

## Wednesday Night

Professor Charles Hartley leaned back in his chair and watched his wife progress through the languid motions of the Dance of the Seven Veils. In the background, from the Hartleys' tasteful black ash hi-fi system came the whine of an Eastern flute, like a dog shut on the wrong side of a door. Alice Hartley revolved slowly, her large black-ringed eyes expectantly on her husband, her broad feet treading the carpet. Charles Hartley stifled a yawn.

He was not aroused. Deep in the recesses of his baggy boxer shorts The Phallus – the proud symbol of the Professor's innate superiority over half of the population of the world – lay quiescent, a dozing puppy. There was no urgency. There was no hurry. Mrs Alice Hartley wore several layers of diaphanous petticoats and gauzes beneath her flowing kaftan, and tonight, as a special treat for Charles's forty-fourth birthday, she had added several scarves trimmed with beads and bells around her neck, waist, and wrists, a djellaba over her head, and a collegiate scarf tied purdah-wise across the lower part of her face.

She would be hours getting that lot off, Professor Hartley thought sourly, and settled himself deeper into his padded rocker-chair. Hours and hours, he thought gloomily and his imagination strayed – as it so often did – to little Miranda Bloomfeather who could step out of her t-shirt and tight blue jeans in fifteen seconds flat – and often, deliciously, did.

Professor Hartley was at that time in his life when a man demands of himself what is the meaning of life, asking: 'For what was I born? And is this all there is? And what of the great quests which have motivated men through the ages? Where am I going? And what is the Nature of Individualism? Or, more simply: Who am I?'

Like all men who courageously confront great questions of identity and truth, Professor Hartley came to one conclusion. Unerringly, untiringly he struggled through his boredom and his despair until he found the source of his discontent, the spring of his angst, his own private darkness. It was all the fault of his wife.

Alice, he sincerely felt, was part of his past. Part of his struggling, underfunded, undergraduate past. While Miranda, with her pert little bum and skimpy clothes, was undoubtedly The Future. Certainly the disturbing and erotic dreams which awoke him nightly with The Phallus making a little tent of the continental quilt were deeply symbolic, meaning – he was sure – that it was time for a shift of perspective. Time for growth, time for rediscovery, time to change. In other words (in the crude simplicities of lay-person's speech): Professor Hartley was tired of Alice; and wanted Miranda instead.

