

VITAL SIGNS

by Lowry Pei

It was a hot day in Little Dixie as Tom Hardison drove north out of Columbia, Missouri on U.S. 63. His black Bonneville with the red interior was only two years old and worked fine but he was fed up with paying for it. No satisfaction in the machine any more – except the air conditioning; he wished he had bought a VW like Kate’s instead, but the clients and the company had certain expectations. He wrenched the car around a curve and over a slight hill. On the other side a railroad track jolted him into slowing down for a moment. The highway burned in front of him, melting into mirage-pools floating on the blacktop; the horizon wavered with heat, but the trees, heavy with thick midsummer leaves, did not stir, and no one was in sight. Then some sad bastard in a John Deere hat and a sweat-soaked work shirt, crawling down the shoulder on a tractor. Tom passed him at sixty-five. Sometimes he drove slower and waved to the oncoming pickups as you’re supposed to do on country roads, but today he couldn’t bother with that.

He was early for his appointment in Hartsburg, a tedious business about a shed roof and a thunderstorm. He knew the building was no good, knew the owner would just as soon the whole thing fell down so he could collect on it. You wrote a big policy, you put in something like that worthless shed. Maybe it was carelessness, maybe you were thanking the guy for the commission you were getting, it was still an invitation to rip you off. Bad business. Not the kind of thing that made you popular with the men in Kansas City. He pulled up at Hartsburg’s only stoplight, in front of the Western Auto, and turned the air conditioning up full blast.

Lee Dressler, who had run Tom’s office for three years, had gone to Iowa City because her son’s wife was having a baby – Lee’s first

grandchild – and she had hired a temp named Lisa Renko to take her place for six weeks; Lisa seemed absurdly young, too attractive to know what to do. And unmarried; all in all Tom was surprised Mrs. Dressler had even considered her. Other agents rolled their eyes at him once they got into his inner office, lowered their voices. “Must make coming to work a lot more fun.” “You got dibs on her?” “My wife’d kill me if I hired one like that.” But she did the job well enough, and more. The strangest thing about her, which Mrs. Dressler had barely mentioned, was that she was a calligrapher. No wonder she was a temporary secretary; no one could make money doing fancy handwriting. It took a while for him to realize what sort of world Lisa lived in. She thought in lines on paper; for her, twenty-six letter forms had justified years of study. Seeing her write made Tom wonder if he knew anything that well. The fourth day she worked for him, he was eating a sack lunch in his office and came out to get a Diet Pepsi from the refrigerator in the supply closet, and there she was with a pad of paper on the cleared desk, writing in silence as he passed behind her – “moment monument momentum amanuensis,” over and over.

“Is this what you do when you’re not working?” he said, since she did not look up.

For a moment she kept writing, then gave him a glance over her shoulder. “This is my work,” she said.

He had moved on, conscious of trying to keep quiet, got his Diet Pepsi and closed his office door behind him carefully, as if he had been rebuked – not by her but by what she did with her life.

And now here he was in Hartsburg, population what? Three hundred? Where the people on certain porches watched with a devouring hostility that never changed, every time he drove through town. Ignorant old peckers and their dried-up wives. Your kids left town a million years ago, went to Kansas City, St. Louis, they’re not coming back. Take that.

“Well, you tell me,” Oliver Steptoe said. “Does this look like a roof you’d want on your house? On your garage even?” He took hold of the corrugated edge and shook it like a little boy showing off; the metal had rusted away from the nails that once held it down on the beams of the shed, and it undulated in the sun, making a metallic din.

“It’s old,” Tom said, “but we don’t insure against age.”

“Hail!” Steptoe shouted. For an instant Tom thought he had said “Hell,” which would have made more sense. “See those pock marks? That’s what weakened it. It was that storm in May, the one no one expected.”

What would you have done if you had? Tom thought, but he said, “Those look like they’ve been rusting for a long time, Oliver. More’n a couple months.”

“Aah – no-good steel these days.”

“Looks like galvanized to me.”

“They call it that.”

“Look. This roof was pretty well shot in the first place, we both know that. I can give you a percentage of the replacement value on it, but it’d have to be low. Your best bet is, hope for a tornado to rip the whole thing out, then you could really collect.”

Mournfully Oliver shook his head, looking at the ground. “You’re hurting my feelings, Tom. I expect you don’t mean to, but – sounds like you think I’m trying to steal from you. This little shed don’t look like much, but I trusted you enough to insure just about everything we’re looking at.”

He looked at Oliver Steptoe’s old eyes, full of transparent guile. “Eight percent of replacement.”

“Fifteen.”

“Twelve’s as high as the main office will let me go. I don’t know if it’s worth that.”

“Well, I’m not a greedy man. Just every little bit counts, you know?”

Tom knew.

When he got back to the office Lisa had a stack of letters for him to sign. She got everything done; maybe Lee Dressler wasn’t as much of a wonder as he thought. Lisa was scrupulous; every day after exactly sixty minutes of lunch hour she put away her pad, screwed the cap on her Pelikan pen with the medium Italic nib (he had examined it once while she was out at the post office), and started typing.

“As far as I know, that’s everything you gave me. I could start filing those claim forms that came in yesterday, or . . .”

She could, but could he spend another hour at his desk? “Why don’t we close up shop? It’s after four anyway.”

She looked at him uncertainly; for a moment he got the impression that she was offended, almost as if he had tried to make a pass.

“Are you sure?”

“Why not? I could still be in Hartsburg, after all.”

“Well, it’s your office.” She sounds like Lee already, he thought; what is it about this place?

“Put the answering machine on and nobody will know the difference.”

“Okay.”

Tom went into the inner office, threw the papers about Oliver Steptoe's shed on his desk. There in the middle of it, occupying a cleared space on his green blotter, was a brochure about the district managers' exam. The next step – but not tonight. Leave the briefcase, leave everything. Just go home. Enough to think about there already.

When he came back out, Lisa was standing in the outer office as if waiting to be dismissed, purse over her shoulder and the drawing pad under one arm. She had already turned the air conditioner off. He opened the door for her, flicking off the lights as he did so. You didn't open doors for women anymore, but so what, she didn't seem to take it wrong.

"What the hell," he said, "it's Thursday, that's always been party night at Moo U. anyway."

"I really needed the time," she said. "Good night." She clicked down the stairs before him – he was always surprised at how fast small women could move their feet – and was gone out the front door of the building before he reached the landing.

Good night.

As he came in the door he was pulling off the tie he had loosened in the car; he had his suit jacket in his hand, and threw the tie and jacket together onto the living-room sofa. Some sound he didn't recognize at once was coming from the kitchen, and then he realized it was sanding. The faint but penetrating smell of new wood met him in the dining room.

In the kitchen Kate was at work with a sanding block, smoothing the surface of a counter that hadn't been there when he had left in the morning. More than a counter: there were shelves above and below it, and it fit exactly into the space between the stove and the sink, a construction of two-by-fours and plywood and pine boards that looked as if it had been there for much longer than just a few hours. It didn't even look built, but rather as if it had always had that right shape and had simply arrived. He almost couldn't remember what had taken up that space, until he saw it shoved into a corner of the kitchen – a cheap pressed-metal cabinet that had been there when they bought the house and which he had long since ceased to notice. It looked mean and pinched now that Kate had dragged it into view.

She stopped sanding and looked around. "Wow," he said, leaning in the door.

"I thought of something to do," she said.

"I guess you did." He stepped up to the counter, put his palms on it. "It's a good height." He realized that he had had to stoop slightly to

use the top of the old cabinet as a counter. Kate, like Tom, was tall; nearly three months of pregnancy didn't show on her. Maybe she had gotten fed up with that slight stoop while making breakfast and decided to do something about it at last.

He put his arm around Kate, kissed her cheek. She was sweaty, and a fine down of sawdust perfumed her neck. "Hi."

"Hi."

"I like the shelves, too."

"See, the cookbooks can go up there. And spices. Makes sense, doesn't it? And then put the pots underneath."

"It makes so much sense I can't figure out why it took all this time to do it."

"I guess there's advantages to being out of a job."

"Boy," he said, opening the refrigerator and looking for a beer, "I haven't heard that one in a while. Is all the beer gone?"

"I drank the last one."

"You sure Oscar won't mind?"

"Gertrude."

"Gertrude? And I thought Mabel was bad."

"Well, if I can have one glass of wine a week, I suppose I can have one beer instead. Anyway, I've been sweating so much I don't think it spent more than half an hour in my system."

"You really are feeling better, aren't you? I told you you couldn't sleep for a whole nine months."

"Well, how many times have you been pregnant?"

"Think you're smart, don't you?" He put his right arm around her waist, picked up her right hand with his left. "Wanna dance?"

"Sure."

They shuffled around the kitchen, swaying slightly; Tom made tuneless hums. They bumped into the refrigerator.

"Watch it," Kate said.

"She's padded, it's okay."

"She?"

"You said Gertrude." Kate and he, for an instant, leaned different ways.

"I'm getting a stomach, you know that?"

"Where?"

She put his hand on her belly just below the belt. "See what I mean?"

"No."

"Oh, come on, don't be cute about it."

Tom stopped dancing, held her at arm's length and looked at her. Maybe she was beginning to show. "Seems the same to me." That was what she wanted to hear, wasn't it?

"No, my pants are getting tight."

"Okay." If they were, they were. "I think I'm going to go get some more beer. Work on a stomach of my own."

"Oink, oink," she said.

So that was how the land lay. "Well, you're pretty liberated yourself, staying home all day for months on end."

"Oh, come on, what else was I supposed to do? It was a dumb job anyway."

"God, I was only kidding." Was she going to be this touchy for the next six months? "Do you want anything while I'm out?"

"No."

"Well – I'll be right back."

As he left the kitchen she said from behind him, "Is that all you have to say about this?"

He turned. She was planted dangerously in the middle of the kitchen floor, facing him with her arms crossed, head slightly cocked toward what she had built, hands tucked into her armpits. It was hard for him to imagine yet that she had another life inside her; what was in there seemed more like a reproach.

"No. It's not all."

He turned to leave again. "Bring me some Seven-Ups," she said, in something more like her normal tone.

"Okay." He was out the door.

Inside the Heidelberg it was already, because it was always, dark. From time to time, as Tom sat drinking draft beer which seemed to have no effect, the front door of the restaurant opened and a beam of incongruous outside light shone over his shoulder, revealing smudges on the mirror behind the bar. The spare liquor bottles were arranged into four ranks under the back bar, in front of a long mirror of their own, bathed in golden light from a hidden source. Even the ends of the bottle shelves were mirrored, so that bottles seemed to extend around the corner and out of sight. Somehow he found the labels comforting; maybe it was the colors. Lisa would scorn them, he was sure. Too garish. They were nothing like her own work. And as for Kate – what was the matter with her?

Something that happened to women when they got pregnant, maybe. Staying home too much. Mad Housewife Syndrome. Some hogwash like that.

“Another draw?”

“Sure.”

Foam just barely bulged over the rim, sent one long drop down. The bartender took a bill from in front of Tom, put down his change.

There was something coiled inside her – not the baby – not that at all. A feeling, resentment. But of what? It wasn't as though he had twisted her arm to get pregnant, quit her job, it had been her idea... “Give you a baby.” Why did women talk like that? One minute Gloria Steinem, the next, boom, back to the Old Testament. He wasn't standing around demanding a baby.

But that counter, now that was impressive. If she could do that in one day, what had she been up to all the rest of the time since she quit working for Rausch the vet, that fat-ass who insisted on being called Doctor?

It *had* been a dumb job. Sure, she loved animals, but did she love arguing with their owners about why she couldn't give them an appointment at the exact time they demanded? And she knew perfectly well that the Missouri vet school was harder to get into than medical school, especially for a woman.

She had never figured out what to do. That crack about being liberated hadn't been a great idea; he knew she thought she ought to have found a career by now. The last thing he needed to do was make it look like he was keeping score.

Maybe she ought to trade places with him, try that for a week. She didn't know what he did either, he was sure of it. She didn't know what could happen when he would be out on the melting highway moving along to the sizzle of his tires, fast, past the rank and mindless fields and then into a town, suddenly slow, POP. 1050 20 MPH, old Bunny Bread signs rusting on gates, and stop somewhere before the appointment: quiet. Maybe in front of the regional high school, watch the local cocksmen, the hot-rodders getting rubber in three gears, the breasts of the year's girls pressing the unappreciative surface of their loose-leaf notebooks. The car would tick, cooling. It could break your heart to watch them drag Main, going nowhere. Drive to the next town and drag Main there too. And back, between the rows. That was what made something happen to him, watching that, and then over it some spire or roof-peak, some weathervane, even a cornice carved with stone garlands and a date could do it. He would look up and see peace up there, peace if he could be the copper rooster and take the view from the sky. Even

lightning wouldn't matter, it would go right through. But no one could climb up there, too heavy and too big by himself let alone with a wife and a house and a car and an office all teetering on the point of that one thin rod. And to cap the impossible act a baby. No one could. But he would sit there in the car before driving on and think, Maybe just having put it there would be enough, having had the idea to put up that cornice or that gingerbread roof-peak so that when somebody looked up from between the fields he would have this human thing to fasten his eye on and imagine himself up there where he would never be.

"Do it again?" the bartender said. He had one of those bushy dried-out-looking mustaches Tom had always disliked. Mark Spitz with sandy hair. He probably wanted all the women to think he was from California.

"No." There was no point sitting in a bar drinking weak beer and smelling the cheeseburgers. He picked up the bills in front of him and left the change. The place had filled up with customers, waitresses, the sound of clanking plates – he had to get away.

It was almost full dark. Maybe eight o'clock. A car passed with its windows down and the radio playing, and then the street was relatively quiet. The bugs had started to set up layers of sound that meant heat, moisture, night. Mating. But that wasn't enough of a reason for a whole summer of rubbing their legs together or whatever they did, for all-night waves like Midwest surf and sudden outbursts when you weren't expecting them. Singing the night itself – or the night sang them. Locusts, cicadas, June bugs (mostly dead by this point in the summer), tree toads you saw hopping on wet sidewalks in April – did they add their voices too? Crickets. There was no way to tell.

If he had paid any attention in Bio in college maybe he would know what made the sound. But hell. Other people learned things like that, and it didn't solve anything.

When he came in Kate said, "What's the matter, is the whole town of Columbia out of Seven-Up?"

"Oh hell, Kate, I forgot." He remembered he had gone into the Heidelberg in the first place to buy a six-pack. "Forgot the beer too."

She shook her head, dipped her brush in white sealer and stroked it along the edge of a shelf beneath the counter; it made a thin, uneven wash over the wood.

"Ham in the icebox," she said.

“Thanks.” He looked for and found the ham, bread, mayonnaise, mustard, pickles. “Make you one?”

“I had some already.” She kept painting without looking around. You’d better go get that Seven-Up, Tom thought. Better do it now. You don’t have forever. He picked up his sandwich, but the kitchen didn’t seem like the place to eat it at the moment.

“I’ll go to the 7-11, okay?”

“Wherever.”

Out the screen door and back to the night. The light shining from Tom’s own windows, illuminating rhomboid patches of lawn, didn’t seem like his light; being out in the yard was more like taking a walk and seeing into a house someone else was fixing up. The tug of envy felt exactly the same. From outside he could watch the whole lit-up place just be, within its limits, and in it, a woman at work with new wood, making square corners, a sort of clarity that was placed exactly right. Woman expecting child fixing up her home. Why didn’t he just tell her she was doing a terrific job and get it over with?

The woman inside moved to the door, was framed in it. “Are you going to get those sodas? It’s not a hell of a lot to ask.”

His thoughts evaporated. “All right, I’m going right now,” he said, making an effort to raise his voice.

“What are you doing out there, anyway?”

“Thinking.”

“Well, think about someone else for a change.”

“Hey, you can drive a car, you’re not disabled, if I’m not fast enough for you you can go get them yourself.”

The back door slammed. Well, now you’ve done it, he thought. Through the back window he could see Kate leave the kitchen; then the front door closed, the VW started and drove away.

Still the house was not his. Maybe she had taken it over, staked her claim, by building that thing. Around by the side yard, skirting the light on the grass, Tom returned to his car. He drove to a liquor store and bought a six-pack of beer and another of Seven-Up, but he didn’t feel he could go home; what felt right was to keep moving, even though he spent every day in and out of his car, in and out of town. A memory of student days at Missouri, drinking beer by the river at Easley, floated to the surface; that way would do as well as another. Back then he had never thought much about what he would be; he would make a living some way, that was enough to know. Then he had signed up for the training

program because it paid pretty well even before you knew what you were getting yourself into.

South on 63 this time. You could be in country in ten minutes at the most. If you took one of the side roads, back into the creeks and trees, you could be lost in ten more. Except he knew most of them by now. If there was a road, there was something on it to insure. Call the disaster man. He takes bets on tornadoes ripping off your roof, fire in the barn, cars turning turtle on sharp curves and jumping off rickety bridges into creeks, people falling off your front porch, people who don't like the shape of your face...everything except nuclear war, Acts of God, and the way you feel when you come home at night.

He pulled up to a blinking red at a junction of two county roads, and turned. Not a farmhouse or another car in sight. The road wound down into bottom land, where the night was darker, the sky smaller, no one was welcome but the people who had lived there for years. The corn grew right up to the shoulder of the road, outlandishly tall, like the walls of a narrow corridor. Even the smell of it pressed in, and the knowledge that hills on both sides cut off the outside world. This was where you came to abandon someone or to hold them against their will; you could die on this road, get shot, crash your car, and nobody would ever know why. If a pair of headlights had showed up in his rear view mirror Tom would have known that they meant no good to him, that the terrible moment was finally at hand. Insurance man, protect thyself. But what people didn't really understand was that he didn't claim to offer protection at all. As if life insurance would keep you from having to die. Then he crossed a big creek and went up the other side of the bottom. Over the top, sodium-vapor lamps burned pale orange in the distance: the Interstate. He needed a fast way home. He was growing tired in a way that felt out of control, as if each minute were ten; the white reflectors by the side of the road were developing evanescent comet tails on the edges of his vision, and in the distance ahead he kept seeing overpasses and railroad bridges which, by the time he reached them, weren't there. Making the car move forward seemed like a personal effort, and the headlights he had imagined did appear in his rear-view mirror, two trucks side by side, coming at what seemed twice his speed. They were like a moving wall, unconscious, forcing him – where? There was nowhere to go but under. Tom sped up slightly but that was all he could do, his heart pounding but slower not faster; the trucks were upon him, one roaring to his left, the other six inches from his back bumper, its headlights forcing their way into his car like the sound that surrounded him. He felt paralyzed like a rabbit in front of a flashlight, unable to make a move, and then the truck behind him moved to his right, onto

the shoulder, and they passed him on both sides like the jaws of death in a roaring whirl of dust and gravel, orange tracers, the black wheels ready to pound him down.

For a few hundred yards after they had passed, Tom's mind and body stayed clenched, his hands gripping the steering wheel as if he had died and stiffened in a second. As soon as he could move his foot he slowed down. Nothing was behind him. He coasted to a stop on the shoulder, switched off his engine, turned the emergency flashers on, and got out, feeling as though he had barely managed to stop the car, to maintain control, not to smash into some non-existent bridge abutment and sail through it into the middle of a field. He had to get away from the car, certain that even if it was not moving something else would be sure to crush it, some Greyhound bus or twenty-ton tank truck that could run it right over and never feel the crunch.

The roadway, at that point, was raised up ten or fifteen feet, and on the other side of the shoulder a gentle bank sloped down to a cornfield. On that bank Tom sprawled, arms outstretched, his back to the earth: safety. There were the stars, the rest of the world, turning in silence. If one of those speed freaks had made a mistake just now, Tom thought, Kate would be worth two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. He had just raised the amount on his policy because of the baby that was on the way, and now he thought of raising it again, not for them but for himself. For a higher premium you could increase the value of your own life to anything you liked; either that made perfect sense, or it was the craziest thing he had ever heard.

The cornfield in front of him was vast, and rustled faintly even without a breeze. Once he noticed that sound, he knew without thinking that the rustling was growth, as if by a kind of sympathy he could be the corn itself, hidden in its green sheaths. Faintly he could hear the regular clicking of the flashers on his car, on-off, on-off. The battery. He scrambled up, reached in the window, pulled out the button that turned the emergency lights off.

Once he had done that the world was still. No cars passed, no insect buzzed. When he shifted his feet on the gravel of the shoulder he could hear each pebble turn over. For a moment he felt as if anything could happen – anything at all, and why not what he might choose? – seeing himself as if in a movie, from a distance and from behind, leaning on the top of his car, a dark silhouette against the dark fields. Waiting for the moment when he would start the car and the next scene would

begin. Consciously he held off an extra minute, watching the shifting darkness of the corn, before he opened the car door and got in.

The junction with 63 was not far away; he had almost gotten there when the two trucks that he didn't want to remember had played their little game. Up the two-lane in the wide night, he turned the radio on and heard nothing but static. But he didn't want to hear someone talk anyway; he turned it off.

It was only in his own driveway that he remembered he and Kate were having a fight. His dashboard clock said 2:27; without ever deciding to, or knowing when it happened, he had stayed out half the night, and now he had no idea what Kate would meet him with – rage, apology, indifference, anything was possible. He moved into the side yard and sat down on the grass, leaning his back against a tree. Momentarily he wished for another beer, and then felt too tired to want it. Instead he found the hose stretching across the dark lawn and turned on the spigot, drank the cold, plastic-tasting water hungrily, like a kid, as if simple pleasure in such an act, or even the minutely headachy and metallic taste itself, could make him fit more easily into his life.

He threw the hose down, letting it sluice out into the Bermuda grass as he reached to turn it off; the hiss of running water held his attention as it shrank away until it had faded beneath the other sounds of the night. His eyes had accommodated to the darkness, and the streetlamp seemed excessively bright, blocking the stars like a full moon that never waned. He felt as though he wanted to see if the night could hold him up, keep him standing if he spread his arms and laid back on it, if he kept quiet and listened.

Tom moved toward the back of the house, to piss in his own back yard. He went almost to the back fence; nothing could take the place of pissing on one's sovereign dirt in the midst of a hot summer night, knowing that no one else would notice or care. To his left towered three rows of corn, and somewhere to his right squash vines sprawled, nearly burned out now with the heat. The insect sounds came in waves, layers – a high, sustained shrilling, breathless, the “iiii-aaaa” that ebbed and flowed, an obbligato of clicks. The night was clear; another planet, by the look of it, burned in the sky above the neighbors' garage. He was surrounded by leaves, taking their long outbreath into his lungs.

Tom felt himself breathing, a part of the air because he breathed it, a part of the night sounds because he heard them, a part of the earth because he felt it under his feet. From years ago he remembered (who had preached it to him, in philosophy class?) Thou Art God, that when he looked at a firefly God was looking at God through him and through the firefly – blink – darkness – blink (the light, in its brief moment,

moved) – he would set off, first over the back fence, and then – if only something were not distracting him –

How strange it felt to be standing there with his hand on his penis – he put it back, zipped his pants.

For some reason, he had to complete the circle, go clear around the house. When he came in the front, the living room looked exactly as it always did; he might be coming back from a business trip, ending an all-night drive, except that he had no suitcase in his hand. The house held the hopeful smell of new paint; it drew him toward the kitchen; he turned on lights. Kate's piece of work was done, the finish had dried, it looked nothing but natural in its place. Necessary now; part of the house. "Congratulations," he said out loud, and sat down at the kitchen table.

So here she had beaten him to it. She knew what the hell to do after all; she had found the key place and put the right thing there, the piece that changed everything. And just wait until the baby came.

He knew that in roughly five and a half hours it would be time to arrive at the office; it would be hot, the air conditioner would be vibrating in its window, the new claims would need processing, the district manager's exam would be waiting. Within half an hour of getting to work Lisa would have made up a list of what he had to do, exactly as Mrs. Dressler would have. At least one of the other agents would have found an excuse to hang around his office and stare at Lisa and give him poorly concealed winks. She would be waiting for the moment when she could do her real work, and who knew what Kate might cook up during the day?

Tom stood up, picked up the kitchen telephone, dialed his office. It rang once and the answering machine cut in with Lisa's voice; he had not asked her to re-record Mrs. Dressler's message, but she had done it without his asking. "This is Martin and Gray Insurance Agency, Tom Hardison's office. Mr. Hardison is out of the office right now. If you will leave your message after the tone, he will return your call as soon as possible. Thank you."

The tone sounded, and for a moment Tom stood there and thought. In six months he and Kate would have a child, in a year...

"Lisa, this is Tom Hardison," he said. "I might be a little late. I want you to play this message for me when I get in this morning."

"Tom, this is Tom," he said, hoping that words would come to him if he started talking, words that could only be spoken after such a night, but he hadn't yet found them when behind him he heard Kate's bare feet come into the living room and stop. He looked over his shoulder at her, the phone still in his hand; she was wearing her long white bathrobe. He still couldn't see the new bulge in her belly she said was there, but he

knew there was a separate life in her, and as they examined each other, he realized – he saw it in Kate’s eyes – there might be a separate life in him too.

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