

—

#13

by stanley lieber

Perhaps a month later he was still thinking about her. This couldn't continue. He tamped it down and got on with his life.

A dog whined in the kitchen. He knew that he didn't own a dog. It was curious; where could the sound be coming from?

He'd been on his own, what? Seventeen years? He'd lost track. That man who was not his father had given him the go ahead, in his way. From then on it was solo work. He realized then that the sound in the kitchen was the dead dog that had followed him home from the test site. She came to visit from time to time, and he always forgot who she was until she was gone again.

He needed to pull himself together.

He thought about visiting T's parents in New San Francisco. They were always ready to welcome him. But was he ready for them? They couldn't possibly understand the background of his problem. But their nature was conducive to trying. And then there was Sonja.

He thought about it for at least twenty minutes. Then he decided to put off the decision until the following week. Right now, he had work to do.

New York was lousy with t-shirts. That should have been his first warning sign. When he concentrated on them they would go away. So he knew for sure something was up.

New San Francisco was looking more and more attractive all the time.

By the next day he had decided to pack it up and go. He finished with his current job and filed the paperwork. The business would have to survive without him, at least for a while.

Telegraph Hill was a tougher slog than he remembered, but he persevered. His reward at the top of the hill was a locked door to the compound, with no way to contact the inhabitants. He didn't want to just barge in. He tried once again to raise them on the phone. This time, Sonja answered.

"Hey, handsome," she said.

"..." he said.

"You got away once. Not this time. I got us assigned as partners. And you know what else?"

"..." he said.

"You've been chosen as the new Chief. Mom and Dad are getting too old to hold field positions..."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" he said.

"...So we decided that since T was already the leader in New York, you'd make the best replacement."

"This is great," he said.