

ND THEIR TIME TABLES HOTELS AND THEIR CHARGES ART GALLERIES THEATRE

"He's crafty, you say. Can you use him?" One nurse and one nun brought Celestina into the creche behind the viewing window. As Barty climbed to the porch without benefit of the railing and held out his right hand, Paul Damascus said, "Tom, we're wondering if Barty can extend to you the protection he gives to Angel in the rain. Maybe he can ... since the three of you share this ... this awareness, this insight, or whatever you want to call it. But he won't know until he tries." He wanted to fling it into the graveyard, send it spinning far into the darkness. The crazy bitch wielded it with such ferocity that the force of the impact with the floor, rebounding upon her, must have numbed her arms. She stumbled backward, dragging the chair, temporarily unable to lift it. Intuition told Tom Vanadium that the removal of the paintings was significant, but he wasn't a talented enough Sherlock to leap immediately to the meaning of their absence. 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. His body ached, too, especially his back, from the battering that he had taken. He remembered hitting the floor with his chin, and he supposed that he might have gotten knocked about the face more than he realized or remembered. If so, there would be bruises soon, but bruises would fade with time; in the interim, they might make him even more attractive to women, who would want to console him and kiss away the pain—especially when they discovered that he had sustained his injuries in a brutal fight, while rescuing a neighbor from a would-be rapist. He told her that he loved her, and she slipped away upon his words. As she went, the haggard look of the terminal leukemic patient passed from her, and before the gray mask of death replaced it, he saw the beauty he had preserved in memory when he was three, before they took his eyes, saw it so briefly, as if something transforming welled out of her, a perfect light, her essence. The six-foot-tall statue was of a nude woman, formed from scrap metal, some of it rusted and otherwise corroded. The feet were made from gear wheels of various sizes and from bent blades of broken meat cleavers. Pistons, pipes, and barbed wire formed her legs. She was busty: hammered soup pots as breasts, corkscrews as nipples. Rake-tine hands were crossed defensively over the misshapen bosom. In a face sculpted from bent forks and fan blades, empty black eye sockets glared with hideous suffering, and a wide-mouthed shriek accused the world with a silent but profound cry of horror. She shook her head, and red bows fluttered. "No. 'Cause you didn't just move it around." He placed a hand on her shoulder. "Don't beat up on yourself She's come this far. And though I don't know the hospital in Oregon, I doubt the level of care would equal what she'll receive here." Alone with Agnes, the physician said, "I want you to take Barty to a specialist in Newport Beach. Franklin Chan. He's a wonderful ophthalmologist and ophthalmological surgeon, and right now we don't have anyone like that here in town." If Junior had realized that they were driving only a block and a half, he wouldn't have followed them in the Mercedes. He would have gone the rest of the way on foot. When he pulled to the curb again, a few car lengths behind the Buick, he wondered if he had been spotted. "But you wouldn't be willing to use that skill in the King's service?" Wally drove slowly, carefully, with all the responsibility that you would expect from an obstetrician, pediatrician, and spanking-new fiancé. The trip home to Pacific Heights took twice as long as it would have taken in clear weather on a night without a pledge of truth. draftsman? Having never been nudged in that direction, would Cain have followed a different path that took him far from Celestina and Angel? Visibly nonplussed by Junior's blithe failure to terminate the handshake when the shaking stopped, the fussy Neddy didn't want to be so rude as to yank his hand loose, or to cause a scene regardless of how small, but Junior, smiling and pretending to be as socially dense as concrete, failed to respond to a polite tug. So Neddy waited, allowing his hand to be held, and his face, previously as white as piano keys, brightened to a shade of pink that clashed with his red boutonniere. As he was wheeled headfirst into the operating room, Barty raised off the gurney pillow. He fixed his gaze on his mother until the door swung shut between them. The night was holding its breath again, the previous breeze now pent up in the breast of darkness. The minister's threat had been forgotten, repressed. At the time, only half-heard, merely kinky background to lovemaking, these words had amused Junior, and he'd given no serious thought to their meaning, to the message of retribution contained in them. Now, in this moment of extreme danger, the inflamed boil of repressed memory burst under pressure, and Junior was shocked, stunned, to realize that the minister had put a curse on him! PAUL DAMASCUS WAS walking the northern coast of California: Point Reyes Station to Tomales, to Bodega Bay, on to Stewarts Point, Gualala, and Mendocino. Some days he put in as little as ten miles, and other days he traveled more than thirty. When together in Agnes's company, Edom and Jacob were brothers, comfortable with each other. But together, just the two, no Agnes, they were more awkward than strangers, because strangers had no shared history to overcome. He reached the end of the alleyway, stumbled into the stream of pedestrians, nearly knocked over an elderly Chinese man, turned, and discovered ... no Vanadium. Junior intended to add one stocky ghost to the party. Perhaps on a summer night in years to come, at the edge of the light fall from his Coleman lantern, a fisherman would see a semitransparent Vanadium providing entertainment with an ethereal quarter. Taking no chances, Junior swung the candlestick again, bending down as he did so. The second impact was not as solid as the first, a glancing blow, but effective. Prosser—fifty-six, a widower, an accountant—had a thirty-year-old daughter, Zelda, who was an attorney in San Francisco. Junior had driven to Terra Linda previously, to research the accountant; he already knew Prosser had no connection to Seraphim's fateful child. Lined up on the kitchen table were green-grape-and-apple pies. The thick domed crusts, with their deeply fluted edges, were the coppery gold of precious coins. "He must've listened on the car radio," Agnes said, digging down into the layered days in her packed trunk of memories. "He was trying to get ahead of his work, so he'd be able to stay around the house a lot during the week after the baby

came. So he arranged to meet with some prospective clients even on Sunday. He was working a lot, and I was trying to deliver my pies and meet my other obligations before the big day. We didn't have as much time together as usual, and even as impressed as he must've been with the sermon, he never had a chance to tell me about it. The next-to-last thing he ever said to me was 'Bartholomew.' He wanted me to name the baby Bartholomew." 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. Barty read aloud as Agnes drove, because she'd enjoyed the novel only from page 104. He wanted to share with her the exploits of Jim and Frank and their Martian companion, Willis. Too much had happened in those rooms. They were stained dark with family history, and in the night, when either Edom or Jacob slept under that gabled roof, the past came alive again in dreams. The floor of the spacious bathroom featured beige marble tiles with diamond-shaped inlays of black granite. The countertop and the shower stall were fabricated from matching marble, and the same marble was employed in the wainscoting. 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. "One of the four legs of the tower is dangerously fractured where it's seated into the underlying foundation caisson—" For a moment, Junior was mystified. Vanadium's movements had the quality of ritual, vaguely reminiscent of a priest raising high the Eucharist. Angel found this hysterical, and Agnes said long-sufferingly, "Thank you for the language lesson, Master Lampion." Agnes thought crazily of their early dates and the first years of their marriage. They had occasionally gone to the drive-in, sitting close, Junior, putting himself in the detective's place, could think of a few reasons for this visit to Seraphim's grave. Unfortunately, not one of them supported his contention that he was an innocent man. . . . then how come you couldn't walk where your eyes were healthy and leave the tumors there," she remembered. Though she was only a week past her third birthday, Angel always selected her own clothes and carefully dressed herself. Usually she preferred monochromatic outfits, sometimes with a single accent color expressed only in a belt or a hat, or a scarf. When she mixed several colors, the initial impression that she gave was of chromatic chaos—but on second look, you began to see that these unlikely combinations were more harmonious than they had first seemed. Ministering to Perri, Joshua had pulled back her blankets. The fabric of the pale yellow pajama pants couldn't disguise how terribly withered her legs were: two sticks. Young boys, however, are not moved by scenery, especially not when their hearts are adventuring on Mars. He might suspect, but he couldn't know. He would but would be left with at least a shred of doubt about Junior's. When Junior opened the trunk, he discovered that fishing gear and two wooden carriers full of carpenter's tools left no room for a dead detective. He would be able to make the body fit only if he dismembered it first. With the stocky detective looming, Junior wasn't able to stroke his imagination into an erotic mood. In his mind's eye, Victoria's ample bosom remained concealed behind a starched white uniform. She stood just inside the front door of the apartment, admiring herself in a full-length mirror, waiting patiently for Celestina, who was packing dolls, coloring books, tablets, and a large collection of crayons into a zippered satchel. The one piece he had purchased was by a young Bay Area artist, Baval Poriferan, about whom art critics nationwide were in agreement: He was destined for a long and significant career. The sculpture had cost over nine thousand dollars, an extravagance for a man trying to live on the income of his hard-won and prudently invested fortune, but its presence in his living room immediately identified him, to cognoscenti, as a person of taste and cutting-edge sensibilities. The air was spicy with incense and with the fragrance of the lemon oil polish used on the wooden pews. Agnes remembered the blood, the awful red flood. Excruciating pain and such fearsome crimson torrents. She'd thought her baby had entered the world stillborn on a tide of its own blood and hers. Not that he failed to perform well. As always, he was a bull, a stallion, an insatiable satyr. None of his lovers complained; none had the energy for complaint when he'd finished with them. At the bed, he spread the garment across his pillow. Lying down, he pressed his face into the sweater. The sweet subtle scent of Naomi was as effective as a lullaby, and soon he dozed off. Barty, thirteen years old but listening to books at a postgraduate college level, had no doubt studied leukemia while they were awaiting the test results, to prepare himself to fully understand the diagnosis on first receiving it. He tried not to look stricken when he heard acute myeloblastic, which was the worst form of the disease, but he appeared more ghastly in his pretense than if he had revealed his understanding. Had his eyes not been artificial, his stiff-upper-lip pose would have been utterly unconvincing. Two things about him were remarkable, beginning with his face. His head was wrapped with white gauze bandages, so he looked like Claude Rains in *The Invisible Man* or like Humphrey Bogart in that movie about the escaped convict who has plastic surgery to foil the police and to start a new life with Lauren Bacall. Blond hair sprouted from the top of the elaborate wrappings. Otherwise, only his eyes, his nostrils, and his lips were uncovered. As Edom crossed the threshold, moving outside to the landing at the top of the stairs, Jacob followed, proselytizing for his faith: "Christmas Eve, 1940, St. Anselmo's Orphanage, San Francisco. Josef Krepp killed eleven boys, ages six through eleven, murdering them in their sleep and cutting a different trophy from each—an eye here, a tongue there." The following April, when he proposed to her, she wouldn't have him. "You're sweet, Paul, but I can't let you throw your life away on me. You're this ... this beautiful ship that will sail a long way, to fascinating places, and I'd only be your anchor." Turning, turning, turning, the mysterious warning in his mind: The spirit of Bartholomew ... will find you ... and mete out the terrible judgment that you deserve. The January air was crisp, fragrant with evergreens and with the faint salty scent of the distant sea. A curiously yellow moon glowered like a malevolent eye, studying him from between ragged ravelings of dirty clouds. "Well, you ought to be," Grace said, taking her pies out to the Suburban that Wally had bought solely for this enterprise. For guidance, Agnes couldn't rely entirely on any of the child rearing books in her library. Barty's unique gifts presented her with special parenting problems.

Now, when he asked if he could stay up even later, to read about John Thomas Stuart and Lummo, John's pet from another world, she granted him permission..By the time he got back to Spruce Hills, the early night had fallen. The pearly, waxing moon floated over a town that glimmered mysteriously among its richness of trees, flickering and shimmering as though it were not a real town, but a dreamland where a multitude of Gypsy clans gathered by the lambent amber light of lanterns and campfires..Although Celestina felt a little paranoid, being so security-minded in this safe neighborhood, nevertheless she searched, out the master control button and engaged the power locks..Paul stayed with her, sometimes wincing at the ground as though the danger were there, not above-which, in a sense, it was, because impact rather than the fall itself is the killer-and at other times putting his arms around her, staring up at the boy above. But he, too, was silent..In her campaign to keep her weight gain to a minimum, anorexia was her ally. She learned to find pleasure in hunger pangs.."Well, you see, that's the funny thing about all the important choices we make. If we make a really big wrong choice, if we do the really awful wrong thing, we're given another chance to continue on the right path. So the very moment I stupidly stepped off the curb without looking, I created another world where I did look both ways and saw the rhinoceros coming. And so-".Maybe the watch wouldn't be discovered with the corpse. Maybe it would settle into the trash and not be found until archaeologists dug out the landfill two thousand years from now..He usually ate lunch alone in his office. The room was the size of an elevator, but of course didn't go up or down. It went sideways, however, in the sense that herein Paul was transported into wondrous lands of adventure..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..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.At nearly forty years of age, Edom still dreamed of that grim summer afternoon, although not as often as in the past. When it troubled his sleep these days, it was a nightmare that gradually metamorphosed into a dream of tenderness and hope. Until the last few years, he'd always awakened when the roses were being jammed into his mouth or when the thorns flicked through his eyelashes, or when Agnes began to strike their father with the Bible, thus seeming to assure worse punishment. This additional act, this transition from horror to hope before he woke, had been added when Agnes was pregnant with Barty. Edom didn't know why this should be so, and he didn't try to analyze it. He was simply grateful for the change, because he woke now in a state of peace, never with worse than a shudder, no longer with a hoarse cry of anguish.."Too few," said Maria, "might mean you made an admirably small number of moral mistakes but also that you failed to take reasonable risks and didn't make full use of the gift of life."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..Agnes's chilled bones. Pushing a tangle of wet hair away from her face, she realized that her hands were shaking.."I guess so, but it's not that. I was thinking of something my little girl said."Celestina finally zipped shut the satchel. "You better watch out for the big bad wolf."He thought he heard the tick-scrape-rattle-clink of Industrial Woman on the prowl. In the living room. Now the hall. Approaching..What might have become a waiting game of epic duration was ended when the door to the room swung inward, and a doctor in a white lab coat entered from the corridor. He was backlit by fluorescent glare, his face in shadow, like a figure in a dream..Sweaty, chilled, trembling, weak-kneed, watery-eyed with self-pity, Junior spread a plastic garbage bag on the driver's seat. He got in the Suburban, twisted the key in the ignition, and groaned as the engine vibrations threatened to undo him..Angel was lying on a towel on the convertible sofa, where Grace had just changed her diaper..A siren in the city wailed toward St. Mary's. An ambulance. Through streets bustling with hope, always this lament for the dying.."He's here as sure as I am, Barty. He's very busy, with a whole universe to run, so many people to look after, not just here but on other planets, like you've been reading about."With the same surprising ease that she had gotten a plane out of San Francisco on a one-hour notice, Celestina booked two return seats on an early-evening flight from Oregon, as though she had a supernatural travel agent..The diminutive mortician spoke a few comforting words instead of commenting on the dental history of the deceased, and when he put a consoling hand on Jacob's shoulder, Jacob cringed from his touch..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.."Agnes," said the magician, "you better start meeting with that librarian now to record your own life. If you don't get started for another forty years, by then you'll need a whole decade of talking to get it all down."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..On the other hand, one needed to believe in something. Junior didn't clutter his mind with superstitious nonsense or allow himself to be constrained by the views of bourgeois society or by its smug concepts of right and wrong, good and evil. From Zedd, he'd learned that he was the sole master of his universe. Self-realization through self-esteem was his doctrine; total freedom and guiltless pleasure were the rewards of faithful adherence to his principles. What he believed in-the only thing he believed in-was Junior Cain, and in this he was a fiercely passionate believer, devout unto himself Consequently, as Caesar Zedd explained, when any man was clearheaded enough to cast off all the false.Granted that he was only three going on four, nevertheless Barty had never met anyone with as much cheerful imagination as Angel. He intended to marry her in, oh, maybe twenty years..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?"."I'm going to tell you something about your father?that might comfort you," he said, "but you can't ask me for more than I'm ready to say

right now. It's all a part of what I'll discuss with you in Bright Beach." Since dealing with Victoria and the detective, Junior had taken pride in the fact that he'd kept his equanimity and, more important, his lunch. No acute nervous emesis, as he'd suffered following poor Naomi's death. Indeed, he had an appetite. In the end, the reason for the walking was the walking itself. Walking gave him something to do, a needed purpose. Motion equaled meaning. Movement became a medicine for melancholy, a preventive for madness. Celestina had no illusions about playing detective. She would never be able to track down the bastard, and she had no stomach for confronting him. To be fair, with her exceptional beauty, she would have been the center of attention even in a gathering of real artists. Junior had little chance of getting at Seraphim's bastard boy without going through this woman and killing her as well; but if his luck held and he could eliminate Bartholomew without Celestina realizing who had done the deed, then he might yet have a chance to discover if she was as lubricious as her sister and if she was his heart mate. With his mother, his uncles, and Maria hovering just two steps behind, Barty followed the driveway, not bothering with the cane, keeping his right foot on the concrete, his left foot on the grass, until he came to a jog in the pavement, which apparently he'd been seeking. He stopped, facing due north, considered for a moment, and then pointed due west: "The oak tree's over there." When Paul practiced the quarter trick, he usually did so on the sofa or in an armchair, and always in a room with carpeting, because when dropped on a hard surface, the coin rolled and required too much chasing. The police. The stupid police. Ringing the bell when they knew he'd been shot. Ringing the damn doorbell when he lay here helpless, the Industrial Woman lurching toward him, his toe on the other side of the kitchen, ringing the doorbell when he was losing enough blood to give transfusions to an entire ward of wounded hemophiliacs. The stupid bastards were probably expecting him to serve tea and a plate of butter cookies, little paper doilies between each cup and saucer. This was a memory, not a real voice. Even after you became an accomplished meditator, the mind resisted this degree of blissful oblivion and tried to sabotage it with aural and visual memories. "No," Agnes said, shaking loose the grip of irrational fear. "Wait. This is absurd. It's just a card. And we're all curious." While always Agnes held fast to hope, she knew that easy hope was usually false hope, and she didn't allow herself to speculate, even briefly, that his problem had resolved itself. Other symptoms—halos and rainbows—had disappeared for a time, only to return. By the time he reached the airport, located a private-charter company, chased up the owner through the night-security man, and arranged to be flown at once to Eugene, Oregon, aboard a twin-engine Cessna, the points of pain in his face had begun to throb. On the nightstand waited a glass of water on a coaster and a pharmacy bottle containing several capsules of a potent painkiller. The enormous canopy of the oak didn't shelter the lawn beneath it. The leaves spooned the rain from the air, measuring it by the ounce, releasing it in thick drizzles instead of drop by drop. Edom observed, amazed, as Agnes chatted up their host, going from Mr. Sepharad to Obadiah, from the doorstep to the living room, the pie delivered and accepted, coffee offered and served, the two of them pleased and easy with each other, all in the time that it would have taken Edom himself to get up the nerve to cross the threshold and to think of something interesting to say about the Galveston hurricane of 1900, in which six thousand had died. Perhaps, reluctant to admit to herself that she had yearned for him to do everything that he'd done, she had slowly been inflamed by guilt, until she convinced herself that she had, indeed, been raped. Psychotic little bitch. The previous day, Jacob and Edom had driven back to Bright Beach, to prepare for Barty's arrival. Now they hurried down the back porch steps and across the lawn, as Maria followed the driveway past the house and parked near the detached garage at the rear of the deep property. Twice during dinner, he seemed to draw near The Subject, but then he circled around it and flew off, each time to report some news of little relevance or to recount something funny that Angel had said. Victoria lay faceup on the floor. The nurse was no longer as lovely as she had been, and perhaps because of early rigor mortis, her grace, which had initially been evident even in death, had now deserted her. Inevitably, he had to wonder if Naomi had kept her pregnancy secret because, indeed, she suspected that the child wasn't her husband's. The slur faded from his voice in minutes, but he suspected that straining too long to sustain this borrowed vision could result in a stroke or worse. Having settled on the sofa with Agnes and Barty, prepared to serve comfortably in the role of quiet observer, Edom was alarmed to have suddenly become the subject of conversation. He was also alarmed to be called "son," because in his thirty-six years, the only person ever to have addressed him in that fashion had been his father, dead for a decade yet still a terror in Edom's dreams. "No, the more I think about it, the more it feels like this is just kids. Some kids goofing around, that's all. I guess Vanadium got deeper under my skin than I realized, so when this came up, I couldn't think straight about it." Everyone regarded him expectantly, as if there would be more magic, as if flipping a coin into another reality was something you saw every week or two on the Ed Sullivan Show, between the acrobats and the jugglers who could balance ten spinning plates on ten tall sticks simultaneously. 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. He fished the sound-suppressor from a jacket pocket, drew the pistol from his shoulder holster, and began to screw the former to the latter. He misthreaded it at first because his hands had begun to shake. Her hands trembled as she attempted to fold her sister's clothes into the small suitcase. What should have been a simple task became a daunting challenge; the fabric seemed to come alive in her hands and slip through her fingers, resisting every attempt to organize it. When eventually she realized there was no reason to be neat, she tossed the garments into the bag without concern for wrinkling them. She put down her fork, glanced around the restaurant once more, and leaned across the table. Blushing brighter, she softly sang the

opening lines of "Someone to Watch over Me." She told them of Phimie's request that the baby be named Angel. "At the time, I assumed she wasn't able to think clearly because of the stroke." "Oh, yes, I recall it now. Polar bears eating tourists in Union Square, wolf packs prowling the Heights." Agnes called their two-car parade a Christmas caravan, which appealed to Barty's sense of magic and adventure. Repeatedly he turned in his seat and rose to his knees to look back at his uncle Edom, waving vigorously. The spectral singer didn't exhibit her blood-and-bone sisters' reluctance to pursue her man. His first year in San Francisco was an eventful one for the nation and the world. Winston Churchill, arguably the greatest man of the century thus far, died. The United States launched the first air strikes against North Vietnam, and Lyndon Johnson raised troop levels to 150,000 in that conflict. A Soviet cosmonaut was the first to take a space walk outside an orbiting craft. Race riots raged in Watts for five fiery days. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law. Sandy Koufax, a Los Angeles Dodger, pitched a perfect game, in which no hitter reached first base. T. S. Eliot died, and Junior purchased one of the poet's works through the Book-of-the-Month Club. Other famous people passed away: Stan Laurel, Nat King Cole, Le Corbusier, Albert Schweitzer, Somerset Maugham.... Indira Gandhi became the first woman prime minister of India, and the Beatles' inexplicable and annoying success rolled on and on. A new quarry, operated by the same company, lay a mile farther north. This was the old one, abandoned after decades of cutting. Unobtrusively, Junior followed the musician across the large front room, but by an indirect arc, using the babbling bourgeoisie for cover. Although, to her eyes, the natural world had an ominous cast this morning, she was also aware of its great beauty. She wanted Barty to store up every magnificent vista, every exquisite detail. She was a duplicitous bitch, too. After coming on to him, after teasing a reaction out of him, she had run off and gossiped about him as though he had instigated the seduction. Worse, to make herself feel important, she had told the police her skewed version, surely with much colorful embellishment. Every nerve in Junior's body was a tautly strung trigger wire. If something set him off, he might explode so violently that he'd blow himself into a psychiatric ward. Tom was an Oregon State Police detective, as far as Celestina knew, and she didn't understand what he was doing here. "Now you don't have to worry," Angel said, "about what happens to him if ever you're gone, Aunt Aggie. If he can do this, he can do anything, and you can rest easy." Judging by the smeariness of the letters and by the fact that some had run before they dried, the writing instrument hadn't been a felt-tip marker, as Vanadium first thought. A spattering of red droplets on the closed lid of the toilet and across the beige marble floor, all dry now, gave rise to a suspicion.

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