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American Scientist

Donna Emerson

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American Scientist

by Donna Emerson

He changed the spectrometer to measure
at the cellular level, refined the study
of noble gases, clarified neutrino dynamics.

He understood plutonium and talked
on the news about how easy it would be
to carry in a briefcase across borders.
Americans may be safer for what he's told us.

He's getting scientific awards now that he's seventy,
goes down in history for his lab, his students.
Has a chair named for him. In perpetuity.

No presenters will discuss his three wives,
his failure to measure what was happening at home,
his neglect, his daughter choosing to abandon college
and not tell him, his many women.

His wives remain separate and forgotten.
They remain unnamed:
Lucy, Jennifer, and Mary Alice.
In procession they anointed him,
made all honors possible,
carried oil in urns of alabaster.