

BIG POTATO A BIOGRAPHY OF JOSEPH AUSTIN TOWERS

"A friend's daughter. They say she died in a traffic accident down in San Francisco. She was even younger than Naomi." First room on the left. Move. Kick the door open. The sense of a larger space beyond, no bathroom this time, and darker. Fan the pistol, gripping with both hands. Two quick shots: muffled cough, muffled cough.. "I was raised to understand it," said Celestina, and when she looked across the room, she saw that her words had moved her mother.. With Angel at breakfast, instead of just Uncle Jacob, at least Barty had someone to talk to, even if she did insist on speaking more often through her dolls than directly. Apparently, the dolls were on the table, propped up with bowls. The first, Miss Pixie Lee, had a high-pitched, squeaky voice. The second, Miss Velveeta Cheese, spoke in a three year-old's idea of what a throaty-voiced, sophisticated woman sounded like, although to Barty's ear, this was more suitable to a stuffed bear.. He wasn't a marksman, anyway. He couldn't handle anything more than close-up work.. If the ace of diamonds, in quartet, must be taken seriously, then why not the rest of the draw?. He spent the afternoon with her and stayed for dinner. He ate at her bedside, feeding both himself and her, balancing the progress of his meal with hers, so they finished together. He'd never fed her before, yet he wasn't awkward with her, or she with him, and later what he remembered of dinner was the conversation, not the logistics.. To her mother, Celestina said, "What did you mean when you said you'd heard all about Barty here?". She couldn't explain her anxiety to him, because he believed in the supremacy of laws, in the justice that might be delivered in this life, in a comparatively simple reality, and he would not comprehend the gloriously, frighteningly, reassuringly, strangely, and deeply complex reality Agnes occasionally perceived-usually peripherally, sometimes intellectually, but often with her heart. This was a world in which effect could come before cause, in which what seemed to be coincidence was, in fact, merely the visible part of a far larger pattern that couldn't be seen whole.. Opening his eyes blinking back his tears just as more agonizing contractions knotted his abdomen, he could see ribbons of red in the watery green mess that gushed from him. Bright red. Gastric blood would be dark. This must be pharyngeal blood. Unless an artery had ruptured in his stomach, torn by the incredible violence of these intransigent spasms, in which case he was puking his life away.. He traveled prairies and mountains and valleys, passed fields rich in every imaginable crop, crossed great forests and wide rivers. He walked in fierce storms when thunder crushed the sky and lightning tore it, walked in wind that skinned the bare earth and sheared green tresses from trees, and walked also in sun-scrubbed days as blue and clean as ever there had been in Eden.. "What wound? Junior wanted to ask, but he recognized bait when he heard it, and he did not bite.. From the phone, Barty proceeded directly to the refrigerator. He opened the door, got a can of orange soda, and returned without hesitation to his chair at the table.. Eventually he approached the door between the dining room and the kitchen. He paused there, listening.. Now, twenty-four hours later, when Sparky answered his telephone and heard Tom Vanadium, he said, "You looking for a little company? I've got another bottle of Merlot where the last one came from..". Houses made settling noises all the time. That was one reason why he couldn't rely much on sound to guide him through the darkness. A noise he thought had been made by the weight of his tread might as easily have been produced by the house itself as it adjusted to the.. Tom pointed to the nearly finished martini that stood on the table before him. Balanced on the thin rim of the glass: impossibly, precariously--the coin.. "Well," Agnes said, "thank the Lord, we don't have tornadoes here in California..". "D'you have a bag?". His wife, Dorothea, adored him, not least of all because he had taken in her eighty-year-old mother and treated that elderly lady as though she were both a duchess and a saint. He was equally generous to the poor, burying their dead at cost but with utmost dignity.. With some sharp instrument, probably a knife, Cain had stabbed and gouged the red letters, working on the wall with such fury that two of the Bartholomews were barely readable anymore. The Sheetrock was marked by hundreds of scores and punctures.. He pushed on the door, but still it resisted, and he surprised himself by letting out a bellow of frustration that expressed quite the opposite of self-control, though no one listening could have the slightest doubt about his determination to commit and command.. Although to Paul this was no more than childish chatter, Tom knew at once that the girl referred to his explanation for why he wasn't sad about his damaged face: the salt and pepper shakers representing two Toms, the hit-and-run rhinoceros, the different worlds all in one place. "Yes, Angel. That's something like what I was talking about..". The sound made by the dropping corpse indicated that cushioning trash lined the bottom of the bin, and also that it was no more than half full. This improved chances that Neddy wouldn't be discovered until a dump truck tumbled him into a landfill-and even then perhaps no eyes would alight upon him again except those of hungry rats.. If this insurance payoff was not mere coincidence, if it was the wealth that had been foretold, then how far behind the fortune did the knave travel? Years? Months? Days?. Jolene started to refill his coffee mug-then thought better of it. "Maybe you don't need more caffeine, Edom..". He pressed the muzzle of the weapon against the girl's forehead and said, "Naomi, Seraphim, you were exquisite lovers, but you've got to be realistic. There's no way we can have a life together..". When he woke, he was in a hospital bed, his upper body slightly elevated. The only illumination was provided by a single window: an ashen light too dreary to be called a glow, trimmed into drab ribbons by the.. Three times, the singing faded away, but twice, just when he thought that she had finished, she began to croon again. The third time, the silence lasted.. Since her conversation with Joshua Nunn the previous Thursday, she'd had more than four days to armor herself for the worst. She prepared for it as well as any mother could while still holding on to her sanity.. "You may be eating yourself into an early grave, Vinnie, but poor Jacob has murdered his own soul, and that's infinitely worse..". The previous April, the lads from Liverpool had claimed all five of the top five. Real Americans, like the Beach Boys and the Four Seasons, were forced to settle for lower numbers. It made you wonder who had really won the Revolutionary War.. To have the best chance of becoming a master

mechanic, any young apprentice needs a mentor. The art of total card control cannot be learned entirely from books and experimentation. For a while, leaning forward in his chair and staring at the floor with an intensity and an expression that could not have been inspired by the insipid vinyl tiles, Tom mulled over what she'd told him. Then: "The connection is there, but it's still not entirely clear to me. So he took perverse pleasure in raping her with her father's sermon as accompaniment . . . and maybe without his realizing it, the reverend's message got deep inside his head. I wouldn't think our cowardly wife killer has the capacity for guilt ... although maybe your dad worked a sort of miracle and planted that very seed." Happiness could grow out of unspeakable tragedy with such vigor that it produced dazzling blooms and lush green bracts. This insight served, for Celestina, as a primary inspiration for her painting and as proof of the grace granted in this world that we might perceive and be sustained by the promise of an ultimate joy to come. With effort, she managed to say, "I'm sorry, sweetie," but her voice was sufficiently distorted by anguish that even to herself, she sounded like a stranger. Though Celestina was still holding Angel, Wally kissed her, and again it was lovely, though shorter than before, and Angel said, "That's a messy kiss." He needed to keep moving, conduct the search, find the watch, and get the hell out of here, but he couldn't stop staring at the musician. Something about the cadaver made him nervous—aside from the fact that it was dead and disgusting and, if he was caught with it, a one-way ticket to the gas chamber. The ghost cop was forty feet behind him, beyond ranks of other pedestrians, every one of whom might as well have been faceless now, smooth and featureless from brow to chin, because suddenly Junior could see no countenance other than that of the walking dead man. The haunting visage bobbed up and down as the grim spirit strode along, vanishing and reappearing and then vanishing again among all the bobbing and swaying heads of the intervening multitudes. "It isn't just the rotten railing," Junior said, still paging through the report, his outrage growing. "The stairs are unsafe." It didn't seem to him to amount to much. It was such an easy matter to him to make a silvery light shine in a dark room, or find a lost pin by thinking about it, or true up a warped joint by running his hands over the wood and talking to it, that he couldn't see why they made a fuss over such things. But his father raged at him for his "shortcuts," even struck him once on the mouth when he was talking to the work, and insisted that he do his carpentry with tools, in silence. "I'm gonna dream about baby chickens," she told Celestina, "and if I'm all yellow, they'll think I'm one of them." 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. This was a relaxation technique that had worked often before. He had teamed it from a brilliant book, *How to Have a Healthier Life through Autohypnosis*. At Thanksgiving dinner, again at the three tables set end to end, in the year of the triple zero, Mary Lampion, now fourteen years old, made an interesting announcement over the pumpkin pie. In her travels where none but she could go, after seven fascinating years of exploring a fraction of all the infinite worlds, she said she sensed beyond doubt that, as Barty's mother had told him on her deathbed, there is one special place beyond all the ways things are, one shining place. He was focused enough, in fact, to find Bob Chicane, kill the insulting bastard and get away with it. "Soon as Cain is out of sight, we yank up our tricky vending machines, then haul the real ones out of the van and bolt 'em down again. Slick, fast. People are still picking up quarters when we finish. And get this—they want to know where the camera is." Tammy—the stock analyst, broker, and cat-food-eating feline fetishist—whom he had dated from Christmas of '65 through February of '66, had given him the timepiece in return for all the trading commissions and perfect sex that he had given her. Initially, Helen Greenbaum, at Greenbaum Gallery, had taken on three canvases, and had sold them within a month. She took four more, then another three when two of the four moved quickly. By the time that she'd placed ten pieces with collectors, Helen decided to include Celestina in a show of six new artists. And now, already, she had a show of her own. In addition to delivering a honey-raisin pear pie, Agnes had come to offer Obadiah Sepharad a year's work—not performing magic, but talking about it. They were as gracious as any people he had ever met, but they also seemed genuinely interested in his story. He wasn't surprised that. The boy's difference was defined as much by what he didn't do as by what he did. For one thing, he didn't observe the Terrible Twos, the period of toddler rebellion that usually frayed the nerves of the most patient parents. No tantrums for the Pie Lady's son, no bossiness, no crankiness. The hall was deserted. Then a woman came out of one of the offices and walked toward the gallery, without glancing at him. 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. In her arms, little Barty bumbled contentedly, unaware that his destiny supposedly included epic love, fabulous riches, and violence. "Miss White was admitted to St. Mary's late January fifth," said Nolly, "with dangerous hypertension, a complication of pregnancy." At last, as the sun slowly set, he arrived at the highest of the high redoubts, beyond which the branches were too young and too weak to support him farther. Against a sky red enough to delight the most sullen sailors, he rose and stood in a final crook of limbs, pressing his left hand against a balancing branch, right hand planted cockily on his hip, lord of his domain, having kicked off the trammels of darkness and fashioned from them a ladder. And the irony of ironies: With her talent deepening to a degree that she had never dared hope it would, with collectors responding to her vision to an extent she had never imagined possible, with her goals already exceeded, and with great vistas of possibility opening before her, she would throw it all away with some regret but with no bitterness if required to choose between art and Angel, for the child had proved to be the greater blessing. Phimie was gone, but Phimie's spirit fed and watered her sister's life, bringing forth a great abundance. Since he knew where Celestina would be on January 12, there was no point in taking risks to find her sooner. He had plenty of time to prepare for their encounter, time to savor the sweet anticipation. With the determination of any pulp-magazine adventurer, Paul walked in sunshine and in rain. He walked in heat and cold. Wind did not deter him, nor lightning. "It's what?" asked the detective, for with the exception of his teeth, he was not a self-improved

individual..With a sigh, Obadiah differed: "Not clever. Crude. Before my hands became these great-knuckled lumps, I could have dazzled you." "But I had greater facility with cards than most magicians. I trained with Moses Moon, greatest card mechanic of his generation." During Barty's hospitalization, they had graduated from the young adult novels by Robert Heinlein to some of the same author's science fiction for general audiences. Now, pajamaed and in bed, with his sunglasses on the nightstand but his padded eye patches still in place, Barty listened, rapt, to the beginning of Double Star. The musician's bird-sharp gaze grew dull. His pink tongue protruded from his mouth, like a half-eaten worm..Max hung up. The Ansaphone made a series of small robot-mouse noises and then fell silent..Turning away from the window, Celestina grabbed the girl and pushed her toward the bed, whispering, "Down, under." Junior Cain was committed to continuous self-improvement. He believed in the need constantly to expand his knowledge and horizons order to better understand himself and the world. The quality of life was solely the responsibility of oneself he author of How to Have a Healthier Life through Autohypnosis was Dr. Caesar Zedd, a renowned psychologist and best-selling author of a dozen self-help texts, all of which Junior owned in addition to the literature that he had acquired from the book club. When he had been only fourteen, he'd begun buying Dr. Zedd's titles in paperback, and by the time he was eighteen, when he could afford to do so, he'd replaced the paperbacks with hardcovers and thereafter bought all the doctor's new books in the higher-priced editions. The collected works. Later, as Bonita and Francesca proudly served their mother's individually molded Christmas-tree-shaped servings of flan, which they themselves had plated, Barty leaned close to his mother and, pointing to the table in front of them, said softly but excitedly, "Look at the rainbows!" They would have given him an antinausea medication. It most likely wasn't going to work quickly enough to save him..The social worker's office once more. Rain tapping lightly at the window where Dr. Lipscomb had stared intently into the fog as he tried to avoid confronting the life-changing revelation that Phimie, speaking with the special knowledge of the once-dead, had shown him..That was all right, for she had done the same for Otter's elder sister, and so his parents sent him to her in the evenings. But she taught Otter more than the song of the Creation. She knew his gift. She and some men and women like her, people of no fame and some of questionable reputation, had all in some degree that gift; and they shared, in secret, what lore and craft they had. "A gift untaught is a ship unguided," they said to Otter, and they taught him all they knew. It wasn't much, but there were some beginnings of the great arts in it; and though he felt uneasy at deceiving his parents, he couldn't resist this knowledge, and the kindness and praise of his poor teachers. "It will do you no harm if you never use it for harm," they told him, and that was easy for him to promise them..The vending machines were designed to accept quarters, not to eject them. They didn't make change. Mechanically, this barrage wasn't possible..If not for Celestina's slutty little sister, Bartholomew would not exist. No threat. Junior's life would be different, better..Standing at graveside, Junior was in a foul mood. He was weary of pretending to be deep in grief..Dragonfly."Maybe because we didn't want to be called witches," said Obadiah with a smile, "and give folks one more reason to hang us." Surprisingly, dolls. Quite a few dolls. Apparently the bastard boy was effeminate, a quality he sure as hell hadn't inherited from his father..Wally and Celestina went to dinner at the Armenian restaurant from which he'd gotten takeout on the day in '65 that he rescued her and Angel from Neddy Gnathic. Red tablecloths, white dishes, dark wood paneling, a cluster of candles in red glasses on each table, air redolent of garlic and roasted peppers and cubeb and sizzling soujouk-plus a personable staff, largely of the owners' family-created an atmosphere as right for celebration as for intimate conversation, and Celestina expected to enjoy both, because this promised to be a most momentous day in more ways than one..The reception still roared in both showrooms of the gallery. Legions of the uncultured, taste-challenged in every regard except in their appreciation for hors d'oeuvres, yammered about art and chased their cloddish opinions with mediocre champagne..Junior Cain definitely was not a crazed sex-killer, not driven to homicide by weird lusts beyond his control. A single night of sex and death-an indulgence never to be repeated-wouldn't require serious self-examination or a reconsideration of his self-image..On Tuesday, less than twenty-four hours after Naomi's funeral, Knacker, Hisscus, and Nork--representing the state and the county held preliminary meetings with Junior's lawyer and with the attorney for the grieving Hackachak clan. As before, the well-tailored trio was conciliatory, sensitive, and willing to reach an accommodation to prevent the filing of a wrongful-death suit..His profession was cocktail piano, though he didn't have to earn a living at it. He had inherited a fine four-story house in a good neighborhood of San Francisco and also a sufficient income from a trust fund to meet his needs if he avoided extravagance. Nevertheless, he worked five evenings a week in an elegant lounge in one of the grand old hotels on Nob Hill, playing highly refined drinking songs for tourists, businessmen from out of town, affluent gay men who stubbornly continued to believe in romance in an age that valued flash over substance, and unmarried heterosexual couples who were working up a buzz to ensure that their rigorously planned adulteries would seem glamorous..must either change her mind or commit herself to a more difficult and challenging life than any she had envisioned only this morning..She stepped on a broken-off chair leg, lost her balance, and fell backward into the side of the bed.."Forget Barty's tree for a second and imagine that all these many worlds are like stacked slices of Swiss cheese. Through some holes, you can see only the next slice. Through others, you see through two or three or five slices before holes stop overlapping. There are little holes between stacked worlds, too, but they're constantly shifting, changing, second by second. And I can't see them, really, but I have an uncanny feel for them. Watch closely." He already had the pistol he had taken from Frieda Bliss's collection, but it didn't come with a sound-suppressor. He was preparing for all contingencies. Focus..Barty wanted to hug her. He did hug her. He hugged Angel, too. He hugged Tom Vanadium..Though she worried that reading would strain his eyes, worsening his condition, she recognized the irrationality of her fear. Muscles don't atrophy from use, nor eyes wear out from too much seeing..Edom did as asked. Then he cut the deck into two approximately equal stacks when requested to do so..He and the

homicide detective had been friends for almost thirty years, since Max had been a uniformed rookie on the SFPD and Vanadium had been a young priest freshly assigned to St. Anselmo's Orphanage here in the city. Before choosing police work, Max had contemplated the priesthood, and perhaps back then he had sensed the cop-to-be in Tom Vanadium. The symptoms that terrified Phimie—the headache, crippling abdominal pain, dizziness, vision problems—had entirely relented. Possibly they had been more psychological than physical in nature. The strange barrage of lightning, putting an end to the rain rather than initiating it, had been a clue. The rapid clearing of the sky—indicating a stiff wind at high altitudes, while stillness prevailed at ground level—a sudden plunge in the humidity, and an unseasonable warmth confirmed the coming catastrophe. Onto its roof now, the Pontiac spun as it slid, grinding loudly against the blacktop, and regardless of how determinedly Agnes held on, she was being pulled out of her seat, toward the inverted ceiling and also backward. Her forehead knocked hard into the thin overhead padding, and her back wrenched against the headrest. Coughing, spitting saliva that was bitter with toxic chemicals, Paul followed her, slapping frantically at his clothes when fire singed his shirt. 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. Aftermath was not important. Only movement mattered. Just forget the busload of nuns smashed on the tracks, and stay with the onrushing train. Keep moving, looking forward, always forward. A MOMENTOUS DAY for Celestina, a night of nights, and a new dawn in the forecast: Here began the life about which she'd dreamed since she was a young girl. Because she'd enjoyed some limited use of her right arm, it was less wasted than her left, although not normal. Paul pulled down that sleeve of her pajamas. Vanadium nodded. "And I'd like to hear about Cain's reactions in more detail. I've read your reports, of course, and they've been thorough, but necessarily condensed. There'll be lots of subtleties that only reveal themselves in conversation. Often, the apparently insignificant details are the most important to me when I'm devising strategy." "I'm going to recommend that you be admitted overnight and that we lance these under hospital conditions. We'll use a sterile needle on some of them, but a number are so large they're going to require a surgical knife and possibly the removal of the carbuncle core. This is usually done with a local anesthetic, but in this instance, while I don't think general anesthesia will be required, we'll probably want to sedate you that is, put you in a twilight sleep." For a finder's fee, Junior was put in touch with a papermaker named Google. This was not his real name, but with his crossed eyes, large rubbery lips, and massively prominent Adam's apple, he was as perfect a Google as ever there had been. At the front door of the funeral home, as Panglo was showing him out, Jacob leaned close. "Joe Lampion didn't have any gold teeth." Between his surgeries and for many months thereafter, Vanadium had devoted his energies to speech therapy, physical rehabilitation, and the concoction of periodic torments for Enoch Cain, which Simon Magusson was able to implement, every few months, through Nolly and Kathleen. The idea wasn't to bring Cain to justice by torturing his conscience, since he'd allowed his conscience to atrophy a long time ago, but to keep him unsettled and thereby magnify the impact of his first face-to-face encounter with the resurrected Vanadium. He added verisimilitude to his threats by concluding with a few hard punches where they wouldn't show, in her breasts and belly, and then he, went home to Naomi, to whom he'd been married, at that time, less than five months. "—though this Tom now has a rhinoceros-smacked face, this other Tom, in his own world, has an ordinary face. Poor him, so ordinary." Tom believed that the girl had an intuitive understanding of the true complexity of the world, but she was only three, after all, and neither ready nor able to absorb the scientific theory that supported her intuition. Fourth and last, he was surprised that Kickmule was a legitimate surname. This information wasn't of immediate importance to him, but if ever his Gammoner and Pinchbeck identities were compromised and he required false ID in a new name, he would call himself Eric Kickmule. Or possibly Wolfgang Kickmule. That sounded really tough. No one would mess with a man named Kickmule. Support as he had only pretended to need it previously. He felt as if he had become the mere shell of a man and that the right note would shatter him as a properly piercing tone can shatter crystal. Junior was less surprised by his sudden assault on Victoria than by the failure of the bottle to break. He was, after all, a new man since his decision on the fire tower, a man of action, who did what was necessary. But the bottle was glass, and he swung forcefully, hard enough that it smacked her forehead with a sound like a mallet cracking against a croquet ball, hard enough to put her out in an instant, maybe even hard enough to kill her, yet the Merlot remained ready to drink. "What was it like, Enoch? Did you look into her eyes when you pushed her?" Vanadium's uninflected monologue was like the voice of a conscience that preferred to torture by droning rather than by nagging. "Or doesn't a woman-killing coward like you have the guts for that?" The reverend said, "I'm sure you underestimate my parishioners, Celestina. They won't be scandalized. They'll open their hearts." In the present, long after the execution of Josef Krepp, half a block ahead, lay the Lipscomb house. Beyond it, the Lampion place. The patches were held by the same two elastic strips, so Barty flipped up both at the same time. Joey was standing just outside, gazing in at her. His blue eyes were seas where sorrow sailed. 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. "You can learn em." Supposing that this new enthusiasm was an attempt to uncover skullduggery in Seraphim's accident, then the girl would be doing Junior a service even after her demise. Whether or not the traffic accident was an accident, Junior hadn't had anything to do with it. After nudging the door shut with his shoulder, Barty carried the sodas out of the kitchen and forward along the hall. Pausing at the livingroom archway, he said, "Uncle Jacob?" Celestina sensed an easy camaraderie between these two men, but also tension that was perhaps related to the reference to an illegal search. Junior had hoped not to be recognized by anyone at this affair. He regretted that he hadn't stuck to his original plan, maintaining surveillance of the gallery from his parked car. Only now, as the tide of adrenaline began to ebb, Paul wondered who could possibly

have wanted to kill a man of peace and God, a man as good as Harrison White..Although rain-pasted to her skin, the fine hairs rose on the nape of her neck. The gooseflesh crawling across her arms had nothing to do with her cold, wet clothes..Deciding that he didn't need an exit line, Junior headed toward the service road and his Suburban..In a neatly groomed neighborhood of unassuming houses, Vanadium's place was as unremarkable as those around it: a single-story rectangular box of no discernible architectural style. White aluminum siding with green shutters. An attached two-car garage.."Sometimes these sympathetic vibrations are very apparent, but alot of the time, they're so subtle that you can hear them only if you're unusually perceptive."On a street a half mile from the airport in Eugene, he sat in the parked Dodge long enough to gingerly unwind the bandages and use a tissue to wipe off the pungent but useless salve he'd purchased at a pharmacy. Although he pressed the Kleenex to his face so gently that the pressure might not have broken the surface tension on a pool of water, the agony of the touch was so great that he nearly passed out. The rearview mirror revealed clusters of hideous, large, red knobs with glistening yellow heads, and at the sight of himself, he actually did pass out for a minute or two, just long enough to dream that he was a grotesque but misunderstood creature being pursued through a stormy night by crowds of angry villagers with torches and pitchforks, but then the throbbing agony revived him..As kinky and thrilling as it had been to make love to the girl while playing the recorded rough draft of a new sermon that she had been transcribing for her father, Junior could now recall nothing of what the reverend had said, only the tone and the timbre of his voice. Whether instinct, nervous irritation, or merely the sherry should be blamed, he was troubled by the thought that there was something significant about the content of that tape..Alone with Paul, as he stood abashed, she removed her blouse and bra and, with arms crossed over her breasts, revealed to him her savaged back. Whereas her father had used open-hand slaps and hard fists to teach his twin sons the lessons of God, he preferred canes and lashes as the instruments of education for his daughter, because he believed that his direct touch might have invited sin. Scars disfigured Agnes from shoulders to buttocks, pale scars and others dark, crosshatched and whorled..He must be careful in his approach to her. He dared not rush into this. Think it through. Devise a strategy. This valuable opportunity must not be wasted..She was not going to be as forthright with Barty as she had insisted that Joshua Nunn be with her, in part because she was too shaken to risk forthrightness..His first overnight journey, in June of '65, was to La Jolla, north of San Diego. He carried too large a backpack and wore khaki pants when he should have worn shorts in the summer heat..Her fear, Agnes suddenly realized, arose from her father's often expressed conviction that an attempt to excel at anything was a sin that would one day be grievously punished. All forms of amusement were sinful, by his way of thinking, and all those who sought even the simplest entertainment were lost souls; however, those who desired to amuse others were the worse sinners, because they were overflowing with pride, striving to shine, eager to make themselves into false gods, to be praised and adored as only God should be adored. Actors, musicians, singers, novelists were doomed to hell by the very acts of creation which, in their egomania, they saw as the equal of their Creator's work. Striving to excel at anything, in fact, was a sign of corruption in the soul, whether one wanted to be recognized as a superior carpenter or car mechanic, or a grower of prize roses. Talent, in her father's view, was not a gift from God, but from the devil, meant to distract us from prayer, penitence, and duty.."There's a fine George and Ira Gershwin song called 'Someone to Watch Over Me.' "You remember things?" the girl asked, her fingertips still pressed lightly to his cheek..From her reading, she knew that amniotic fluid should be clear. A few traces of blood in it should not necessarily be alarming, but here were more than traces. Here were thick red-black streams..I believe the universe is sort of like an unimaginably vast musical with an infinite number of strings."..As though the fog were a paralytic gas, Junior stood unmoving in the middle of the sidewalk. He really didn't want to climb into that Dumpster.."Oh, it certainly is! It certainly is enough! But ... I don't regret much, you know. But I do regret not being here to see why you and Angel have been brought together. I know it'll be something lovely, Barty. Something so fine."..Three times, Mary vanished, and three times she reappeared, before she led the bamboozled Koko to her mother and father. "Neat, huh?"

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