

JOE AND JOSEPHINE AT BIOCHEMIX

Your secretary looked up as you came in. "Boss, we've gotten a call from one of the labs. They're missing a young chemist named Josephine Li. They don't think it's just someone goofing off. They seem to think either the Director or you (Assistant Director for Administration) ought to know about it. The Group Leader is coming right over."

The Group Leader, Al, doesn't know much either. Josephine Li, 24, has worked closely with a brilliant young Ph.D., Joe Bartlett. Josephine hasn't come in for two days; Joe has been in and out, say his co-workers. The co-workers say Joe looks upset, comes in, looks around, goes out. What's most strange is that these two appear to have made a significant breakthrough in their work two nights ago. The lab notebooks are marked with an elegantly clean result and a beautifully sketched wreath of laurel leaves.

You send Al out to look for Joe. Joe can't be found and does not return. Your secretary, Alice, has offered to call Josephine every 15 minutes. Just before 4 PM Josephine comes home, answers her phone, and agrees to drive in. You wait at the office to see her.

Josephine comes in looking tired and very, very strained. She sits, unable to talk. Alice comes back in to pick up something, glances at you for approval, goes to sit with Josephine. Josephine says she's been walking most of twenty-four hours; she doesn't know what to do. Slowly a story emerges, half whispered to your secretary.

Joe and Josephine had been exuberant yesterday, although very tired, when at 4 AM they had finished the experiment. Joe had asked, "Why don't you come back with me for breakfast? You know I live two minutes away. We can rough out a report for Al."

Josephine went with Joe to his apartment. They had breakfast. She says that he raped her. Joe had pushed her onto his studio couch, removed her clothes and raped her. She never wants to see him again. She doesn't know if she should press charges. How can she tell her parents or her fiancé at Cal Tech? She was very conservatively brought up, had never dated anyone but her proper, Chinese fiancé. She hasn't been able to eat, doesn't think she can sleep. She can hardly talk.

At 6 PM the phone rings; the Group Leader, Al, has found Joe. You confer quietly. Half an hour later Al calls back.

Joe apparently was horror-struck when the Group Leader asked him about a rape. He said he'd been out looking for Josephine when Al found him. Joe thought Josephine had just left his apartment to go sleep; he had worried when she did not come back to work. He had no idea she would be upset. He had been waiting to celebrate their work.

Joe, in quiet horror, has told Al he had no idea Josephine was engaged. He admitted he knew very little of women. He had hardly ever dated; in fact, he said, he had been a virgin. Joe said he had never kissed a girl. He was hardly able to talk with Al.

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But he did look up at one point and said, "She never said 'no'. She could have just walked out. I did not hurt her; I love her. I never would have stopped her if she had tried to leave. Why didn't she say 'no'?"

As you talk gently with Josephine, you ask if she had tried to stop Joe. Had she said "no"? Josephine looks at her feet. "I didn't say 'no'. I didn't say anything. I couldn't talk at all. I couldn't move. I couldn't breathe. I just froze. It was as if I were up on the ceiling watching this terrible thing happen to someone else. It was a long time before I could get up and dress and leave. I just walked all day and most of the night and all day today by the river. I couldn't talk with anyone."

How on earth did these two fine young scientists get into such a nightmare? What will you do?

These stories are deeply troubling to everyone who hears them. Most people believe in "fight or flight." So we ask ourselves, why didn't she run? Why didn't she hit him? But "freezing" is an alternative to running or fighting. And it can be misleading to an aggressor, especially if he has little or no experience with women, or believes that silence means "yes".

The experienced on-looker may be left believing both of two, mutually inconsistent interpretations of the same facts. Not only does each side seem convincing, but one cannot reconcile the two stories, as one would like to do, by "establishing the facts." In cases like these the facts, as a video tape would show them, are usually attested to by both sides; that is not the problem. But the real problem does remain. Was Josephine, who appears in every way a rape victim, in fact raped? Did Joe, who in no obvious way appears to be a "rapist," rape Josephine?