

COOLEY FITZGERALD, who always carried his camera focused at infinity, died on September third, 1968, with his lens cap on, when the private plane he was flying in tried to make an emergency landing on a narrow highway only a mile and a half short of the Cedar Rapids, Iowa airport and hit the fourteenth car of a Rock Island Line freight train headed for Keokuk carrying, as it so happened, pigs. It was the most unusual thing ever to occur within a mile and a half of the Cedar Rapids airport, and remained the most unusual thing until, six years later, a small herd of dairy cows spontaneously combusted, or so the farmer who lived just down the road from the main terminal turn-off claimed, though he was widely thought to be dumb as a stick, in great need of insurance money and irrationally religious. Still, there were the charred remains to consider. Nevertheless, Cooley's death was unquestionably more tragic. Not only did the hogs, once marketed in Chicago, represent a substantial profit for their owners, but the train derailed and traffic was blocked for hours, and that caused a problem, because the airplane Cooley had been flying in hit the side of the train opposite the closest hospital, which Cooley reached too late, the ambulance wasting forty minutes round trip in detour around the airport, too late and later, certainly, than it could have been, had everything been perfect. But then, had everything been perfect, the plane would have had more fuel, or the people who planned the airport would have put it a mile and a half closer to the site of the crash, which would have been a mile and a half farther from the religious dairy farmer, lessening the noise from the Ozark and United jetliners, which would have meant his cows would have been more contented and given more milk, and he wouldn't have had to torch them. If, in fact, he torched them. But life is not perfect like that—it is perfect in some other way, and if anybody could have, Cooley would have understood.

The real tragedy was that Cooley Fitzgerald died with his lens cap on, because he stayed reasonably lucid and capable of taking pictures up until the last moment, which came only a few moments before the surgeons entered the operating room, dripping at the elbows. The ambulance attendants and nurses all, to the best of their recollections, remember a critical patient pointing and clicking his camera at them, but unfortunately, nobody noticed that the lens cap had not been

removed, nor had Cooley, who certainly cannot be faulted, under the circumstances, for committing the cardinal sin all photographers cringe at the thought of. There are conceivably few things as distracting as an imminent one-hundred-and-fifty m.p.h. collision with a Rock Island Line freight train. Still, it's a shame, because, had his pictures turned out, it would have been exactly the kind of photo essay he would have been thrilled to die for. He'd said often that the second best subject he could think of, when people were innocent enough to ask him what *subjects* he'd thought best to photograph, would be his own death. He'd said, just as often, and usually in the same breath, that the most exciting subject would have been his birth, and every time he said that, his voice seemed to dissolve in what listeners thought a discernible and sincere mist of regret.

On a brighter note, at the time of his death, the best series of photographs he'd ever taken was having the greatest success he'd ever known, though it must be made clear Cooley "F-stop" Fitzgerald did not think in terms of *best* or *greatest* or *success*, all of which was precisely why his fellow professionals considered him a genius. It is reasonable to ask, what good does success do a dead man? The answer most frequently given, and most often correct, is, none, but in Cooley's case, a great deal, because the degree to which he was dead corresponded in direct ratio to the degree to which his photographs succeeded, and not in the figurative *an artist is immortalized by his work* sense. The sense was quite literal, keeping in mind that his heart had stopped, his brain had ceased to function, and that his body temperature, in the morgue, had dropped to a cool thirty-five degrees fahrenheit. As they laid him in the ground, his \$1950.00 Hasselblad 500cm with \$2499.00 500 Tele-Tessar 8.0t lens poised on his chest, his stiff shutterfinger posed at the ready, all at his request, his third choice of burial, there were in existence twenty-eight eight-by-ten black and white stills, dry-mounted and arranged chronologically in a portfolio, and one Polaroid color snapshot, upon which his life depended.

Kedney Bassett stood at the side of Cooley "F-stop" Fitzgerald's grave, weeping. She was the most gorgeous woman at the funeral, though the competition was weak. She was five-foot-two, 104 pounds, and had very thin hair the color of oak and difficult to wash in anything but very gentle shampoos. She preferred Dr. Castille's Natural Peppermint Sham-

poo, which made her, in addition, the most fragrant woman at the funeral, again, her stiffest challenge coming from Cooley's mother, who wore Tabu. There were five or six of Kedney's closest friends, and there were a couple of Cooley's friends from the Art Department, in which he taught a course in Photo Media, the days he wasn't off practicing his art. There was a minister, and there were Cooley's father and three brothers, and there was a poet who taught in the Iowa Writers' Workshop, an amateur photographer, friend of Cooley's and Kedney's instructor. As he stood opposite Kedney at the grave, he was thinking that with Cooley gone, he stood a chance with Kedney. He stood no chance, and never would. Kedney was Cooley's fiancée, though he had not known at the time of his death that she was.

Kedney wept. She had not wept for years, somehow, had thought, as people who have *been through too much* quite often think, that she had been rendered by life incapable of tears. She wished someone would come up to her, put his or her arms around her and whisper soothingly, "Cry harder, it's not that good," but instead, they all tried to get her to stop, and to stop feeling again was not what she wanted. She was overcome by the usual griefs—loss, guilt, the assassination of love, especially that—but she was also overcome by irony. Cooley had hit the hog car within seconds of the moment, the very moment, Kedney Bassett had decided to marry him. Of course. She had been considering the idea for a long time, though he'd never proposed, and thought against it until the day before he left in the ill-fated Beechcraft to go cover the Democratic National Convention in Chicago for *Life* magazine, he proposed, in the form of the portfolio of twenty-eight black and white prints. They were not actually a proposal, though it was clear they were a proposal. She'd spent the two weeks Cooley had been gone looking at them, and decided she would marry him. She did not know then, naturally, that he would die, or that, at his funeral, after he died, his life would depend on them.

Before explaining the photographs or the nature of how Cooley Fitzgerald took photographs—his genius—it should be explained that he was a rather bizarre, frightening man who could leap from serenity to outrage in an instant, or disappear for days without warning, and sometimes, return unable to say exactly where he'd been or why. It should be explained as well that Kedney, beyond being the most gorgeous and fragrant woman at the funeral, was the least pregnant. Of all the women at the funeral, and more than most women in general,

Kedney took great contraceptive precautions, and took children, especially the ones she might have, very seriously. Once, she and Cooley had joked that he ought to have some of his sperm frozen and then have a vasectomy, so that they could make love as much as they wanted to whenever they wanted to, and he could still father children when the time came, wherever the time came, and by whomever the time came to. There was another woman at the funeral, whom nobody knew, who had had a hysterectomy, and who was therefore not even in the competition to see who could be the least pregnant. The woman was a Mrs. Holmgren, the same woman who had originally called the ambulance which hadn't gotten Cooley to the hospital in time, a farmwife down the road whose husband, six years in the future, would burn his cows. After her hysterectomy, however it connects, she began to enjoy going to funerals.

The services ended and the mourners began to amble listlessly toward their cars, pausing to ask Kedney if she needed a ride, which she said she didn't, preferring to walk. With all the writers and poets in town, it was a celebrated cemetery, mapped and traversed in song and story. Poets probably frequented the cemetery more than fiction writers, it seemed to Kedney, summoned by uncomfortable notions that, being poets, they ought to think more about death, or drawn there by the innate morbidity of introspective people battered by bowling alleys, laundromats and pizza places. The sky was more than three-quarters cloud, the wind more than gentle, and Kedney was glad she'd worn a windbreaker, though it was still officially summer. She noticed that in the very uppermost branches of an elm tree, the leaves were beginning to pale, signalling a premature autumn.

Kedney walked to a monument more often mentioned in Iowa City graveyard poetry than anything, the notorious Black Angel. It was a fifteen-foot tall looming statue, wings outstretched, the whole thing leaning precariously, it seemed, over some poor woman's remains, the original white marble oxidized black before sunrise the very night the poor woman was interred because, as legend has it, her husband was betraying her memory and fornicating with her sister at the time. As legend has it. Legend, Kedney thought, can keep it.

Kedney's grief was real, so she left the cemetery, which offered up nothing but clichés. She went home and tried to play the piano but started to cry and had to stop. She tried to read, but started to cry and had to stop. She could not put her feelings into words. She missed

Cooley. She couldn't conceive of not being able to see him again. A great love had risen up inside her, and she now had no way to release it. At the same time, she was afraid she would release it—that she would forget who Cooley was.

Kedney began to tremble, and felt a very real tightness in her chest, as if her heart were a clenched fist. She felt a tingling in her hands and feet, and then muscle cramps, her fingers twisting into gnarled, awful forms. She slowed her breathing, and her hands relaxed. She walked rapidly home, got in her car, and drove to a small motel outside of Dubuque, where she trembled and chain-smoked and stared out the window for six days.

She had left the photographs in Iowa City because she didn't think she could bear to look at them, for fear of what they might do to her and remind her of, but returned from Dubuque after she'd realized, biting into a French fry at Erdl's Burgers on Kerper Boulevard, that now she could not bear not to look at them. On the same fry, she also realized she was done, done being nuts.

Cooley "F-stop" Fitzgerald was a genius because he was the first Zen photographer. If he'd had a motto, though he had no motto, it would have been "To take a perfect picture—first make yourself perfect, then take a picture." In the same way that a Zen Master hits the target every time he releases an arrow because he does not aim the arrow but lets the arrow become part of the target and then find itself, Cooley's photographs were wonderful because he did not interfere with *the wonderful*. He knew, simply because it was his nature to know, when he was in the right relationship to a photographic occasion, the right angle, and he was always receptive. He opened his perception the way he opened his shutter. He loved Kedney the same way, not forcing his love on her, but simply "putting it in front of the camera of her heart," or so he had phrased it once, not as good with words as with a lens. He never, never, in his life, took a photograph of himself, and so every photograph he'd ever taken was more personal and had more of *the man behind the camera* in it than any of his contemporaries had in theirs. All the photographs he'd left Kedney were of Kedney, taken at moments when she was in a perfect state to be photographed. They revealed him to her, and more amazing, they revealed her to herself, not in the *am I that ugly?* sense, the way some photographs do, but in the sense of showing her who she

really was all along, and who she could be, in her best state. That is, by being a perfect photographer, Cooley made his subjects perfect, or captured only the perfect in them—that in effect, he could make a rock say cheese and steal the souls of parking ramps.

It was complicated to explain, so Cooley seldom tried, nor did he think about it much, because it was easy enough to show, which his photographs always did, and when he showed Kedney the pictures he'd taken of her, she knew how much and how long he could love her.

Cooley loved photographs that expressed or implied the condition of the photographer at and after the click of the shutter. An example might be a picture of an attack dog in midair, about to rip Cooley's throat out, frozen in the moment before ripping it. One of the pictures Cooley took at the Democratic Convention became very famous for the same sort of anticipatory reason: it was a picture taken at about ten o'clock at night of a crowd of demonstrators being held back by an armlocked cordon of National Guardsmen, and in the middle of the crowd, the only demonstrator wearing a white shirt—a brilliantly lit white shirt—was giving Cooley the finger. The young man had also shouted "fuck you, cocksucker!" at Cooley, and there were some who swore they could hear the man's voice off the print, and some who would say the photograph *epitomized the spirit of the sixties*, this picture taken a few days before Cooley died.

Ten days after he died and a week after the funeral, Kedney returned from her lost weekend in Dubuque, which has its share of them, to examine the portfolio Cooley had left her. The neighbor's dog snarled at her as she got out of her car on the last hot day of summer. Her landlord had taken in her mail and laid it on the newel post, letters of condolence from her friends, one from her mother, from Cooley's parents, from her grandmother, the usual bills, the unusual bills from the hospital, three envelopes from small literary magazines which she opened immediately, the contents informing her she was rejected from each, a local shopping guide and a free sample of the latest in tampax technology. Her apartment was hot, the air dusty. She watered her plants, made a pitcher of lemonade, and sat down on the couch with the album.

There was a picture of her typing, taken from behind, in which the light of the fluorescent lamp over the typewriter made her thin peppermint hair affect the halo she always felt was there when she was writing a good poem. There were four pictures showing how in love

with Cooley she'd looked before she'd started to worry that he was too bizarre and threatening, three of them showing, in her eyes and mouth, how worrying had hurt her face. There was a picture of her in a yellow rain slicker telling a little boy he should go inside because he was getting wet. There was one of her trying to portray the syllable "butt" in a game of charades. Two of her sleeping, one with a good dream, one with a bad dream which was about to wake her up, but which also gave the sense she knew and was comforted by the knowledge that Cooley would be there to hold her when she woke. The photographs, toward the end of the album, the most recent ones, seemed to Kedney to evidence that, unaware of it at the time, she'd been falling back in love with Cooley. One showed her fishing, sitting in a boat with a borrowed pole in her hand and an old felt fedora on her head, and you could tell from the picture she was about to catch a nice walleye. One showed her in the bathtub just after having flung a handful of Mr. Bubble bubbles at Cooley. One, taken in Minneapolis, Cooley's home, showed her in a restaurant they'd eaten at the first time they'd gone to visit his parents. It was called The Skyroom, located at the top of a downtown department store where 2000 shoppers at a time could dine off the menu or opt for the Zip Lunch from the salad bar, crunching croutons, exploding cherry tomatoes between their molars and watching fashion shows of local-label clothing. The restaurant meant something to Cooley because it was where his mother always took him and his brothers each year at Christmas, where the boys would all fight with each other and behave badly, and where Cooley had had his first clubhouse sandwich, and numerous subsequent clubhouse sandwiches because ordering anything else seemed inappropriate. It was a picture of Kedney with her mouth full of bacon, turkey, bread, tomatoes, lettuce, mayonnaise, salt and pepper, and it was all oozing out between her teeth, and she was holding the sandwich in her hand for the camera to see, and there was the smell of hairspray and Iced Blue Secret in the air, and in the background, out the window, from twelve stories up, the layout of South Minneapolis where Cooley had roamed far and wide as a boy on a bicycle—in short, it was a picture of Kedney in exactly the right place at exactly the right time doing exactly the right thing because she was being exactly who she was. She began to cry a little, just a little, under control, to think that after all the men she'd gone through who had tried to get her to love them, and done all the sweet and charming things it took to *win* her love, Cooley had been the first man to *let* her love him, and now,

as the old story goes, she thought, *his plane hit a train full of swine and he was gone*. She even laughed a little, sadly.

She went to her bulletin board, returning with the only picture of Cooley she had. She'd borrowed a friend's Polaroid Swinger and taken it. It looked exactly like him, but when she'd shown it to him, after waiting the required thirty seconds, the chemistry then not being what it is now, he'd looked at it and said, "Bean, that's really you." He called her Bean, for Kedney Bean. He was right. The picture of him had been her, Swinger in hand on one end of a teeter-totter at City Park on the Fourth of July. She understood.

Kedney poured another glass of lemonade and wondered what sort of poems she'd write about Cooley, what elegies. She started opening the letters. Her grandmother wrote:

Dear Kedney,

I just wanted to send you a little note to tell you your old grandmother loves you, for whatever that's worth. When Odell died I know all my friends tried to comfort me with words and none of it helped much, so I know there's not much I can say to help you, but I wanted to tell you that even though Odell passed on, in some ways I don't feel I've lost him at all. Having children helped and I see him in your mother and her brothers all the time, but even so when you live with someone and love him he can't be taken from you just because he's died. That must sound odd. I know Mary never really understood your "live-in" (is that what they call it?) situation with your Mister Fitzgerald, but please try to understand and forgive her. I believe you must have loved him very much and to tell you the truth I never gave a hoot if you were married or not and I told Mary so but she has her ideas.

It hurt a great deal to lose Odell but after a while he became a warm memory, like an egg inside my ribs that would never need to hatch. I hope the same thing can happen for you, and God will help you too. You don't have to write me back if you don't want to, but if you want to get away and need a place to stay, I would be glad to clear the packages off the bed in the guest room for you. We all love you and are with you in your sorrow.

Love,
Grandma Bethel

P.S. I forgot to thank you for the cigars. They were very good. How did your Mister Fitzgerald ever be allowed to go to Cuba? He must have been very special. We'll talk later.

There were four letters from Kedney's friends, each of which told her to thank god she had his pictures, that always the good die young, and all offered her a place to stay, as if competing for the privilege; but she was truly moved by how much they cared. Her mother wrote:

Dearest Kedney,

Your father and I are deeply sorrowed by your friend's death, and we want you to know you can come home any time you want to, though they're wallpapering your room right now (sample enclosed) so you'll have to either sleep in one of the twin beds in Cheryl's room or stay with your father. I don't have many words I feel will comfort you. Death is never easy to understand, especially that of a loved one, and I hope you believe me when I say I know you loved Cooley. Can the past be forgotten? I love you and support you as much as I can. Maybe I love you too much some times. Marvin has been in Montreal for two weeks, but I talked to him on the phone, and I'm sure he will write to you soon. Take care, and trust that time will heal the pain. I'm sure it will. I love you.

Mary

P.S. I hope you like the wallpaper—your room will be ready if you ever need it, though I'm thinking of converting it into an office the times you're away.

Kedney wanted to dislike the wallpaper but liked it against her will because her mother had always had, she had to admit, if little else, good taste. Cooley's mother wrote to say that she and Cooley's father were fine, that the estate had been taken care of, Cooley having died as any

Zen Master should, intestate, and they hoped Kedney would use the camera equipment they were sure Cooley would have wanted her to have, to complete the record of her life that he'd begun. They thought she was a fine girl, a special girl. Cooley's mother said Cooley talked to her about his "Bean" all the time, and, his mother said, "you can rest assured that I believe, at the time of his death, you were the most important thing in my son's life, and his father and I both thank you for being that." Kedney loved Cooley's family, including his younger brothers, who had helped her move Cooley's things out of their apartment before the funeral, fighting over his shirts and sweaters, joking and holding Kedney when she needed it, which was often. The letter ended:

Please come and visit any time. Minneapolis is beautiful in the fall, and we'll show you the lakes, which you didn't really get a chance to see. They are full of ducks. And please, please, keep in touch. We can see why Cooley loved you, and we love you too. Our deepest regret is that you two didn't get married and have children, or damnit, just have children, married or not. We hope you will continue to let us think of you as a daughter-in-law. Cooley once said to me, and I thought it odd, but then, I guess he could be a little odd, couldn't he, "Mom, sometimes I just wish I could make myself small enough to crawl inside Kedney and live there forever." Please, Kedney, let him live there. He's small enough now. We love you and hope you are alright. If you need anything at all, please let us know.

*Much love,
Corey and Mike*

Kedney found herself crying again, her face folding in on itself, both for the hopeless loss of it all and for the kindness that seemed to be flooding the space left by Cooley's death.

Kedney blew her nose and sorted through the remaining envelopes, a phone bill, a gas and electric bill, something from *Newsweek*, a letter from the hospital Cooley had been brought to, no doubt a form condolence, Kedney thought, and something from the Hillman Lab, University Hospitals, right in Iowa City. When she opened the letter from the Cedar Rapids hospital Cooley had died in, Kedney's heart began to beat rapidly, for in it was a note and also a smaller envelope, on which was written, in Cooley's own handwriting, "Bean." She took

a deep breath, and set the papers aside, opening her gas bill which came to \$5.47, opening her phone bill, which amounted to \$47.93 due largely to all the long-distance phone calls to Cooley in Chicago. *Newsweek* had been nice enough to drop a note saying they were making her a special offer as a college student, and just to make sure she read it all over a second time, but she could not calm the throbbing in her chest, and she feared cracking a rib from it, so she dropped the letters and went grocery shopping, buying two boxes of Bisquick even though she had half a box at home and didn't use the stuff much anyway. She drove around. She drove around some more. She came home to face what she concluded was a deathbed letter from Cooley. It was. She read the accompanying message first. It said:

Dear Mrs. Kidney,

Excuse my english for there are many things I cannot say or know how to but I must write you for Mr Cooleys sake who asked me too. We are good doctors and do all we can but I am very sorry he did not make it I have seen others die here or before in Saigon and I can convince you he did not die of very painful injuries he looked happy. He had also some moments of alertfulness to write you the letter I enclose also and gave me your adress and toid me this I should send to you. Please do not think he died without thinking of you it was only one minute or more before he died after finishing what I also send. Even for nurses death is hard be please happy in time. There is Viet Nam saying I remember which says "ask the grave, it says 'life' ". I have help translating this. Maybe it helps.

*Your friend Mai Duc Bui
Cedar Rapids General*

Kedney poured two inches of warm lemonade and melted ice cubes into the wastebasket and filled the glass from a bottle of akvavit Cooley's brother Pat had left her in the refrigerator. It was a strong Scandinavian liquor that tasted like Ry Crisps and it was just what Kedney needed. She added ice, and felt prepared to read Cooley's letter.

Dear Bean,

They tell me

and then the handwriting, Cooley's, changed to the hesitant scratches of Mai Bui. It continued:

that I probably will die they don't tell me underline tell but I know period Bean I love you. By the time you received this you probably received letters from friends and wool wishers saying they love you too. Feel loved even by me after this is over with it is actually quite interesting and though Id have to admit I hope to survive quite understandably Im sure Im not at all apprehensive about this really, I hope the pictures turn out. Bean I have to tell you Ive not always lived as securely in the present as I might have lead you to believe Ive done something Im unsure I should tell you about but haven't the time to give the old ternatives the required consideration they deserve. So I put the problem in your hand. and trust you will do the right thing that is comma the right thing for you. Please feel under no old bligation to me because I love you two much to interfere in your life or allow it to go in any direction except that it desires. I will cut this short because I can no longer see anything. Dramatic underline dramatic arent I? If you really truely love me contact the Hillman lab at the University Hospital and give them my name if you are at all uncertain or dotfull please please I stress ignore this. Curiosity will lead to unwanted responsability. I warn you be sure of yourself first even then do what's best for you for your life underline your period. And take your time, please for me. Im sorry Im getting tired. Please send my endpromptoo stinografer here a big bowkay of you know whats I don;t think she knows who I mean she is sweet. I love you more than anything Ive ever loved period. As a group we dying men dont lie. What a group Im joining I hope I meet Abrohan Lincoln. How odd to think this is the last thing Ill ever say to you take care of yourself always I will miss you I love you if it is possible I will see you again we shall see wont we I love you.

Cooley

ps let Sam have first shot at these pictures it their any good at all give the money

I am sorry he said no more. Your friend Mai Duc Bui. I am sorry I spell nothing good he said okay.

Kedney did not hesitate to open the letter from the Hillman Lab. It contained an invoice, itemizing \$13.00 for liquid nitrogen, plus a \$2.00 service charge, plus tax, coming to a total of \$15.45. The letterhead read *Hillman Fertility/Urology Laboratories, University Hospitals, University of Iowa*. The bottom of the statement read, "Paid—storage and maintenance—acct. #s-424-q — 7/1/68 - 8/30/68."

Kedney dialed the number of the lab and discovered, conversing with Dr. Fallon, who somehow could convey his bedside manner over the phone, that Cooley had deposited one hundred milliliters of sperm—an amount, if every sperm were given its egg, enough to repopulate the world eighteen times over, certainly enough for a nice sized family—in the hospital sperm bank over a period of two weeks the previous May, which had been when they'd joked about his vasectomy, and the time he'd taken the picture of her in her rain slicker with the little boy. Another picture, taken in May, showed her with her shirt off one sunny morning at breakfast, because it was a nice day, when she'd jokingly put drops of milk on each nipple, and then had cupped her small breasts toward the camera, pursing her lips. There was a bowl of Wheaties, Breakfast of Champions, in the near foreground, the photographer's meal. Had children and motherhood, Kedney wondered, been on Cooley's mind that May? And, there was a picture of her posed by the Black Angel in the cemetery, which in the hands of anybody but Cooley "F-stop" Fitzgerald was a shot that would have been, and always has been, in Iowa City, about the tritest thing you could do to photo-emulsion, but Cooley had been lying on his back on the granite coverplate and looking up at the towering angel, trying to feel dead, when Kedney had leaned over him and said "Aren't you cold?" "Only on the outside," he'd said, and clicked the shutter, locking into place the grey May rainy sky, the looming Angel, and the interposed Kedney, closer and equal in size to the Angel. It was a picture of mortality.

"And," Dr. Fallon added, "at your husband's request, made through the attendant nurse, we extracted a post-mortem supplement of semen from the vas deferens and epididymis which, I should tell you, is much more viable than the sperm he had frozen last spring. The newer sperm has only been kept two weeks at minus eighty centigrade. My guess is it's roughly seventy-five percent resuscitative, whereas the older stuff is, ah, much colder and will, when revived, be slower and less purposeful."

"Purposeful?" Kedney said, draining the last of the akvavit and

noticing that she was slurring her words slightly. "Well I don't suppose I'd want to be impregnated by any shiftless loafer of a sperm."

"Well, it's more that to keep it longer we take it down to minus one-ninety-six centigrade and store it in liquid nitrogen. That'll keep it viable for up to ten years, or at least so far that's as long as we've been successful. Really, it plateaus at roughly fifty to sixty percent efficacy for nine years, but after that it drops off. We've had very little success after nine years."

"So," she said, "it's not exactly now or never, but now would be better, is that what you're saying?"

"That's a reasonably accurate statement, I should think, yes," Dr. Fallon said.

"Well, ahh, just what do I have to do, I mean, how is impregnation achieved?" she said, staring at a picture of herself in a baseball cap, the sun setting behind her, highway streetlamps coming on in the distance, the droning crowd below sitting quietly in anticipation, two out, sixth inning, Quillici on first, Oliva on second and Harmon Killebrew at bat, Red Sox leading 4-1, her cheeks bulging from a mouth stuffed with hot dog.

"It's actually a surprisingly simple procedure," Dr. Fallon said. "The sperm is allowed to thaw to room temperature, and when it's done, caffeine is added, and then the mixture is spread on a cervical cap, quite like a diaphragm and inserted the same way. You could really do it in your own livingroom, though we don't recommend it."

"Caffeine?" Kedney said, "like a cup of coffee and then off to work?"

"Well, in fact," Dr. Fallon said, "the chemical function is identical. Caffeine has been found to boost the resurrectivity, as it's called, up to 150 percent. Sperm are remarkably tenacious, even so, the extra get up and go helps a great deal. Mrs. Fitzgerald? Are you there?"

"I'm sorry," Kedney said, "yes, I am. I hope you forgive me, Doctor, but this is all rather a lot. This is the first I've heard, to tell you the truth."

"Oh my," Dr. Fallon said.

"Yes," Kedney said, "oh my."

"Hmmm. Mrs. Fitzgerald, as your husband's doctor I suggest you give the idea of raising a child fatherless some thought, and there's no hurry, but if you do choose to inseminate, your best bet would be to do it in the next month. You have nine years after that, however."

Kedney told him he'd been kind, that she'd think about it, and be

in touch, and he told her that all the storage costs had been paid in advance for the duration of viability, that she would receive monthly statements, and that she need not worry about a thing, access to his sperm was restricted at Cooley's request to her, his wife.

"Did he say specifically to me, 'his wife?'" Kedney asked.

"Well, I assumed. . . ."

"We weren't married, Doctor. My last name is Bassett."

"Oh," he said. There was a short pause. "Well, I have last say, really, as his doctor, but I do think we should keep this under our hats, because I don't really know about the legality of it, and I don't know what people will think with all this Haight-Ashbury free love sort of thing going on, but I do know that this is Iowa and Iowa morality we're dealing with, and it would be a mistake to lose sight of that fact. We have a lot of churchgoers here, and Dr. Hillman goes twice each Sunday and once Monday, if you know what I mean."

"You're not Catholic, are you, Doctor?" Kedney asked.

"Hardly, I would say, more like transcendentalist, if anything in particular—why?"

"I don't know," Kedney said, "your name, it's Irish, isn't it? Cooley was Irish."

"Finnish," he said, "but in fact, it's an odd coincidence, but Cooley and I went to the same high school, years apart. My senior year, I played on a football team that went undefeated, and the string eventually went to sixty-eight games without a loss. I think that's some sort of national record. Cooley played on the team that lost. The man he was supposed to cover caught the winning pass. I kidded him once, and told him I'd only take his sperm if he promised to keep his sons out of football. That's a promise I won't hold you to, I should add."

"You're from Minneapolis," Kedney said, "I was there last summer. We went to a Twins game. Killebrew hit a home run with two on in the sixth to tie it, and another in the ninth to win it."

"He had a helluva year," Dr. Fallon said, "I remember that game. Five to four."

Kedney was staring at the leaves that had fallen from one of her plants to the floor, and she wanted to continue to stare mindlessly, so she thanked Dr. Fallon and hung up. For five minutes, she stared, wondering only what the name of her plant was.

Kedney tucked the letters and the Polaroid snapshot in the portfolio from Cooley, put the portfolio on her bookshelf and *things in perspective*.

She was a twenty-six-year-old woman, a poet, with a history of love affairs that never seemed to turn out right, her propensity for failure something she sometimes blamed on her parents' bad marriage. She had had two abortions, and one wonderful live-in terrifying true deep forever love affair with a dead genius who, small enough now to live inside her, had willed her his sperm to do with as she saw fit, nor did she care for what was going on in Viet Nam, and Eugene McCarthy needed her help. That was her attempt at perspective.

Kedney Bassett went back to Dubuque for two days.

When she returned, she decided to do the only sensible thing: live her life. She could not really fathom the full implications of that, but realized that whether she chose to or not, her life would be lived by her as sure as trains would continue to haul hogs to Keokuk and she'd damned well better get used to it. She did not want, particularly, to live without Cooley, but after some time she could find no way around the fact that he was dead, she was alive, and that they had, in this way, grown apart. Cooley once said he wanted to be rich enough at his death to be able to afford to have himself stuffed, and then hire a staff of attendants to continue to place him in front of the television when his favorite shows were on, *Star Trek* or *I Spy* or *Run for Your Life*, or take him down to the local bar occasionally. His second choice was "to be skinned, cleaned, dressed, cooked and then fed to the Johnson Administration," and then have someone tell them what they'd eaten. His regret was that he would be unable to see the expression on Robert MacNamara's face, and he said he'd will his cameras to whoever would take the picture and send him a print. But, Kedney thought, driving back from Dubuque through the gorgeous colors of autumn in Iowa, across land farmers were squeezing every last penny from every square inch of, Cooley had had to settle for his third choice of interment, and was turning blues, greens and purples in a coffin six feet beneath and 130 yards south of the Black Angel, and there was nothing she could do about it. Except have his child. Which she preferred not to think about, just yet.

In the following years, Kedney Bassett would “go to Dubuque” often, a few times in the literal sense, reassured by the familiarity of that one plain, bare motel room where she could cohabit with her grief, whatever the cause at the time. It was nice to be able to keep it all in one room. Other times, when her life and career took her beyond a convenient drive, she “went to Dubuque” figuratively, once, for example, in 1973, waking up in a private clinic in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, north of Detroit, gaining slowly an awareness that her mother had killed herself with an overdose of Nembutal. In the months immediately following Cooley’s death, Kedney spent a good part of her time trying to contain the emotional energy she could feel storming inside her, because she would run the vacuum cleaner into the leg of a chair accidentally and burst into tears, or slip on the ice getting out of her car and burst into tears, and she was tired of bursting into tears. She took up racquetball, swatting ferociously at the ball, hoping not that it would carom properly and score a point but that it would splatter against the front wall like an ink blot. She canvassed her neighborhood for Eugene McCarthy, and watched impassively that November when the “Nixon Phenomenon” vaulted “Tricky Dicky” into office. She’d go to bed at night and long for Cooley. When Nixon waffled on his troop withdrawal promises and threatened “appropriate action” in response to any Viet Cong aggression, one of her racquetball partners, a fellow poet from Rapid City, S.D. named David Sundance, or who called himself David Sundance, asked her to help him organize a poetry reading against the war, and she agreed.

Kedney and David and three other members of the committee met a few times in bars, and as often as not, Kedney felt distracted and out of place, though she tried to contribute. It was her idea that they should organize a way to have students donate blood which, ultimately, would be poured out on the steps of Old Capitol, a functionless building in the middle of campus which everybody agreed symbolically represented the government even though the offices and officers of government had been relocated in Des Moines in 1857. The idea was met with enthusiasm and carried out, the big demonstration coming on April first. On May 15, 1969, Kedney handed in her thesis, entitled *Getting Warmer*, which broke basically into three sections—love poems, elegies, and anti-war poems. On the same day, rioting erupted at the People’s Park in Berkeley. David Sundance had organized another, more broadly-based committee, and left Kedney out of it because she continued to play racquetball, a

game he'd stopped playing because of its similarity to war, but even so, Kedney participated in a *display of solidarity* with fellow student protesters in California. She still needed to play racquetball, but she was playing less frequently. She was finding a change taking place, a substitution, for the angrier she was during the day, the less sad she was at night. In June she got her M.F.A. degree, and in July she got a job at Mills College, a women's college in the MacArthur Park section of Oakland. On the first anniversary of Cooley's death, Kedney taught her first poetry workshop in blue jeans and no make-up to a class of young upper-class, well-mannered women who all wore skirts and scarves and mascara. She'd asked them to bring samples of their poetry, and they had, and eight of the poems were entitled "Life" and all the rest were about horses. Kedney drove into Chinatown for dinner that night, and as she drove, she thought of what a considerable amount of consciousness-raising she had set before her. As she tore at a bite of moo goo gai pan, she saw in the paper that Israel had shelled guerrilla sanctuaries in Lebanon. Driving home, she marveled at how different from Iowa San Francisco was, and how obvious a marvel she'd just had, but she felt compelled to measure the distance she'd come in a year, in larger terms than miles or days. When she got home, she felt calm and relaxed, and reached almost casually for the portfolio she'd only a day before placed on her brand new bookshelves, but when she pulled it out, the envelopes fell to the floor, and the one which landed on the top of the pile was the one from Cooley which said "Bean" on the outside, and it was instantly as if nothing had changed at all. The tears came suddenly, and she fell to her knees. She spent the night on the telephone.

By the second anniversary of Cooley's death, 9/3/70, Kedney was wearing her hair curly, was still the most gorgeous fragrant woman at any funeral, and had been arrested four times for demonstrating against, in order, the Cambodian incursion, Nixon in general, Kent State, and the closing of a daycare center in Berkeley. That day, Xuan Thay, North Viet Nam's chief negotiator, returned to the Paris peace talks. On September third, 1971, Kedney was seeing a man, a young and rather inept zookeeper who was constantly being bitten, stung or clawed by something, whom Kedney felt sorry for, and because she was leaving that week for Tucson, Arizona, where she would teach a graduate poetry workshop, her first book soon to be published to much acclaim, she let that zookeeper be the first man since Cooley to sleep with her. She'd had one more arrest that year for joining a sit-in on behalf of lettuce

pickers. She'd developed a kidney infection, and had had to go six months without drinking any alcohol. She'd published, as her last official act at Mills College, the school literary review, entitled *Life and Horses*, though to be fair, the poems anthologized were considerably better than they'd been initially, and she felt proud. She'd learned how to change her oil and tune her engine that year, though she was still uncertain what the "dwell" was. As the man entered her she thought of Cooley, and drove to Arizona the next day, three days earlier than planned, in a fit of self-loathing and a blue Volvo. She spent the better part of her first week in Arizona in Dubuque.

Two days before the fourth anniversary of Cooley's death, Bobby Fischer won the world chess championship. One day before, a Spanish woman in Tyler, Texas, saw the Virgin Mary breastfeed a goat in an arroyo by the first light of dawn, though no money was being made off the miracle until well after lunch. On the anniversary itself, Mark Spitz won his sixth of seven gold medals, and the Soviet Union announced that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn would not be allowed to go to Stockholm to receive his Nobel Prize. On the evening of the fourth anniversary, Kedney looked through the album once, read the letters, looked at her snapshot of Cooley, and quietly put it all in a box which she wrapped, roped and mailed the next day to Cooley's mother with a note expressing the wish Cooley's mother keep it, unopened, until further instruction. Kedney had hoped to become cold and callous about the photos, hoped they'd become as remote and frozen and ungraspable as an Iowa City winter seemed to a Tucson resident, which was what she intended to be and stay. She wanted them to fade past cognitive recollection but knew Cooley didn't take photographs that ever would. It was a warm desert night, and she went for a drive west of town toward the Saguaro National Monument, turning off before reaching the desert museum, parking at the mouth of Red Rock Gulch. Kedney was pleased to think the gulch was there and named before the Hopalong Cassidy movies and Roy Rogers westerns made such places seem so ludicrous and false. She walked down the sandy path, the walls climbing gently to either side, and she saw a javelina scooting up a wash, and she heard coyotes, and she made a fire from dust-dry mesquite branches, and she spent the night in Dubuque. She had to evict Cooley, as it were, because she wasn't making any money inside, had had no tenants, and while admitting to herself she'd never really shown the place around to the men who'd been attracted to her, she did not like the thought of turning thirty without

the prospect of company. She'd had feelings for Cooley she'd not had since Cooley, and she wanted them back, but from someone living. It looked to her as if Cooley had to go, out on the street with rags on his feet but please, she told the sliver of a maiden moon above Red Rock Gulch, let it be let go of—let it be gone.

The day after she mailed the package to Cooley's mother, she threw out the notices from the Hillman Lab and wrote asking Dr. Fallon to have whoever was sending them stop. Two weeks after mailing the package she received a plane ticket and a note in the mail from Stanley Kunitz informing her that, as that year's judge, he had selected her manuscript, *Doubt Healer*, as the winner of the Yale Younger Poets Prize, and could she come pick it up? By the time Kedney got the card telling her Dr. Fallon was no longer at University Hospitals, but could be reached at the Dobler Clinic, University of Minnesota Hospitals, two black students had been shot at Southern University, and Kedney didn't give the card much notice. Also, she was trying as hard as she could to fall in love with a man she would marry in eight months.

On the fifth anniversary of Cooley's death, 9/3/73, Kedney sent Corey Fitzgerald a letter apologizing for not thanking her sooner for the wedding gift, an exquisite bathroom wall's worth of slabware tiles. The letter went on:

I wish you could have been here, but it is certainly a long drive.

Corey—I can hardly tell you how much I appreciated staying with you after mother's funeral. I find I know no one in Detroit any more, and the house, which I always thought was empty anyway, was even emptier. I hope you will let me think of you as my mother now—we all need someone to at least think of as mothering us. Cooley took a picture of me in a cemetery once which he claimed captured the smell of my hair there. What happened at mother's (cemetery) is something I guess I understand now, but in a way never will, really. How could I love her so much underneath and hate her so much on the surface? How did I hide it from myself? The doctor called what happened "SCHIZOPHRENIC COGNITIVE DISSONANCE PSYCHOSIS." I love that kind of talk. Did they tell you, when you talked to them (when I was babbling in my rubber room) what started it?

They say what triggers it is never important. I was standing there, listening to the minister, and where they found him I'll never know, when I saw a Hostess Twinkie wrapper blow into the grave, right

into the hole itself. I saw a boy hiding behind a headstone where apparently he'd been eating his lunch—he had his lawnmower turned off. Anyway, he was peeking over the stone, watching, maybe to see if anyone had noticed the wrapper. Corey, I couldn't help it—I started thinking of mother spending eternity with a Twinkies wrapper in her grave, and I started laughing hysterically, and then apparently I really lost it, but all I remember is that it was too much, and I don't care what they say, I still think it's funny. But I'm better. Where did I get so unstable?

I'm writing you from our new address in Georgetown, where we both begin teaching in only a few weeks. I will also consult, somehow—nobody seems to have answers to any of my questions—with the Library of Congress. It's no big deal, believe me. I'll find out what my job is once I do it, which is the way everything else works in this town. And Corey, this town is incredible—I've never been anywhere so exciting. Nobody, but nobody, believes the bastard when he "accepts the responsibility (for the break-in) but denies personal involvement." It's become a party joke around here, when you hear people saying, "hey baby, wanna go to bed? I'll accept the responsibility but deny personal involvement." I believe Sirica will get the tapes.

Also, our house has a breakfast nook almost exactly like yours, with unstained pine and a rather smallish French window. I am looking for a porcelain butter dish like the one you have to complete the picture, but I doubt I'll find one. What fun to actually own a house after ten years of leaky, drafty apartments with roaches and old refrigerators that shudder in the night. David is a good man, and takes good care of me, in many ways. This is not, I guess, your fairy-tale romance of everlasting passion, but I have learned it is wrong to compare the way we live to the way we'd love to live—the ideal. David and I are both intelligent people, and we love each other, and we will work it all out. I have not forgotten Cooley—I never will, but I have made room for David. I have not forgotten you either. There is a good chance I could be in Minneapolis around Christmas time for an interview. Can I stay with you? I'll let you know the poop. And speaking of poops, hello Mike, you old fart (an Irish fart, which as everybody knows is the worst kind.)

I love you both. Take care.

Love, Bean

(officially Kedney Bassett Weisman)

Kedney Bassett Weisman's first real pregnancy did not go to term, spontaneously aborting without her ever the wiser in its fifth week, four days before her birthday, a kind of gift, though in truth any suspected connection would be specious. It was just as well, if such things can be just as well, because hers was an Andrea Doria of a marriage, on the rocks and sinking fast, capsized by a sheer incompatibility of detail and a realization on her part that David's Jewishness, which had at first been so new to her and what attracted her to him in the first place, was not enough to compensate for the fact that he was at heart a real prick, selfish and cruel at times, terribly insecure, and not, her therapist told her, obviously not Kedney's type. It was a depressing winter. There were long boring lines at all the gas stations, gloomy forecasts on every front, from the *Economic Outlook* to the *Future of the Novel* to *The Human Prospect*, and worse, in Washington D.C. proper, where Kedney's apartment was—into which she'd moved the day Henry Aaron announced his intention to beat his career into the ground and play another year—storekeepers and janitors everywhere were keeping the lights turned off, and Washington, a town built out of little other than stone, marble and granite, was enough of a goddamn mausoleum, Kedney thought, even with the lights turned on. For Kedney as well, it was a time of closing down, pulling in and conserving. She taught her courses and went home, where there was no phone to answer, and no mail to bother with because after the split she felt it important that no one know where she was, and she kept her new address private. She read, and wrote, and did what the rest of the country was doing, which was watching the vivisectioning of the Nixon Presidency on the television, at the hands of a simple country lawyer on his way out and an ambitious country senator from Tennessee on his way in. She spent Christmas alone, though she tried not to make too much of a sentimental big deal about it, to herself, going to church at eight o'clock Christmas Eve, which was nice, afterwards spending two hours chatting in a restaurant with a woman from Thailand whose first name was Suaruang, whose last name sounded like "Bun-under-pot-corn," and who, no matter how much Kedney explained, couldn't understand the purpose of Santa Claus. Kedney was divorced on the third of January.

Kedney's course load lightened the next semester, which gave her

more time to spend at home. In the entire month of February, she managed to produce only one line of poetry, which went: "If I were a man I would grow a beard," after which she stopped because she could think of no way to follow it. She even went out and bought a razor and a can of Rapid Shave, and shaved her face in an attempt to unblock herself, but all that resulted was a small cut which she hoped she would not have to explain to her office-mate. On April 29th, Nixon released the edited transcripts of his tapes and, politically speaking, the Frankenstein was turning on its creator, and had him pinned in the corner by the throat. Kedney spent all of August 9th, 1974 reading, and so first heard of Nixon's resignation when she read it on the cover of a local tabloid in four-inch-tall letters while waiting in the checkout line at 5:15 a.m. in an all-night A&P near the Tidal Basin where she'd gone to buy blueberries and wheatpuffs for breakfast, not because she was hungry but because as usual she couldn't sleep. When she saw the cover, her heart did somersaults, and she was as pleased as any normal person would be, that the rascal was routed. She bought a copy to read with her yogurt. Inside, on page seven, her eye was drawn to a headline in forty-eight point Futura Bold type announcing the usual sort of sensational story such tabloids thrive on:

HERD OF COWS BURSTS INTO FLAMES: INVESTIGATORS BAFFLED

Chicago. AP A Cedar Rapids Iowa farmer, Luther Holmgren, claimed Friday his herd of guernsey dairy cows, sixteen in all, caught fire and died in their enclosure on a farm just north of the Cedar Rapids airport. Said Holmgren, "I just a sinner. God is punishing me by striking down my cows. Thank God though that they were insured. This is a blessing in disguise. The Lord works in mysterious ways."

Insurance investigators are checking into the possibility of arson. An airport official said it was doubtful an overpassing jet could have dropped fuel on the herd, and no UFO sightings were reported in the area. Six years ago, a private plane tried to make a forced landing on the highway leading to the airport, but crashed into a train that was crossing the road, killing all the passengers, and injuring livestock. Reports of other unexplained phenomena in the area are being looked into.

When Richard Nixon resigned, people rushed out to the drugstores and newsstands to buy copies of *Time* or *Newsweek*, to anchor themselves in *History as it Happened*. People who had been waiting and watching quit smoking the day he resigned, went on diets, began books they'd put off, started to paint their houses. Office pools were collected, backs were patted, and the Press, particularly the Washington Press, buried hatchets with each other, got in cars, drove to bars and got in the bag together, and stayed there for days. "Hippies" got haircuts, and war resisters returned from Canada, though not necessarily to turn themselves in, but certainly to celebrate.

Kedney Bassett called Iowa City the day after Nixon resigned and accepted the job she'd been hesitant to accept, a year's appointment to teach at the same Writers' Workshop she'd graduated from, offered by the same poet who'd had designs on her at Cooley's funeral, though she wasn't worried about that. She called collect from a payphone in a shopping mall, and even as she spoke, she thought she could see on the faces of all the shoppers milling about her that something had changed, that something important had ended, and even if that weren't true, she told herself, she felt something new inside her. It was, if nothing else, she told herself, a way of taking advantage of history, of letting herself be carried forward by the notion that perhaps *Justice had Triumphed*, that the air was clear and vibrant in the summer heat, that her lease was coming due and gas supplies were coming back to near normal, that a job she'd never tried to specify, about the war, about the condition of the world, was over in a way it wasn't necessary to articulate, and all that was clear was that she didn't have to do it anymore, could do something else. She thought now that it would be nice to be back where she'd lived with Cooley, nice to be close to Dubuque, and nice to teach a nice young bunch of nice students in a nice building just a nice ten minutes walk from where they kept the frozen sperm she intended to impregnate herself with.

She drove first to Minneapolis, and spent the weekend with the Fitzgeralds. She sang as she drove, and thought her terrible voice was as terrible as ever. She was excited when she arrived, but did not tell the Fitzgeralds anything about the possibility of making them grandparents because it was only that—a possibility, not a certainty. She retrieved the package containing the photos, but did not open it, and told Corey it was a manuscript she'd wanted to "let ferment a while." By the time she'd reached Iowa City in her falling apart blue Volvo, Kedney had

decided she would not open the package until the right moment, and she trusted she would know when that was.

She was disappointed to learn from the receptionist at the Hillman Lab that Dr. Fallon had moved, because she'd wanted to meet him, and more than disappointed when the same receptionist told her that in 1972 the Iowa legislature had passed the Downs Bill, which mandated that all sperm-bank donations be encoded by number only, and that Cooley's name was not enough. Kedney panicked, slightly, but calmed down when Dr. Fallon, who remembered her, told her long-distance that he would take care of everything.

"Yes, well, my understanding was that the law was based on genetic-engineering scares and black-market baby scandals going on in New York at the time it was passed, so the law would make sense in New York, where there isn't one, but not in Iowa, where there is, but I did warn you we're dealing with Iowans, didn't I?" Dr. Fallon said.

"You have a good memory, Doctor," Kedney said.

"An unmarried couple having children six years after one of them has died is not something I'd ordinarily forget, I would say. What I'll do is get a letter in the mail tomorrow to old Hillman, and I think you should see Doctor Semba for the actual procedure. He's a friend of mine who will understand. I'll send him a note too."

"Dr. Fallon," Kedney said, "you said once it was so easy I could do it in my own livingroom."

"Ahh, but I added, as I recall, that we don't recommend it, for reasons, among others, of sterilization."

"Well that's what I want, anyway. I'll be clean. Do you think I could, or would it be too much trouble, or illegal or anything? It is important to me."

"How important?"

"Very important."

"Well, Kedney," Dr. Fallon said, "I don't know if they'll let you, but I think you could do it, and home insemination is not completely without precedent. You'd need a vacuum bottle to carry it in, and a c.i.c.—cervical insemination cap—and a thermometer, some caffeine solution, and they'll measure it all out for you. But Kedney, you should know, that even under optimal conditions, we only succeed fifty or sixty percent of the time, and often try for months before hitting paydirt. Do you know when you ovulate? There's a slightly increased chance the baby will be, well, malformed or under-developed in some way, slight

but real. It could take a long time, and it might not work at all, and I want to know if you're ready for that?"

"I think so," Kedney said, though to know for sure seemed impossible. But she knew what she knew, and where she'd been, and what a long time was. "I mean, Doctor, it seems to me that what I've got to lose is a good deal less than what I stand to gain."

Kedney spent the last week of August moving into a new apartment on Jefferson Street which had a kitchen, a bathroom, a livingroom, a bedroom and another room with enough space for either a study or a nursery, and it should be made clear that she left her boxes of books on the floor of this room, not elsewhere. On the sixth anniversary of Cooley's death, she put in the trunk of her Volvo a suitcase with a weekend's worth of clothes in it, two fifths of Irish Whiskey, her notebooks, four pens, and the portfolio Cooley had given her, still unopened. The doctor was a short Japanese man, as one might have guessed, but he did not smile as incessantly as Kedney had supposed he would. He did have a thick accent, but a Southern rather than Oriental one, having grown up in New Orleans. He spent the better part of an hour instructing Kedney—what temperature to let the sperm thaw to, when to add the caffeine, how to butter the cap, what her vaginal temperature should be, and so on. Kedney had imagined telling Dr. Semba that she was at the top of her menstrual cycle, coincidentally, and he would smile and say "velly good," but instead he said he thought that was "just jim dandy." Dr. Semba's wife/nurse assisted in the demonstration, a Vietnamese woman named Mai Bui Semba, the very same, and she remembered Cooley.

"I could not forget him, Miss Bassett. I never seen man so serene, you know, and remember he ask me if I were married. When I said no, he said I should marry Japanese man because Japanese make good cameras. Then he make joke you know and said, 'In fact, some Japanese are born cameras.' I recall laughing but not understanding."

"That was sort of how you had to take him," Kedney said.

She had time to kill, and spent that day driving leisurely along the back roads and off the main highways. She passed horsebuggies carrying Mennonite and Amish people to and from wherever Mennonite and Amish people go, to each other's farms, Kedney wondered, or do they shop in real stores in town? She took pictures of them, and of anything

she thought to take a picture of. She tried to take pictures Cooley's way, without trying, but she felt a little foolish and a poor imitator. She thought however that, as with the one other creative effort she intended to make that weekend, she would wait to see what developed. It was a good year for corn in Iowa, which is something like saying a good year for snow in Siberia, but it was true—the corn was six or seven feet high in places, and where the road dipped below the fields, Kedney felt as if she were driving through a tunnel of green, the sheer multiplicity of life around her like a blanket, the drive wrapping her in the rolling landscape of Eastern Iowa. She did not cross a bridge that boys weren't fishing off of, and all the dogs in the world were out and barking. The day was hot and, by late afternoon, turned overcast. Birds wheeled and swarmed in the windbreaks, and where the gambling farmers were harvesting early, purple martins followed the tractors as they unearthed or unseated insects. Like seagulls, Kedney thought, following ships out to sea for their trash. Kedney caught herself feeling very organic and fertile, and under the circumstances, let the feeling grow, so that, of course, it was raining as she drove into Dubuque, a small, dirty, smelly little town on the Mississippi River, with railroad yards and warehouses, neon signs with letters missing from them, black wires as thick as a finger strung from creosoted poles, and small motels with one car in the parking lot.

Kedney's motel had, bless its heart, not changed, save for a new Coke machine and a row of shrubs that did not look as if they were going to make it. She signed in using the name she'd always used—Anne Frank—another frightened girl trapped in a room, trying to love everything or just understand a little of it. She asked for and got room eight, her room. She threw her suitcase on the bed, and set beside it her packages, the portfolio and the things from Dr. Semba, and then she closed and locked the door behind her and drove to Erdl's Burgers for dinner. The rain was not hard, and it appeared as if it were not going to let up. Erdl's had, in the time elapsed, closed down because Erdl, a man who if he flexed his muscles would rip his hat, had shot his wife and killed her in the arms of her lover in Galena, Illinois, Erdl now slinging hash in the kitchen of the Anamosa State Penitentiary. Kedney found another place called, simply, "Eat." She read *The Des Moines Register*. Across the horseshoe counter from her, a red-eared man was explaining how someone named Vern had been trampled by his own cows, and the red-eared man took care to emphasize that these were fat

cows, not lean ones, as if, Kedney thought, it made any difference. It was warm and comfortable in the cafe. Kedney ordered a bowl of chili. The red-eared man had moved on to the topic of Luther Holmgren.

“Do you think Ford will pardon him?” a voice to her left said. She turned to face the voice, which had come from an old man whose crutches leaned against the counter beside him. Kedney’s first impulse was to ask who was to be pardoned, and then she was surprised at how little she’d been keeping track of what was going on. But when she thought about it, she realized that she didn’t really care one way or the other if they pardoned Nixon or not, and she was not one who felt he had suffered enough, either. On the front page of the paper, in the lower left-hand corner, it was reported that Luther Holmgren had been picked up and charged with arson in the *Great Cedar Rapids Conflagration of Cows Scandal*—Burgergate—with Watergate just two equal symptoms to Kedney of how terribly difficult it is to live perfectly, and people should understand. She didn’t want to see Richard Nixon and Luther Holmgren crucified like Christ and Barrabas. She wanted them to be allowed to go golfing together, and help each other, and talk to each other, and work things out, but knew, laughing out loud in the Cafe Eat, that it was not to be.

“I don’t know—I guess,” she told the man.

“I’ve been in jail,” the man began, but Kedney stood and paid her bill and left.

She went back to her motel, the rain a steady late-summer or early-autumn Iowa rain like rain anywhere really, but here, in the Corn State, Hog State, Farm State, Kedney thought, each raindrop a penny from heaven, an extra kernel per acre, money in the bank. It was about eleven o’clock. She opened the vacuum bottle, inside of which was what looked like a sugar cube, softening already at the edges. She set the lid aside, to let the semen thaw. Her vaginal temperature was 99.5. She was ovulating. She went into the bathroom and brushed her teeth, and when she returned, she took her clothes off and put on a red flannel nightshirt that had been Cooley’s, which she’d expropriated from him and worn the first night they’d slept together and most nights thereafter. She had not worn it since he died. She lay on the bed and opened the package. She read the letter from her mother, who was dead now. Had she told her mother she’d really liked the wallpaper? Yes, she had, but it was no comfort. She missed her mother. She read the letter from her grandmother, who was still alive, and decided to write her the next day,

and to send some cigars. She read the note from Mai Duc Bui, whose English was much improved now that she was happily married. She read Cooley's mother's letter, and planned to drive to Minneapolis soon, maybe the following week. She saved Cooley's letter for last. She'd never been able to evict him from inside her. Even when she'd tried to toss him out on his ear, she'd felt his presence, looking in the window, not asking to come in, just interested, looking and loving her. She was sure she had really loved him, as he'd asked her to be sure, and she'd taken her time, as he'd asked, and she was now giving Cooley, who had lived, with one precaution, without expectations or designs beyond the present, a future. She hoped he'd met Abe Lincoln. She checked the temperature of the sperm, but it was still cold.

She looked for the snapshot of Cooley, but couldn't find it anywhere, nor could she understand how she could have lost the only picture of him she could ever show her child. She thought back to Tucson, was sure she'd put it in the package, but then she realized she didn't really need it, and was not so angry or upset. She looked at the pictures of her and saw him in each. A picture of her daydreaming while sliding a piece of Juicy Fruit in her mouth with the foil still on it. The rain slicker photo, the milked nipples photo, a montage of lakes and sandwiches and dreams. There was a picture he had taken of her when they'd both had the flu, and had lain together in bed for a week, blowing each other's noses, taking medicine and embracing toward health. A shot of her from far away, through a telephoto lens, taken as she'd been walking toward their house, the July sun setting splendidly behind her, her straw summer hat under her arm, an ice-cream cone in her hand, a dog at her feet looking at the cone, a child approaching rapidly from behind her on a tricycle. And simple portraits of her face, her twenty-six-year-old face. It was smooth. It was without blemishes, skin happy in forgetting the pain of junior high acne and senior high pregnancy, eyes unaware of what they would see, the police at Berkeley, the televised news of the Tet Offensive, the faces of men she couldn't see beyond the shadows of—but—in the photographs they were only twenty-six-year-old eyes adoring with all the love they could muster the man behind the camera. Kedney Bassett was thirty-two years old now. Cooley Fitzgerald had been twenty-nine when his plane crashed.

The sperm was at room temperature. Kedney tasted it, but thought that it somehow did not taste the same, and then remembered that it had been cut with ten percent glycerine for freezing. She added the caffeine,

and waited the five minutes she'd been instructed to wait. She smeared the sperm on the cap with a sterile swab, inserted it over her cervix, tucked it in place, and turned out the lights, pulling the covers up to her chin. There was the sound of trucks passing the motel, going to Chicago or Omaha, the drone of diesel engines and the sibilance of tires on wet pavement. And there was the sound of the rain on the roof, steady and reliable. Kedney began to masturbate, slowly, and in ten minutes, she began to come.

Richard Nixon would sulk in blue suits about the grounds of San Clemente for a few years, sell the place and move to New York. Luther Holmgren's insurance company dropped its case when Luther dropped his claim; his wife wanted to give the cows funerals. Dr. Fallon went to Sacramento, Henry Aaron retired in '76 with 755 slammers, Killebrew in '77 with 573. Dr. Semba and Mai stayed in Iowa City, and Cooley's parents retired to Tucson, where Kedney occasionally visited them.

Kedney Bassett was to give them two grandchildren by artificially inseminating herself with Cooley "F-stop" Fitzgerald's sperm, the first a boy, Cooley, the second a girl, Bethel. Kedney would write a book which would be one of the finalists, but not the winner, of the National Book Award, the year Cooley Jr. turned six. The title of the book would be *I Never Went Back to Dubuque*. Cooley had perfection in him, and he brought it out in Kedney. The children were, of course, like all children, perfect.

Immediately after her orgasm, though Dr. Fallon would later assure her it was quite impossible, Kedney knew for a fact she was pregnant, and she fell warmly into a better sleep than she'd known in years—the best night's sleep since the night before the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago when Cooley had put his hand on her cheek, brushed her hair back, and said, "Sleep, Bean, I'll be back in two weeks."