

A DIVERTED INHERITANCE

When Junior cut open a grapefruit for breakfast, he didn't find a quarter in it..Maria set aside two cards before turning another faceup. This was also an ace of hearts..He felt for the railing. Grasped at the empty air only briefly. Found the handrail. He climbed to the porch..Junior tossed garments on the floor and across the bed to create the impression that the detective had packed with haste. After being imprudent enough to blast Victoria Bressler five times with his service revolver-perhaps in a jealous rage, or perhaps because he had gone nuts-Vanadium would have been frantic to flee justice.. "D'you have a bag?"..San Francisco's pre-Christmas cheer had deserted it. The glow and glitter of the season had given way to a mood as dark and ominous as *The Cancer Lurks Unseen, Version 1.* "I mean it. You have a lot of responsibilities here. Barty. Pie Lady Services. People who depend on you. Friends who love you. When you came on board with me, mister, you bought into a whole lot more than you can walk away from."..He was nearly forty years old, and a life spent fearing nature could not be turned easily into a romance with her. Some nights he still stared at the ceiling, unable to sleep, waiting for the Big One, and he avoided walks on the shore in respect of deadly tsunamis. From time to time, he visited his brother's grave and sat on the grass by the headstone, reciting aloud the gruesome details of deadly storms and catastrophic geological events, but he found that he had also absorbed from Jacob some of the statistics related to serial killers and to the disastrous failures of manmade structures and machines. These visits were pleasantly nostalgic. But he always came with roses, too, and brought news of Barty, Angel, and other members of the family. When Paul sold his house to move in with Agnes, Tom Vanadium settled into Jacob's former apartment, now a fully retired cop but not yet ready to return to a life of the cloth. He assumed the management chores of the family's expanding community work, and he oversaw the establishment of a tax-advantaged charitable foundation. Agnes provided a list of fine-sounding and self-effacing names for this organization, but a majority vote rejected all her suggestions and, in spite of her embarrassment, settled on Pie Lady Services..From the plush pillowy shadows of the bed, Barty said, "Oh, look. Christmas lights."..As Sinatra began to sing "I'll Be Seeing You," Junior stepped around the bloom and the Merlot. He cautiously peeled back two inches of the curtain at one of the sidelights..She. Heretofore, Celestina hadn't given a thought to the gender of the baby, because, to her, it had been less a person than a thing..In his seventies but vigorous and full of fun, Sparky liked to take an occasional jaunt to Reno, to pump the slot machines and try a few hands of blackjack. The off-the-record, tax-free monthly checks from Simon were gratefully received, ensuring the old man's cooperation with the conspiracy..Although the only light on the back porch came from the pale beams that filtered out through the curtains on the kitchen windows, all these faces seemed luminous, almost preternaturally aglow, like the kiln-fired countenances of saints in a dark church, lit solely by the flames of votive candies. The rain-a music of sorts, and the jasmine and incense, and the moment sacred..A car waited at the curb in front of the park. Dr. Salks two associates stood beside it and seemed to have been there awhile.. "How's something so delicious come from a fat, smelly, dirty, snorting old pig?"..He almost opened the paper atop the quarter before seeing it. Shiny. Liberty curved across the top of the coin, above the head of the patriot, and under the patriot's chin were stamped the words *In God We Trust*..By the time he went to bed Saturday night, the cards that had been only that morning were showing signs of wear..For a while he thought the fear would end only when he perished from it, but eventually it faded, and in its place poured forth self-pity from a bottomless well. Self-pity, of course, is the ideal fuel for anger; which was why, pursuing the Buick through fog, climbing now toward Pacific Heights, Junior was in a murderous rage. By the time he reached Cain's bedroom, Tom Vanadium recognized that the austere decor of the apartment had probably been inspired by the minimalism that the wife killer had noted in the detective's own house in Spruce Hills. This was an uncanny discovery, troubling for reasons that Vanadium couldn't entirely define, but he remained convinced that his perception was correct.."One hour," he announced, establishing a countdown. In sixty minutes, his internal clock would rouse him from a meditative state..Without using his flashlight, depending only on the moon, he ascended through the cemetery to the service road..Risking all, he turned his back on her and fled, and in spite of his expectations to the contrary, she allowed him to escape..Tom Vanadium rose to his feet and, with one hand on Barty's shoulder, he surveyed the faces of those gathered on the porch. Most of these people were such new acquaintances that they were all but strangers to him. Nevertheless, for the first time since his early days in St. Anselmo's Orphanage, he'd found a place where he belonged. This felt like home..Maybe he went a little crazy then. He wouldn't deny a brief, transient madness..Jacob had been born with the requisite dexterity and more than sufficient memory function. His personality disorder-which made him unemployable and guaranteed that his social life would never involve endless rounds of parties-ensured that he would have the free time needed to practice the most difficult techniques of card manipulation until he mastered them..An outrageously sexy redhead hit on him as he selected from an array of bomb-shaped canapes on a tray held by a waiter dressed as a ragged and soot-smearred blast survivor. Myrtle, the redhead, preferred to be called Scamp, which Junior entirely understood. She wore a DayGlo green miniskirt, a spray-on white sweater, and a green beret..Nevertheless, Thomas Vanadium's hostile ghost, that terrible prickly bur of stubborn energy, wasn't done with Junior yet. Until Bartholomew was dead, the cop's filthy-scabby-monkey spirit would keep coming back and coming back, and it would surely grow more violent.."Getting her into her shoes and coat sooner than Monday required a bribe," Wally said..Caesar Zedd recommended not merely seizing the day but devouring it. Chew it up, feed on the day, swallow the day whole. Feast, said Zedd, feast, approach life as a gourmet and as a glutton, because he who practices restraint will have stored up no sustaining memories when famine inevitably comes..Shrieking like carrion-eating birds waiting for their wounded dinner to die, the Hackachaks twice drew stern warnings from nurses. They were told to quiet down and respect the

patients in neighboring rooms..Celestina rose, heart suddenly clumping in her breast, like heavy footsteps hurrying away from an approaching bearer of bad news, but she herself couldn't run, could only stand rooted in her hope-and hear in her mind six versions of a bleak prognosis in the two seconds before the doctor actually spoke..When she complimented him on being such a good little soldier, abiding his cold with no complaint, he shrugged. Without looking up from the coloring book, he said, "It's just here." When he judged that he was near the porch steps, he probed with his cane. Two paces later, the tip rapped the lowest step..From his motel room, he telephoned Hanna Rey in Bright Beach. She still looked after his house on a part-time basis, paid the bills from a special account while he traveled, and kept him informed about events in his hometown. From Hanna, he learned that Barty Lampion's eyes had been lost to cancer.. "From childhood, I've had this ... awareness, this perception of an infinitely more complex reality than what my five basic senses reveal. A psychic claims to predict the future. I'm not a psychic. Whatever I am ... I'm able to feel a lot of the other possibilities inherent in any situation, to know they exist simultaneously with my reality, side by side, each world as real as mine. In my bones, in my blood-" "You may be eating yourself into an early grave, Vinnie, but poor Jacob has murdered his own soul, and that's infinitely worse." "-and when I get up off the street, my clothes are a mess, and I've got this face."..Recalling how the title of the exhibition had resonated with him when first he'd seen the gallery, brochure, Junior felt certain now that a tape-recorded early draft of this sermon was the kinky "music" that accompanied his evening of passion with Seraphim. He couldn't remember one word of it, let alone any element that would have deeply moved a national radio audience, but this didn't mean that he was shallow or incapable of being touched by philosophical speculations. He'd been so distracted by the erotic perfection of Seraphim's young body and so busy jumping her that he wouldn't have remembered a word, either, if Zedd himself had been sitting on the bed, discussing the human condition with his customary brilliance.. "Sometimes it's sad here, Mommy. But it's not sad every place you are. Lots of places, Daddy's with you and me, and we're happier, and everything's okay."..That saving smile once more returned lost harmony to the scarred and broken face. "Not me. From my perspective, psychology is just one more of those easy sources of false meaning-like sex, money, and drugs. But I will admit to knowing a thing or two about evil." "You'll need time to ... adjust to this," he said. "Perhaps you've got to call family.. .". Although the piano was at some distance and the restaurant was a little noisy, Kathleen recognized the tune at once. She looked up from her veal, her eyes full of merriment..By ones and twos, the festive crowd eventually deconstructed, but for Celestina, an excitement lingered in the usual gallery hush that rebuilt in their wake..In the three years since Perri's death, he had walked thousands of miles. He hadn't kept a record of the cumulative distance, because he wasn't trying to get into Guinness or to prove anything..The hardest was being in this room at the very moment when Phimie had moved on. Celestina knew beyond doubt that this was the worst thing she would have to endure in all her life, worse than her own death when it came..Throughout this procedure, Barty appeared solemn and thoughtful. When he had squeezed the tenth toe, he stared at it, brow furrowed..So Barty and Tom just happened to be chatting about a quantum physicist they had seen on a television program, a documentary about the uncanny resonance between the belief in a created universe and some recent discoveries in quantum mechanics and molecular biology. The physicist claimed that a handful of his colleagues, though by no means the majority, believed that with a deepening understanding of the quantum level of reality, there would in time be a surprising rapprochement between science and faith..Her father respected and admired Tom, so she was thankful for his presence. And anyone who could survive whatever catastrophe had left him with this cubistic face was a man she wanted on her team in a crisis..With no job to return to, he dawdled over lunch. He was actually tumescent with a growing sense of freedom that was as thrilling as sex..The silence on the line was not merely that of a caller holding her tongue. It was abyssal and perfect, as no silence on a telephone ever can be, without the faintest hiss or crackle of static, no hint of breathing or..Flanked by Dumpsters and trash cans, through steam rising out of grates in the pavement, past parked delivery trucks, here came the dead cop. Running..Copyright (c) 1997 by Ursula K. Le Guin.. "You better wise up, you tree-humping nitwit," Rudy advised Junior, grabbing the bed railing as if he might tear it off and use it to club his son-in-law senseless..Sometimes, while shaving or combing his hair, as he was looking in the bathroom or foyer mirror, Junior thought that he glimpsed a presence, dark and vaporous, less substantial than smoke, standing or moving behind him. At other times, this entity seemed to be within the mirror. He couldn't focus on it, study it, because the moment he became aware of the presence, it was gone..In the Fairmont coffee shop, Junior ordered french fries, a cheeseburger, and cole slaw. He requested that the burger be served cooked but unassembled: the halves of the bun turned face up, the meat pattie positioned separately on the plate, one slice each of tomato and onion arranged beside the pattie, and the slice of unmelted cheese on a separate dish..He realized that like so many women, Seraphim wanted it, asked for it-yet had no place in her self-image to accommodate the truth that she was sexually aggressive. She wanted to think of herself as shy, demure, virginal, as innocent as a minister's daughter ought to be which meant that to get what she wanted, she required Junior to be a brute. He was happy to oblige..Startled, Celestina said, "Good grief, you're spooky. How could you know what I'm thinking?"; Heart jumping like the heart of a fox-stalked rabbit, she ran from the driveway into the yard. She would have cried out if her throat hadn't seized up with terror at the sight of her boy at neck-breaking height. By the time she could speak, she realized that a shout, or even the unexpected sound of her plaintive voice, might unnerve him, cause him to misstep, and bring him caroming down, limb to limb, in a bone snapping plunge..BARTY TODDLED, Barty walked, and ultimately Barty carried a pie for his mother on one of her delivery days, wary of his balance and solemn with responsibility..Hesitantly, the ivory tickler shook hands. "I'm ... uh ... I'm Ned Gnathic. Everyone calls me Neddy."..More often than not, in a social situation, regardless of its nature, there came a time when Edom had to bolt, and here now was the time, not because he floundered at a loss for words, not because he became panicked that he would say the wrong thing

or would knock over his coffee cup, or would in some way prove himself foolish or as clumsy as a clown in full pratfall, but in this instance because he didn't want to bring his tears into Agnes's day. Recently she'd had too many tears in her life, and though these were not tears of anguish, though they were tears of love, he didn't want to burden her with them.. "Bet I could, and sell it, too," she said. "I might not be as good at it as I am at teeth, but I'd be better than some I've read." His attention, as morbid as a circling vulture, settled upon the pianist's right hand. The left was open, palm down. But the right was crumpled shut, palm up..If not for Celestina's slutty little sister, Bartholomew would not exist. No threat. Junior's life would be different, better..The white padded eye patches rebuffed her, and she realized how profoundly the boy's double enucleation would affect how easily she could read his moods and know his mind. Here was a littler loss until now shadowed by the greater destruction. Denied the evidence of his eyes, she would need to be better at noting and interpreting nuances of his body language-also changed by blindness-and his voice, for there would be no soul revealed by hand-painted, plastic implants..Nevertheless, when the points of soreness in his brow and cheeks gradually grew worse, he stopped at a service station near Courtland, bought a bottle of Pepsi from a vending machine, and washed down yet another capsule of antihistamines. He also took another antiemetic, four aspirin, and-although he felt no trembling in his bowels-one more dose of paregoric.. "In the early hours of January seventh," Nolly continued, "Miss White died in childbirth, as you figured." Abruptly alert, sitting up on the edge of the bed, Celestina knew the caller could not be the comatose old woman, so she said angrily, "Who the hell is this?". He wondered if the hawk had descended in a constricting gyre, justice coming down, but he could not lift his head to see.. "Why should I care whether you have any peace?" she asked, and she seemed to be listening to a woman other than herself.. "So do I," said the visitor, and Junior almost frowned at this peculiar response, wondering what was meant in addition to what was merely said.. Each page comprised four columns of names and numbers, most with addresses. Approximately one hundred names filled each column, four hundred to a page.. This momentous day. In every ending, new beginnings. But, thank God, no ending here.. Through nine months of quiet panic, however, Phimie grew less rational week by week, resorting to reckless measures that endangered. Symptoms of food poisoning usually appear within two hours of dining. The hideous intestinal spasms had rocked him at least six hours after he'd eaten. Besides, if the culprit were food poisoning, he would have vomited; but he hadn't felt any urge to spew.. Whereas Paul had been confounded in his desire to express his admiration for Salk, he was able to speak about Perri at length and with ease. Her wit, her heart, her wisdom, her kindness, her beauty, her goodness, her courage were the threads in a narrative tapestry that Pad could have continued weaving for all the rest of his days. Since her death, he hadn't been able to talk about her with anyone he knew, because his friends tended to focus on him, on his suffering, when he wanted them only to understand Perri better, to realize what an exceptional person she had been. He wanted her to be remembered, after he was gone, wanted her grace and her fortitude to be recalled and respected. She was too fine a woman to leave without a ripple in her wake, and the thought that her memory might pass away with Paul himself was anguishing.. While they waited for the room-service waiter to arrive, Tom got from Paul a detailed report of Enoch Cain's attack on the parsonage. He had heard most of it from friends in the state-police homicide division, which was assisting the Spruce Hills authorities. But Paul's account was more vivid. The ferocity of the assault convinced Tom that whatever the killer's twisted motives might be, Celestina and her mother-and not least of all Angel-were in danger as long as Cain roamed free. Perhaps as long as he lived.. Now, on his kitchenette table, two nights after Maria's reading, Jacob finished integrating the four decks as he had done Friday in the dining room of the main house. His work completed, he sat for a while, staring at the stack of cards, hesitant to proceed.. As he headed toward the door, the detective said, "Don't forget your apple juice. Got to build some strength for the trial." The rich aromas on the air would have thwarted the will of the most devout monks on a fast of penitence.. Odder yet, the pianist had studied him with a keen interest that was inexplicable, since they were essentially strangers. When caught staring, he'd appeared rattled, turning away quickly, eager to avoid further contact.. Perched on a chair with two plump bed pillows to boost her, Angel extracted one crisp strip from her club sandwich and asked Tom, "Where's bacon come from?". Wild exhilaration burst through him like pyrotechnics blazing in a night sky, reminiscent of the rush of excitement that followed his bold action on the fire tower. Happily, Junior had no emotional connection to Prosser, as he'd had to beloved Naomi; therefore, the purity of his. After much oily commiseration, sanctimonious babble about Naomi having gone to a better place, and insincere talk of the government's desire always to ensure the public safety and to treat every citizen with compassion, Knacker or Hisscus, or Nork, finally got around to the issue of compensation.. evening. She brought her daughters, seven-year-old Bonita and six year-old Francesca, who came with their newest Barbie dolls-Color Magic Barbie, the Barbie Beautiful Blues Gift Set, Barbie's friends. The boy-wonder physician turned to Junior again and assumed an expression of compassion so inauthentic that if he'd been playing a doctor on even the cheesiest daytime soap opera, he'd have been stripped of his actor's-union card, fired, and possibly horsewhipped on a live television special. "We'll be doing the procedure this afternoon, so I wouldn't want to give you anything much for the pain just prior to anesthesia and sedation. But don't you worry, Mr. Pinchbeck. Once we've lanced these boils, when you wake up, ninety percent of the pain will be gone." Curiously, reciting these facts usually calmed him, as though speaking of disaster would ward it off. Since Friday, however, he had found no comfort in his usual routines.. Junior's attorney-Simon Magusson--insisted upon full disclosure of maintenance records and advisories relating to the fire tower and to other forest-service structures for which the state and the county had sole or joint custodial responsibility. If a wrongful--death suit was filed, this information would have to be divulged anyway during normal disclosure procedures prior to trial, and since maintenance logs and advisories were of public record, Hisscus and Knacker and Nork agreed to provide what was requested.. Lowering his surgical mask, Dr. Lipscomb approached Celestina, where she stood with her back pressed to the

wall..Junior no longer leaned casually on the casing. He put both hands flat against the door..Initially, the Pacific could not be seen beyond an opaque lens of fog, Yet later, when the mist retreated, the sea itself became a portent of sightlessness: Spread flat and colorless in the morning light, the glassy water reminded her of the depthless eyes of the blind, of that terrible sad vacancy where vision is denied..Even a cool day on the pie route could produce a good sweat by journey's end, because with the addition of the men to this ambitious project, they now not only made deliveries but also performed some chores that were a problem for the elderly or disabled..Agnes knew now why this prognostication had dismayed rather charmed her: If you dared to believe in the good fortune predicted he cards, then you were obliged to believe in the bad, as well..Never would he pause to reload at this desperate penultimate moment, when success or failure might be decided in mere seconds. That would be the choice of a man who thought first and acted later, the behavior of a born loser.. "Imagine me thinking you'd be gone," she said to Barty. "Your old mum is losing it. I never made a deal with Rumpelstiltskin, so there's nothing for him to collect."..She told him to stay on the line, stay on no matter what, told him to keep talking to her, and he hung up..A s?ance was what it appeared to be at first. Eight people were gathered around the dining-room table, which stood utterly bare. No food, no drinks, no centerpiece. They all exhibited that shiny-faced look of people nervously awaiting the revelations of a spirit medium: part trepidation, part soaring hope.. "If there's a presentation, I assume then I'm the presentee," he said, taming his chair sideways to the table and taking her into his lap. "Just remember, I never wear neckties.".. "I only told you about that," said Grace, "because it was a very handsome shirt, and I thought you might want to get one for Wally."..A cast-bronze figure, fixed to lacquered walnut in want of raw dogwood, suffered above the bed. This crucifix, contrasting starkly with the white walls, reinforced the impression of monastic economy..He produced her coat as if by legerdemain. Magically, she found her arms in the sleeves and the collar around her neck, though given her size lately, putting on anything other than a hat usually required strategy and persistence..Celestina stared out for a moment, and then turned her head to look at Tom, with both the shade of the night and the sparkle of the metropolis still captured in her eyes. "What was that all about?"..A plate-size piece of the door had been blasted away. Because of the light shining through from the room beyond, Junior could see that no part of the lock remained intact. In fact, he peered through the hole in the door to the back of a piece of furniture that was jammed against it, whereupon the nature of the problem became clear to him..With his sister's financial backing, Edom purchased a flower shop in '71, after ascertaining that the strip mall in which it was located had been even more soundly constructed than the earthquake code required, that it didn't stand on slide-prone land, that it did not lie in a flood plain, and that in fact its altitude above sea level ensured that it would survive all but a tidal wave of such towering enormity that nothing less than an asteroid impact in the Pacific could be the cause. In '73, he married Maria Elena (that boy-girl thing, after all), whereupon she became Agnes's sister-in-law in addition to having long been a full sister in her heart. They bought the house on the other side of the original Lampion homestead, and another fence was torn down..Shadows still perched throughout most of the room. They no longer reminded her of roosting birds, but of a featherless flock, leathery of wing and red of eye, with a taste for unspeakable feasts..The bullet had been fired by a renegade cop who was every bit as lousy a marksman as he was a corrupt scumball. He'd been aiming for Nolly's crotch..Vanadium flipped the quarter straight into the air and at once spread his arms, palms turned up to show that his hands were empty..Instead of answering the question, meaning to imply that he believed Junior already knew the facts, Thomas Vanadium said, "I was able to get a warrant to search your house." Junior thought this must be a trick. No hard evidence existed to indicate that Naomi had died at the hands of another rather than by accident..In San Francisco, Seraphim Aethionema White lies beyond all hope of resuscitation. So beautiful and only sixteen..At the open kitchen door, arms laden with a stack of four bakery boxes, her mother said, "Will you get those last four pies for me there on the table? And don't jostle them, dear."..Greed. So easy, taking money from the rubes. Soon, instead of peeling off a little from each game, he sought bigger kills..She could see now what she hadn't seen when running with him through the cemetery, because she was looking directly at him. Yet even seeing did not make it easy to believe..As red as Angel had been for her evening outing, she was that yellow for retirement to bed in her own home. Two-piece yellow jersey pajamas. Yellow socks. At the girl's request, Celestina had tied a soft yellow bow in her mass of springy hair.. "The mass of these malignancies suggest they will soon spread-or have already spread-out of the eye to the orbit. There is no hope that radiation therapy will work in this instance, and no time to risk trying it even if there were hope. No time at all. No time. Dr. Schurr and I agree, to save Bartholomew's life, we must remove both eyes immediately.".. "Nevertheless, even if Muffin assaulted you, she's otherwise such a sweet little thing. What would Maria think of you if you told her you'd smashed poor Muffin with a shovel?".. "We'll need to talk about this a lot in the days to come, as we both have more time to think about it."..Junior had expected these singular creatures, and he needed them to be as monstrous as they had always been in the past. Nonetheless, he shrank back against his pillows in dismay when they exploded into the hospital room. Their faces were as fierce as those of painted cannibals coming off a fast. They gestured emphatically, spitting expletives along with tiny bits of lunch dislodged from their teeth by the force of their condemnations..Mocked by the silvery ping-ting-jingle of the maniac detective emptying his ghostly pockets, Junior ran.. "I could have been killed," Junior Cain repeated, suddenly so horrorstruck by this realization that an iciness welled in his gut, and for a while he wasn't able to feel his extremities..She pushed her chair back from the table and got to her feet, and everyone followed her example..Casey and Tutti, her sister Skipper, and dreamboat Ken-and soon the girls had Barty enthusiastically involved in a make-believe world far different from the one in which Heinlein's teenage lead owned an extraordinary alien pet with eight legs, the temperament of a kitten, and an appetite for everything from grizzly bears to Buicks..SHORTLY BEFORE one o'clock, the Hackachaks descended in a fury, eyes full of bloody intent, teeth bared, voices shrill..Hound smiled.

"They haven't undone what you did yet, either," he said. "Old Whiteface was crawling all over her yesterday, growling and muttering. Ordered the helm replaced." He meant Losen's chief mage, a pale man from the North named Gelluk, who was much feared in Havnor..The rocking chair stopped squeaking under her. She heard the sincerity in Vinnie's voice, and as her disbelief dissolved, she was shocked into immobility. She whispered, "My little superstition." First, he searched immediately around the dead man, figuring that the watch might still be snared on the coat belt or on one of the sleeve straps. No luck..Just as Celestina snapped shut the latches on the suitcase and turned to the door, a nurse's aide entered, pushing a cart loaded with towels and bed linens.."Well, it's true," he said, finally turning the key in the proper direction and firing up the engine..Immediately at the thought of regurgitation, his abdominal muscles contracted like those of a laboratory frog zapped by an electric current, and he choked on a rising horror..Celestina, the battering Baptist, back in action, came at him again. With one leg broken, another cracked, and the stretcher bar splintered, the chair wasn't as formidable a weapon as it had been. She swung it, Junior dodged, she struck at him again, he juked, and she reeled away from him, gasping..This trick, however, was far more difficult than walking where the rain wasn't. Sustaining vision took both a mental and physical toll from him..Leaving the engine running and the heater on, he got out of the car, leaned back inside, said, "Better lock up while I'm gone," and then closed his door..Tom said, "Now I'm going to add a human touch and a spiritual spin to all this. When each of us comes to a point where he has to make a significant moral decision affecting the development of his character and the lives of others, and each time he makes the less wise choice, that's where I myself believe a new world splits off. When I make an immoral or just a foolish choice, another world is created in which I did the right thing, and in that world, I am redeemed for a while, given a chance to become a better version of the Tom Vanadium who lives on in the other world of the wrong choice. There are so many worlds with imperfect Tom Vanadiums, but always someplace ... someplace I'm moving steadily toward a state of grace." Dinner was available in the lounge. Junior enjoyed a superb filet mignon with a split of fine Cabernet Sauvignon..Celestina had a delayed reaction to Barty's name. An odd look came over her. "Barty? Short for ... Bartholomew?". Angel didn't join the grieving women, but sat on the floor in front of the television, switching back and forth between Gunsmoke and The Monkees. Too young to be genuinely involved in either show, nevertheless she occasionally made gunfire sounds when Marshal Dillon went into battle or invented her own lyrics to sing along with the Monkees..The funeral was at two o'clock, after which family and friends of the deceased would gather here in the parsonage for a social, to break bread together and to share their memories of the loved one lost..Judging by the sounds Vanadium made, Junior figured that the cop had settled once more into the armchair..KATHLEEN IN THE candlelight, her ginger eyes a glimmer with images of the amber flame. Icy martinis, extra olives in a shallow white dish. Beyond the tableside window, the legendary bay glimmered, too, darker and colder than Kathleen's eyes, and not a fraction as deep..The previously flat, monotonous voice had in it now a subtle but undeniable new roundness of tone: "And every human being, every living thing, is a string on that instrument." In the physician's eyes, a yearning to believe. In his face, a squint of skepticism..Wonderful. Oh, perfect. So Neddy, a friend of Celestina's, knew that Junior, reputed to be a vicious sadist, had attended this reception under a false name. If Junior really was a sleazy pervert of such rococo tastes that he would be shunned even by the scum of the world, even by the deranged mutant offspring of a self-breeding hermaphrodite, then surely he was capable of murder, too..During the girl's final appointment, Junior discovered she would be home alone that same night, her parents at a function she wasn't required to attend. She appeared to reveal this inadvertently, quite innocently; however, Junior was a bloodhound when it came to smelling seduction, regardless of how subtle the scent..Her mother and father still resided in a world where Phimie was alive. Bringing them from that old reality to this new one would be the second-hardest thing Celestina had ever done..Although a cold current crackled along the cable of her spine, Agnes smiled at the card. She was determined to change the dark mood that had descended over them..With one tiny hand, Barty reached up for his mother. She gave him her forefinger, to which the sugar-bag boy clung tenaciously.."Angel," Phimie said thickly, searching her sister's eyes for a sign of understanding..His homely face was long and narrow, as though pulled into that shape by the weight of his responsibilities. In other circumstances, however, his generous mouth might have shaped an appealing smile; and his green eyes had in them the compassion of someone who himself had known great loss..Now he had to focus on being ready for the evening of January 12: the reception for Celestina White's art show. She had adopted her sister's baby. Little Bartholomew was in her care; and soon, the kid would be within Junior's reach..To the right first. Kick the door open, simultaneously firing two rounds, because maybe this was her bedroom, where she kept a gun. Mirrors shattered: a tintinnabulation of falling glass on porcelain, glass on ceramic tile, a lot more noise than the shots themselves.

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