like a lunatic. He kept stopping and smelling it, wondering if it was good and almost deciding against, then he'd try it again and finally he settled in and finished it.

He gave me one of those I-feel-good-but-oh-boy-do-I-feel-bad looks.

I took a few generous gulps. I watched him collapse into a sitting position. Then he was out, right in the middle of the carpet, his paws turned up.

I finished the bottle and got another. As soon as the cork popped he jumped up like a man in a nightmare, staring before him with bloodshot eyes. Then he slumped down and was out again.

I finished that bottle off too, then decided to join Jamie on the floor. I felt my genitals had shriveled to nothing. I was in sudden panic fear that they'd disappeared. Maybe I'd been operated on in my sleep. I tore my pants open, pulled them down. Everything was intact. I slumped on the floor like Jamie and put my arm round him. I felt cold, so I moved closer. He was as hot as a furnace. I fell asleep at once.

55.

The porch door burst open. I heard people. I blinked awake. The light was still on. I thought I saw Emily and Mike Borovitz staring down at me. I thought I was in bed. I heard Emily say 'My god!' emphatically. It might have been a bad dream. I knew it wasn't a dream but it had the unsubstantiality of a dream.

They switched the light off when they went. That proved it wasn't a dream because when I opened my eyes later it was all dark. I slowly became aware of my situation. I was lying on the floor. I still had my arm round Jamie who was still dead drunk. He was breathing heavily.

In the dim light I saw that my genitals were exposed. Then I remembered unzipping my pants before falling asleep.

My nose was in Jamie's fur.

I was painfully stiff and moved slowly into the sitting position. The knockout injection Susan had given me seemed to be wearing off. I took a shower.

I started feeling real hungry and made some fried eggs and dates. I was still staggering a bit. I had to sit down every few minutes. Also I was very jumpy. Jamie only had to scratch himself and I jumped as if a gunman had appeared.

I called up my shrink and told him the state I was in and he said, 'Take it easy. I think you shouldn't go to work. Maybe you need an organised rest.'

'What does that mean?'

'Oh a clinic some place. Forget everything and let some nice buxom nurse be your mom for a few days.'

I was too afraid to leave the house. I peeped through the windows. I let Jamie out for a pee from time to time but didn't go out with him.

That night I locked all the doors before going to bed. I put the chain across in case Emily tried to use her keys. I was afraid she might give me another injection---the exnim one this time. Then have me frozen.

I was undressing in the dark when the bedroom became bright in the swinging headlights of a car and Jamie started barking. I peeped out and saw an unfamiliar car. I watched a man get out and walk to the porch. I didn't recognise him. He rang the bell, then knocked on the door with his knuckles but I didn't move.

He called out my name.

It was my shrink.

I went downstairs and it was all I could do when I opened the door to stop Jamie tearing him to pieces (which probably says something about shrinks).

My shrink has pointed ears and maybe cloven hoofs. His grey hair is close-cropped and the lips are thin, the nose sharp, and he has rather wide glistening eyes that settle onto things, particularly clients, and remain there for too long. I was used to it.

"How ya doing Heinrich, come right in," I said weakly.

The first thing he said when he'd sat down was, 'What's this about you and the dog?'

'What do you mean Heinrich?'

'Your wife calls me up in a sweat, five years of marriage, she says, and now this!'

He got up and started pacing round with his hands in his pockets, which he always does when about to tear down your defences.

'I mean,' he said, 'is it usual for you to lie on the floor in the arms of a German shepherd with your genitals showing?' He swung round, fixed me with his Viennese searchlights. 'Did you have sex?'

'Who with?'

'The dog.'

'Of course I didn't Heinrich, I was drunk!'

'And the exposed genitals?'

'I wanted to see if I could get any kind of rise out of myself.'

'Get a what?' he asked.

'I wanted to see if there was any life in my balls.'

'And what was the result of your researches?'

'Not a thing.'

'Hence the use of the dog?'

'I drank a bottle of champagne and he drank a bottle too.'

'You gave your dog a bottle of champagne?'

'Yes. Dom Perignan.'

He blew through his lips and sat down again.

'I wouldn't have done it normally,' I said, 'but I was lonely. And I needed nursing. And there was only the dog.'

'Nursing you see,' he said. 'Isn't Emily a satisfying nurse? A dog is a substitute for that?'

'Not at all,' I said. 'But she got that injection

together didn't she?'

'Injection?'

'She got Jerry Riven to give this highly potent sedative or whatever it was to his wife---'

'Excuse me,' he interrupted. 'He gave a sedative to his wife?'

'She gave it to me. It was an intravenous injection. She jabbed my arm. Here, look.' I lifted my sleeve. 'You can see it. Susan's my partner. She said my husband's doctor made this up. She's a biochemist remember?'

'Your business partner?'

'No, Emily. It was to make me commit suicide.'

'Commit suicide?'

'That injection knocked me out for three days. I'm still groggy as hell. And while I was out she made me sign a document.'

'Ha!' he said. 'Now we have a document!'

'I think it was a waiver.'

'A waiver?' he asked, screwing his face up.

'I remember the words 'should I decide to commit suicide' or something like that. What proves it is that Clemens invited me to dinner earlier in the week and we had a tête-à-tête and he said human exnims are going to be used.'

'Human what?'

'They're going to be used instead of rats. They wanted iced corpses but you can't get an iced corpse to sign a waiver whatever which way you try.'

'Excuse me,' he said quietly, 'you said iced corpses?'

'He said we can't use iced corpses because when they come alive again they have the same damn rights as anybody else.'

'I see.' He was giving me one of his long looks. 'When the corpses come alive again, yes?'

'That's right' (I was glad he was getting it at last). 'So they were looking for suicides.'

'And your wife wished you to commit suicide?'

'You're damn right! And in that case I'd wake up with my head in Palo Alto and my balls in Sydney!' That's what they need the waiver for.'

'My god,' he said.

'Now you know it all Heinrich.'

'I certainly do,' he said, rising. 'No, don't bother to come to the door.'

And he stepped straight out into the night.

56.

That interview was a tranquillizer for me. I slipped into bed and called goodnight to Jamie. I fell asleep drinking an invisible toast to Freud.

I was in a sound slumber when Jamie started barking again. I was getting used to intruders by now. But there was a hell of a lot of noise this time. The headlights of more than one vehicle were creating a blinding light on the walls.

I heard the porch door open. I must have forgotten to lock it after Heinrich.

Then somebody said 'Jamie!' and he suddenly went quiet.

I lay there, my mouth open.

Mike Borovitz of all people appeared in the doorway, silhouetted against the corridor lights.

'He's here,' he said to someone behind him.

There were two guys in white coats.

Emily was behind them.

'They won't hurt you honey!' she shouted at me. The white-coated guys strode forward and seized me in such a way I couldn't move.

'Don't touch me!' I screamed, trying to fight them off. 'She wants me as an exnim!'

'Don't worry,' one of the white coats said, 'you'll be OK.'

With an outburst of strength that surprised me I managed to push them off and fling myself out of bed. I was on my way to the door when they caught me from behind.

'It was her injection!' I was yelling over and over again.

But by this time I was on my way downstairs with remarkable swiftness---and without my feet touching the ground. In the lounge I felt another injection go in, and the fight went out of me. My last thought was, why isn't my future wife here?

57.

I awoke in a clean bed facing a window. Outside, in the distance, were tufted brown hills of what I thought was Contra Costa country, with Mount Diablo to the right. The room was small. The sheets were rose colored and smelled of lavender.

'Now how are you today?' a female said at my side.

I turned round and found a pleasant young face under tinted hair.

'When did I get here?' I asked.

'Last night.'

'And what's the time?'

'About nine. Would you like some breakfast?'

'Yes,' I said. 'I think I could handle that.'
She was just about to disappear when I called her back.

'Who's paying for all this?'

'I don't know,' she said. 'I've only just come on.'

'Perhaps you could inform yourself while they're defreezing my breakfast.'

'Will do!' she said.

When she came back she said, 'The bill's going to your wife.'

'That means me, right? They break into my house, they pull me down the stairs---!'

'Why don't you cool off?' she said, taking my pulse. 'Your wife's coming for lunch. You can argue it with her.'

'It was that fucking shrink of mine,' I said. 'If he's gone in with the ROOV people I'm finished. But they're not going to get me to commit suicide---no sir! no way!'

'Dead right,' she said. 'Now just eat your breakfast and we'll run a bath for you.'

When I tried to use the phone I got the operator, who told me my line wasn't connected. I called the nurse again and asked her, 'What the fuck goes on? I need to call my business partner.'

'You have to see the doctor first. I think you'll have to improve your language,' she added with a giggle as she went, 'I'm Presbyterian.'

One thing made me feel good. I'd been watching the nurse's body with pleasure. As I finished my breakfast and opened the Contra Costa Times I became aware of an erection. And with that my courage started coming back.

As it turned out I needed it---right away.

58.

Emily was waiting for me when I returned from the bathroom. Her wild blonde hair had the appearance of a vast halo against the window. Her perfume filled the room. She dropped her bomb at once.

'I have news for you,' she said. 'Arthur Schendt and Lucy committed suicide.'

I almost fell down. I looked at her closely to see if she was laughing, maybe pulling my leg about my own fears, but she was serious as hell. I sat on the bed and just gasped for air.

'I don't believe you.'

'It's true.' She looked down.

She added, 'You know, she was always trying to do it. I think her influence gradually worked on him.'

'I don't believe it.'

'Also he found out he'd missed the NP.'

Without looking at her I said, 'What's that?'

'The Nobel prize. His whole life was geared to that. You know a guy's name can come up several times, then it's dropped. Clemens told me. He said Arthur knew the game was up when Hofhoch in Berlin got it. Hofhoch's work was virtually a replica of Arthur's. They had a long talk on the phone---Arthur and Clemens. Arthur started getting very bitter, saying that the NP was a reward for the over-rewarded, crap like that.'

'I just don't believe you Emily,' I said.

'I was shocked too.'

'I mean---Lucy---I mean she and I---!'

She put her hand on mine.

'I know,' she said.

59.

I agreed with Emily I should hang on in the nursing home till the end of the week. I wanted to recover from the news. I asked for no visitors, even Emily. I waited for Susan to call but she didn't.

I knew at least I was safe, now that the Schendts had 'obliged'. I thought of Lucy again and again, lying quite still, gazing at me. I hardly spoke to the day-nurse. She seemed to wonder about this and one time she squeezed my hand and said, 'Have you something on your mind?'

'A couple of friends committed suicide.'

'Oh I'm sorry!'

I dreamed that Lucy was talking to me. And also, waking in the middle of the night, I seemed to see her in the room, sitting by the window as Emily had sat, and telling me she'd done it for my sake, to make my full participation in the ROOV program possible. This made no sense to me, and I put the image down to the hallucination of grief. I found myself yearning for her---just to see her, just to hear it wasn't true and she was still alive and the story of her suicide was a nightmare from which I'd woken.

I began to blame myself. I ought to have married her, I told myself. An absurd triviality like violin practice should not have prevented me. At the same time, thinking these things, I felt disloyal to Susan. A conflict started in my mind---between Lucy's breasts as they appeared repeatedly before me, a pass-door to bliss, and Susan's deep, dark, level gaze that told me as repeatedly, 'She wasn't for you, Lucy wasn't for you.'

To compensate for the guilt this provoked I began to blame Emily and Clemens, accusing them in my heart of setting the suicide up, at least of having had a hand in it somewhere.

I called Emily at the Martinez-Holstein residence, guessing that she would be frightened to stay at the Santa Rosa house

I accused her outright.

I said, 'Did Lucy and her husband sign a waiver?'

'A what?'

'Who got them to commit suicide---you? Clemens?'

Feeling that I now had a pair of balls between my legs and that they weren't after all going to be transported to Sydney without me, I grilled her mercilessly.

Finally she screamed out, 'She killed herself because of you! Arthur Schendt went to Susan's husband and said what's this between Susan and her business partner and Jerry Riven told him straight, they're virtually man and wife, he said, and Schendt had to tell her, she went to his desk and took out the gun, he stopped her doing it but it triggered off his own grief about the Nobel physics prize, and they agreed to do it the next day, they cut their wrists. Sleep with that!'

I slammed the phone down. My temperature went up. I had to stay in the nursing home another three days.

At last Susan called me.

'I thought you were coming home days ago,' she said.

'I got so upset.'

'I want to reopen the clinic on Monday,' she said.

'Next Monday?'

'Right.'

'I'll be there,' I said. 'I'll be there!'

Emily called right after.

'I'm coming back home,' she said.

'What?' I almost screamed.

'Don't you want me?'

'Well of course I want you but aren't we both negotiating marriages with other people?'

'I just feel we should be together so they don't walk over us.' She added, 'It strengthens our bargaining power, gives us something to fall back on. What do you say?'

'I say great!' I said. 'But who are you going to marry finally?'

'It looks like Jock Turner.'

I smothered a gasp and said, 'OK. Sounds a good plan to me.'

'A good concerted plan,' she said.

60.

I was as nervous as a kitten at the idea of facing Emily at home. I called Susan and told her what was happening.

She said, 'Jerry thinks it's a good idea too.'

'Jerry?'

'Yes. He says we can all negotiate better that way.'

'Is Jerry in any negotiations at this time?' I asked hesitantly.

'Of course! Emily spent about three hours with him last night hammering things out!'

'He did?'

Emily certainly worked on a lot of fronts (and I'd better learn to do the same).

'Do you have any idea why Emily wants to move back with me?' I asked.

'Clemens didn't want her there any more,' Susan said. 'He feels it's time to devote himself to his

wife and children. He was very cut up about Lucy's death because apparently he'd been seeing quite a bit of her in recent weeks. In fact they were thinking of setting up house together.'

'What?'

She said it in her mild and even way, knowing what a mindblow it was for me. My first reaction was that of being swindled---Lucy hadn't committed suicide for me after all! Wasn't I worth committing suicide for? Did all the credits have to go to Clemens?

'How long,' I asked as casually as possible, 'has this been going on between them?'

'Oh,' she said, matching my casual tone with what I thought relish, 'for as long as he's known Arthur Schendt, at least a couple of years.'

'A couple of years!' I said.

Then came the stunner.

'They were negotiating marriage right at the time of the suicide,' she said. 'You know, she was the one woman of his life he didn't need overcoats for. He said that being with Lucy was like taking the uterine journey backwards.'

Was she mocking me? I could hardly hold the phone.

'So,' I managed to whisper, 'you think she killed herself out of disappointment? Maybe the negotiations went wrong?'

'Could be,' she said blithely. 'He told her what he told Emily---that he needed to be with his wife for a bit, they were due for their annual vacation together. That's why she gassed herself---'

'Gassed? I thought it was wrists!'

'Oh no. Arthur Schendt always favored gas. He tried about three times with gas.'

'So really Clemens put the seal on it?'

'Yes.'

My pride smarted. I started to blame Lucy. And Susan knew exactly the effect she'd had.

And I admired her for it.

61.

Feeling the return of phallic excitement, I determined to have contact with Emily whether I wanted it or not. It was no good trying to fight her. I'd tried that---and look where it got me. Happily my balls were still in their wonted medical location but it had been a close shave. Emily had shown her mettle and I meant, for the time being, to play my cards diplomatically. And eke what enjoyment I could. My shrink, and plenty of fried eggs and dates, would be my support system.

At the same time I was amazed at this cool decision of mine. As my shrink always says, 'Unexpected change is about the only constant you should expect in human behavior.'

Emily was already home when I drove onto the driveway. The front door was open, so were the windows upstairs. Jamie came out and barked with joy and jumped up at me. There was a shrieked 'Hi!' from upstairs that reminded the cats next door that their respite was over.

Strange to relate, we kissed fondly but didn't make contact. I found I did want it---and I could see she did too---but we both opted silently to put an edge on the desire by waiting. She'd improvised lunch---mostly salad with nuts and cheese and two baguettes fresh from the bakery. These baguettes were so crisp that every time we broke it in our hands Jamie came sniffing round.

'I took him for a walk,' she said.

'Great.'

I started in on ROOV almost at once. I wanted to show that I still felt part of it (I didn't).

'I had dinner with Clemens just before all this happened,' I told her, 'and he talked about the possibility of human exnims, as you and I discussed before.'

She didn't know where to put her eyes. I enjoyed this.

'You mean the cyrogenics idea?' she screamed (the deeper the embarrassment the higher the decibels, with Emily).

'No,' I said. 'You can't get people on ice to sign waivers, you know that. Clemens talked about using suicides. Waivers have to be signed before they commit suicide.'

'Really?' she said, with big false owl-eyes. 'You know, new ideas just sprout out of Clemens's ears!'

'Emily,' I said (I could have bitten off my tongue), 'when you came here that night when I was in bed did you get me to sign a document?'

'Yes I did.'

'Was there a sentence in that document which said should I decide to commit suicide?'

She stared at me. She came and sat by me. She took my hand.

'Honey,' she said. You can't go on talking this way. Heinrich's really worried and so am I and we both want you well. That talk's going to start all the rumors rolling again!'

'What rumors?'

'That you're not quite right in the head.'

'But good---!'

'OK, OK,' she said consolingly. 'Yes I did get you to sign a document but it was exactly what I said it was, a new clause in our marriage settlement. I felt you were better off with Susan than with me, also Jerry Riven, whom I was going out with at the time, wanted the whole thing cleared up. As for the phrase

'if I should commit suicide', you should really talk to Heinrich about that.'

'OK, OK,' I said, 'but after the way Clemens talked, and now Schendt's suicide...'

'Listen,' she said, 'you tried for cat and dog exnims and in doing that you taught all of us in ROOV some new tricks. In studying the cat and dog possibility we discovered we could jump a whole series of stages and make V and VI what we'd previously envisioned for X and XII and XIII! You helped us skip about five stages, all of them expensive---and by the way the expense increases with each stage. So maybe you saved the outfit millions of dollars! So I don't think you should feel you've failed honey---you haven't failed. And you shouldn't be disappointed. You may be involved in ROOV again---but in a far more important role.'

'Wow,' I said in a whisper.

'As Heinrich said to me the other day,' she went on, 'disappointment is a devastation, and it attacks first and last the sexual energies.'

'He said that?'

'He did.' She gazed at me a whole long time.

'You OK now?'

'Yes,' I said. 'I do care about ROOV Emily!'

'I know, I know. And we're all bearing that in mind.'

'I won't sleep tonight for excitement!' I said.

As a matter of fact we lay there holding hands most of the night, awed by what ROOV would hopefully, soon, become, for both of us. It made contact absurd, trivial.

62.

Marrying Emily was at one and the same time the best and worst thing I ever did. I'm not sure if it made me what I am now or unmade me as I once was. Certainly I'm not my own person any more. But then I've never really wanted to be. All my life I've striven to sell myself, and I don't mean that in a bad sense. Looking at my life right now I can say I've succeeded in doing that---and for a top price.

My fear that Susan and I had lost a lot of customers through the sudden closure of the clinic was banished by our answering service telling us that dozens of people had rung up anxiously enquiring about our return.

On the Saturday previous to me going back to work Mike Borovitz dropped by and asked me would I like to invest in his next New Age Meats venture? I said 'I'll think about it.' He said he wanted to open a shop on Solano Avenue in North Berkeley to catch the enlightenment and ecology freaks. He'd found another cheap site in Oakland but would abandon it because a) it was in a black district and b) it was close to Mills college. He said, 'It'll be ten years before blacks can afford to stop thinking about their own survival and devote themselves to that of animals. As for Mills college, students would eat animals alive if they tasted better.'

The shop on Solano Avenue was perfect, he said. 'You get nothing but freaks there,' he added. So I told him to go ahead and see what kind of money we would have to talk about.

So life was contrasting nicely with the helpless

horror that had gone before.

Emily was itching to know the truth about why I was lying on the floor that time with Jamie.

'Are you into animals for christsakes?' she said.

'I wasn't even into women!' I said. 'I gave Jamie a bottle of champagne and I drank another bottle myself. Just before I fell asleep I made a physical enquiry into whether my phallic area even existed any more and I fell asleep without zipping up, that's all.'

That Sunday we did nos 16-24 until about four in the morning. Emily was in mint condition. She said, 'overcoats, hooker-fixated medicos, overweight computer dealers---I've had my belly full!'

Yes, this was the life. I arrived at the office ten minutes earlier than necessary and everything looked as bright as a new pin. Susan came in and we just feasted our eyes on each other.

The all-clear for our building operation had been given by the contracting firm the previous week. The demolition crew arrived that afternoon to break down the rear wall of my office.

The noise and dust gladdened my heart. It was like a new beginning. There was no chance of contacts with Susan, though we both tried to 'accidentally' take a few minutes off together, but the rush of clients was too great and an emergency was brought in from the freeway requiring immediate operation.

The contractors were as good as their promise. The work was over in two weeks flat. A spacious gleaming operation room, big enough to operate on a horse in, was the result, and a widened driveway at the side of the clinic so that emergency cases could be brought straight round for operation.

Life settled back into its former routines. Jerry Riven was still anxious for Susan and I to marry, and so I think was Emily, but she didn't want it to interfere with the life she (Emily) and I shared, which was some-

thing of a contradiction. She was thinking of our numbers, which to my astonishment I was beginning to enjoy again. I urged her to settle her own affairs. She had dropped Jock Turner, to my relief, and had taken up with Jerry again, though not with what I judged to be enthusiasm.

One evening about a month after the new surgery was ready Emily invited me to dinner at a little French place in Concord and when we were sipping our coffee at the end she said, 'There's something I have to say.'

'OK.'

'There's a very big job waiting for you in ROOV.'

Excitement surged through me like a hot glow.

'But I don't know if you'll want to take the responsibility,' she added. 'If you don't, we shall all understand.'

'Tell me what it is!' I said.

'You asked me some time back when you were in your delirious state if Arthur Schendt and Lucy had signed waivers for the use of their bodies after death. Of course that question came from a morbid state of mind at the time, but it's surprising how unbalanced conditions can intuitively hit on something like the truth. As it turns out, Arthur Schendt did, like a great number of scientists, sign his body, and incidentally Lucy's too, over to Stanford university. And the university immediately contacted us.'

I was beginning to tremble. 'But what---? Where do I come in?'

'Clemens saw to it---with a presence of mind typical of that extraordinary man---I mean, overcoats apart he's the only man I know who measures up to what I grew up to believe a genius is---a fountain of new ideas and these are confounding, even frightening---this man saw to it that Arthur and Lucy were immediately put on a life-support system. Luckily they were found within minutes of committing---'

'How did they do it?' I asked quickly.

'I told you---gas!'

'You told me wrists.'

'That's what I thought at the time,' she said convincingly. 'But Arthur Schendt wanted to bequeath clean bodies to the university, with the smallest damage to the organs and neurotransmission, so Clemens told me.'

The tips of my fingers seemed to be flying about.

She went on, 'If our hopes materialise, they can both be brought back to life!'

'But---but---maybe they wouldn't like that!' I said.

'Don't worry honey,' she said. 'The depressive state leading to suicide can be mended with a megadose of endorphins. Easy!'

'My god,' I said.

She sighed. 'It's a heavy responsibility, I know.'

'What is?' I asked, my fingers almost taking off.

'Would you be prepared to shoulder it? You see, no surgeon can do it. Or will do it. We can't even think of approaching one. The experiment has to go through in the conditions that have held from the beginning. Put it this way. The only way to save poor Arthur and Lucy is to put them through the ROOV experiment, and that can't be done in a hospital---or by a surgeon. It has to be the same genetic experiment as what we did with the other exnims.'

'Listen', I said, wanting to leave the table, escape a thousand miles. 'I couldn't---you don't think I could---!'

'Who else is there to do it? And where else? If it's all done at your clinic, which the federal authorities already know about as one of the ROOV locations, the job can be done now, and once it's done nobody can undo it. But if it isn't done in those

strict terms Arthur and Lucy won't be with us again! Honey, it isn't as if they'll feel anything! You feel it! You feel the cruelty of the knife! They're dead honey! And this is going to bring them back to life. You've got to do it!

'But---' I could hardly get my breath, let alone enunciate. 'I---human---surgery---I---know nothing about hu-hu-human anatomy! I c-can't wield a scalpel! I c-can't Emily!'

'Ssh!' she said, looking round. 'Don't you see this is all emotional stuff---it's holding on! Let go! We've talked to Susan and she's far more reasonable.'

'You've talked to Susan? And w-what did she say?'

'She said she'd think it over. But you're not even thinking it over! Of course she has Jerry to support her. But I mean to support you in the same way! I'll be there at home waiting for you and encouraging you and urging Clemens to start dropping your name in NP' circles---'

'My god,' I said again. 'But---I re-repeat--- the human anatomy---and the---don't forget Lucy---it's Lucy---!'

'Just cool off and I'll tell you a little more about it,' she said.

And she did.

I drove to work next morning dazed and unhappy--- yet not at all sure I wasn't the happiest man on earth.

it was just a carrot. I knew that the new ROOV experiment could never become public. Even if it did the geneticists would take the credit. With luck my name might be introduced in five, ten years.

Susan said nothing. Our work continued as usual. The thought of what was going to take place on the fourth morning of September brought us even closer together, and our contacts were as frequent as they could be with a constant stream of clients and at least two operations a day.

On the evening of September 3 Emily took me and Susan to the Martinez-Goldstein residence for a quiet but, in Clemens's words, 'celebration' dinner.

Nancy was there, the punctilious hostess as always. It seemed Susan and I were the guests of honor. Clemens showed me a tattered five-year-old cable saying he was a NPW, from Oslo, and then he showed me the document itself. He seemed to be telling me 'and you, who knows, one day...'

It kindled fires of absurd pride in my heart, I wanted a few words with Susan alone and asked the others if I might walk with her in the garden a moment, as I had a few things to say to her about the next day's work.

When we were walking in the darkness hand in hand I took her to a spot between two tall redwood trees.

'That evening we were all here together, for dinner, you remember?---right here where we're standing Lucy and I---we couldn't resist each other. That's why we were away from the party for about an hour. I don't know if you noticed?'

'Yes I did,' she said.

'We could never resist each other. Do you know why I'm telling you this?'

'No?'

'Because I don't want you to think that we're

doing anything kind of callous tomorrow. I've seen her body before. I'm not really doing this for ROOV. In a sense I am but I know they're using us Susan. And you and I are letting our skills and our equipment and office be used because we want Lucy and Arthur back with us, isn't that right?' I repeated in the darkness, standing on the very spot where Lucy and I had had contact, 'Isn't that right, Lucy?'

'Yes.'

We walked a little further from the house.

'But I'm worried Susan!' I gripped her arm. 'Didn't you tell me when I was in the nursing home that Clemens saw Lucy alone before she died?'

'Yes I did. He had her to dinner.'

'Alone? Are you sure?'

'Yes! Why, what's wrong?'

'He had me to dinner too! And I swear he was trying to hypnotise me---get me to commit suicide---he kept saying, what future does an impotent man have?--- I was low in sexual energy then, Susan---and he knew--- from Emily!'

'I remember.'

'And he kept drilling into me with his eyes---! He was almost sitting on top of me! He's hypnotic Susan! He wanted to use me as an exnim! I know it! So you see I wasn't so crazy when I talked to you on the phone about iced corpses---you thought I was crazy---'

'Yes!'

'Because Lucy and Arthur are on ice! They're probably thawing out now in preparation for tomorrow---'

'They're on life-support systems, not ice,' she said.

'That's right!' I smacked my forehead. 'I forgot! So they were there in time. You see how it all fits? This Clemens must have known what was going to happen. He knew they were going to commit suicide! So he was there on time with the life-support apparatus.'

But---! That means---! Do you see Susan? They must have been alive!

'What?'

'They must still be alive. And we're going to--- we're going to---!'

'They're dead! They committed suicide!'

'Clemens and the geneticists must have got there before they were actually dead---don't you see? Otherwise there'd be irreparable brain damage from gas! But just to fall asleep---to be lightly gassed---that constitutes no risk at all! They're alive, Susan--- only asleep! It's obvious! We can't have a head in San José unless it's alive, unless it's aware and thinking---as aware and thinking as the rat's head in the Sonoma County lab! Those rats were anaesthetized but they were alive Susan! And Lucy and Arthur are alive. They have to be to make the experiment possible!'

Susan was suddenly firm as I'd never seen her before. She almost bared her teeth in the dark in her effort to calm me.

'You mustn't think of it!' she said. 'Just do it!'

'But how can we? If they're alive! We could wake them up now---instead we're---you know what our assignment is? To murder them Susan!'

'It can't be true,' she said in great distress now, as if the word 'murder' had taken all her firmness away. 'It can't be! Do you think a man with a Nobel prize is going to risk that? Of course he isn't! Because he'd be booked for murder too---!'

'Damn right he would,' I said. 'Because he persuaded her to commit suicide, like he nearly did me!'

'You can't be right!' She stamped her foot. 'You can't be! They said they were going to take the suicidal tendencies out of Arthur's brain by chemical means so---'

'They could do that now couldn't they? With the bodies intact?'

'So what are we going to do?' she asked, frightened, chilled in the humid evening air.

'I'm going to talk to Clemens about it. Do you think I'm going to murder Arthur and Lucy? Or let you do it?'

She shrugged, exhausted, and we strolled back to the house.

Everyone was sitting round sipping coffee or liqueurs. Emily was talking to Mike Borovitz. Jerry Riven was in close chat with Nancy. I took Clemens aside and we went to his library.

I told him more or less what I'd said to Nancy. I was still unsteady.

He drew me to an armchair and sat close by.

'The brain damage wasn't irreparable,' he said. 'I confess that. But what do you think Stanford university could have done had they harvested the organs? Brought them back to life? Not at all! But we mean to reconstruct the neurotransmission in both cases my friend---'

'Can't it be done without cutting them up?'

'Who will do it?' he asked emphatically. 'Only the ROOV experiment can shelter them now! Look at the facts. First, we've no time to lose on niceties. We can't retain two corpses---the coroner's verdict has already been issued.'

'Who arranged it?'

'Dr Turner I believe.'

'Oh my god,' I said.

'My second point is that this is a perfectly legitimate experiment as things stand officially. Unofficially there's no way of saving Arthur and Lucy. So we're forced to do it. We're morally obliged, as their friends. We have to bring them back to life if we can manage it---and ROOV is the only way of doing it! With the law on our side, that is. Everything else would be meddling with corpses. Do you think for

one moment that we've time to persuade a huge university to reconstruct these two brains, while maintaining the bodies on a life-support system? It takes academy weeks and months and sometimes years to decide and then finance a new venture! Come to your senses sir! We have to save Arthur and Lucy now!'

My mind was in a whirl. I nodded weakly.

'I suppose you're right,' I said.

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The entire rear wall of the operating room could now be opened, so that the vehicle containing the Schendts would unload its contents without being seen from the street or our waiting rooms. A cool musty scent of eucalyptus drifted in. It was one of those balmy ocean-influenced days. The breeze that stirred the trees from time to time was as gentle as a kitten's paw.

It had been reckoned that the operation would take a minimum of eight hours, a maximum of ten. We knew our assignments, Susan and I, having studied the diagrams for a full month now.

She was trembling. That gave me courage.

When we heard the crunch of the gravel under the thick tyres, as the vehicle travel^{ed} slowly along the side of the clinic, we looked at each other and tried to smile.

As the vehicle turned into the patio and backed slowly toward us, darkening the room, hiding the eucalyptus trees and taking away the spicy scent of that balmy morning, I suddenly remembered I hadn't fed

Jamie.

But Emily would cope, I was sure of that.

* * *

I'm writing this some years later. Susan and I are married, and we live at the Santa Rosa house. Jamie is six now, and has sired a number of pedigree puppies. Emily never married Jerry. He fell in love with the student who wanted to marry Arthur Schendt.

The operation was successful by the way, but it took far longer than ten hours. We were still at it at dawn the next morning.

Emily was waiting at the house with a magnificent breakfast for both of us. She visits us from time to time, and of course we're still closely involved in the ROOV experiment, since she is in charge of the male head, as before.

As a matter of fact Emily married Jock Turner. It was a great wrench for me. I just couldn't respect the man. Their first evening together, on Broadway in San Francisco, literally hooked her. I do my best to see her alone. And I make sure he never meets Susan.

ROOV VI and VII are proceeding smoothly by the way. The neurotransmission in the heads has been rehabilitated. It looks like all is ready for the great event. Phallic erection took place in Sydney, Australia, and there was female receptivity. That was precisely ten months and three days ago. Four weeks after that electronically induced coition took place.

The pregnancy has been smooth. Next week---the words will hardly write themselves, I feel so proud---progeny will result.

Thus, Arthur and Lucy will eventually return to a full and active life in a new role---that of parents.

It was Clemens who got me to write all this. He

said I must tell the world unofficially what it wouldn't tolerate being told officially.

'Use a pseudonym,' he said. 'And disguise the events. But not too much.'