

POETRY III TOME 2 TWENTY SEVEN THOUSAND ASPIRATION PLANTS PART 65 TO 1

Friday brought Scamp again, all of Scamp, all day, every way, wall-to-wall Scamp, so on Saturday he hadn't enough energy to do more than shower. Somehow, Vanadium's malevolent spirit was also to blame for Junior's failure to find a new heart mate, in spite of all the women he'd been through. Undoubtedly, when Bartholomew was dead and Vanadium vanquished with him, romance and true love would bloom..on both sides of the property, the neighbors can't see, but some know, have always known, and have less interest.altogether by taking slow deep breaths, slow deep breaths, and by remembering that each of us has a right to be happy, to be fulfilled, to be free of fear..The girl smiled, as stunningly beautiful as he remembered her, but she was no longer fifteen, as she had been when last he'd seen her. Since her death in childbirth nearly three years ago, she'd matured and grown lovelier than ever..He turned the knob. The door eased inward, but he pushed it open only a fraction of an inch.."Well, the blood wasn't dark and acidic, so it didn't come from his stomach. It was bright and alkaline. It could have arisen in the esophagus, but most likely it's pharyngeal in origin."..The glittering room appeared unchanged. Even the piano player seemed to be the man who'd been at the keyboard back then, though his yellow-rose boutonniere and probably his tuxedo, as well, were new..He was about to lift the body out of the chair when he heard the car in the driveway. He might not have caught the sound of the engine so distinctly and so early if the stereo had not been in the process of changing albums..If magic explained the jacks on Friday evening, maybe it was the dark variety of magic. Maybe he shouldn't be endeavoring to summon, once more, whatever spirit was responsible for the four knaves..Entering the bedroom, Junior had expected to cast aside his pistol and draw a knife. But he was no longer in a mood for close-up work. Fortunately, he'd managed to hold on to the gun..Maria, puzzled but cooperative, left the room as instructed, and Barty removed the correct book from the stack on the table, without anyone's guidance. He sat in the armchair at his mother's side and began to read..Kathleen hadn't noticed Tom replace his glass on the table, over the quarter. When he lifted it to drain the last of the martini, two dimes and a nickel glittered on the tablecloth, where previously the quarter had been..Maria said nothing, working busily, but Agnes recognized that special silence in which difficult words were sought and laboriously stitched together..After all he'd suffered at Cain's hands, Tom Vanadium surprised himself by laughing at these colorful accounts of the wife killer's misadventures. Indeed, laughter had seemed disrespectful to the memories of Victoria Bressler and Naomi, and Vanadium had been torn between a desire to hear more and a feeling that finding any amusement value in a man like Cain would leave a stain on the soul that no amount of penance could scrub away..Junior thought he was alone, but just when he felt capable of summoning the energy to shift to a more comfortable position, he heard a man clear his throat. The phlegmy sound had come from beyond the..In the neatly ordered bedroom, he removed his shoes. Stretching out on the bed, he stared at the ceiling, feeling useless..When the pianist eventually launched into "Someone to Watch over Me," he didn't appear to be responding to a request, considering that a few other numbers had been played since the most recent gratuity. The tune was, after all, in his nightly repertoire.."You should call San Francisco police, have them put your place under surveillance and nail him if he turns up."..Yet that evening, when she'd accepted his proposal and asked if he wasn't frightened, he said, "Not anymore."..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?"..If he didn't find the Rolex and get back to his car before the reception ended, he'd forfeit his best chance of following Celestina to Bartholomew..Finally sleeping, he had anxiety dreams of being in a public rest room, overcome by urgent need, only to find that every stall was occupied by someone he had killed, all of them vengefully determined to deny him a chance for dignified relief..Even when he saw no cop cadaver, no ghoulish grin, no two-bit eyes, Junior was not immediately relieved. Warily, he circled the car, expecting to find the detective crouching and poised to spring.."Well, you ought to be," Grace said, taking her pies out to the Suburban that Wally had bought solely for this enterprise..Joey rested not under the stern watch of the cypresses, but near a California pepper tree. With its graceful, cascading boughs, it appeared to stand in meditation or in prayer..Neddy's face didn't appear to be as pale as it had been earlier. An undertone of gray, possibly blue, darkened the skin..Junior's agony might have made him howl like a cankered dog or might even have dropped him to his knees if he hadn't used the pain to fuel his anger. His knobby countenance was so sensitive that the light breeze flailed his skin as cruelly as if it had been a barbed lash. Empowered by rage even more beautiful than his countenance was monstrous, he crossed the parking lot, looking through car windows in the hope of seeing keys dangling from an ignition..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."..Whether making love or killing, he was never guided by bigotry. A private little joke with himself. But true.."I don't stumble. Not much, anyway." To the girl, Bartholomew said, "Angel, are you okay?"..which was tied a gift tag bearing a hand-printed message: With our compliments. Thanks for your business..Barty's math and reading skills exceeded those of most eighteen year-olds, but regardless of his brilliance, he was a few days shy of his third birthday. Prodigies were not necessarily as emotionally mature as they were intellectually developed, but Barty listened with sober attention, asked questions, and then sat in silence, staring at the book in his hands, with neither tears nor apparent fear..."Don't worry," Celestina told him, "after what we've seen this past week, we're still with you.".."Doesn't look so spooky to me." She turned the knave of spades so the baby could see it. "Does he scare you, Barty?"..Adding new growth to his forest of frustration, Tom got up from the study desk, fetched the newspaper from the front doorstep, and went to the kitchen to make his morning coffee. He boiled up a pot of strong brew and sat down at the knotty-pine table with a steaming mug full of black and sugarless solace..Renee Vivi spoke with a silken southern accent. Vivacious without being cloyingly coquettish, well-educated and well-read but never

pretentious, direct in her conversation without seeming either bold or opinionated, she was charming company..This was not the time to ponder the nature of the relationship between the treacherous Miss Bressler and Vanadium. Junior had a bloody trail to cover, and precious time was ticking away..Many nights, his sleep wasn't half as restful as he would have wished, for he often dreamed of walking in a wasteland. Sometimes, desert salt flats stretched in all directions, with here and there a monument of weather-gnarled rock, all baking under a merciless sun. Sometimes, the salt was snow, and the monuments of rock were ridges of ice, revealed in the hard glare of a cold sun. Regardless of the landscape, he walked slowly, though he had the desire and the energy to proceed faster. His frustration built until it was so intolerable that he woke, kicking in the tangled sheets, restless and edgy..In the tree, the girl grinned. "Even if he stays up there until dawn, he'll still be coming down in the dark, won't he. Oh, we'll be fine, Aunt Aggie..Reluctant to leave Joey's body with the oddly jumpy mortician, Jacob nevertheless crossed the porch of the Victorian style funeral home and left without glancing back. He walked one mile home, alert to passing traffic, especially cautious at intersections..During the cleaning, installation of new carpet, and painting that had followed the removal of the diarrhetic pig set loose by one of Cain's disgruntled girlfriends, the wife killer had spent a few nights in a hotel. Nolly took advantage of the opportunity to bring his associate James Hunnicolt--Jimmy Gadget-onto the premises to provide a customized, undetectable, exterior window-latch release..The slow-motion death ballet, in which Bonnie and Clyde were riddled with bullets, was the worst moment Junior had ever heard in a film. He didn't see more than a brief glimpse of it, because he sat with his eyes squeezed shut. Nine days previously, at Google's instructions, Junior had rented boxes at two mail-receiving services, using the name John Pinchbeck at one, Richard Gammoner at the other, and then he had supplied those addresses to the papermaker. These were the two identities for which Google ultimately provided elaborate and convincing documentation..Returning from his tests, he'd gotten into bed without stripping off the thin, hospital-issue robe. He was still wearing it over his pajamas..Some information she'd withheld from him: that the cancer might already have spread, that he might still die even after his eyes were removed-and that if it hadn't yet spread, it might soon do so..just as the smile curved to completion, however, an awful thing happened. The humiliation began with a loud gurgle in his gut..As he passed the living-room archway, he said, "Watch out for tidal waves, Uncle Jacob."..He hurried into the bedroom and switched on the nightstand lamp, without concern for whether the light might be seen from the street..As he headed toward the door, the detective said, "Don't forget your apple juice. Got to build some strength for the trial."..Remember the beauty of rage. Channel the anger and be a winner. Act now, think later..At the grave, they arrived with red and white roses. Agnes carried the red, and Barty brought the white..She stepped on a broken-off chair leg, lost her balance, and fell backward into the side of the bed..Embarrassed, Kathleen stopped singing, but to the other woman, Nolly said, "It is a lovely voice, isn't it? Haunting, I think."..pending storm gathered as if called forth by a curse cooked up from eye of newt, toe of frog, wool of bat, and tongue of dog..When Junior checked his Rolex, he realized that he didn't know how long he'd been sitting here since Ichabod had driven off in the Buick. Maybe one minute, maybe ten..He remembered standing in the cemetery, downhill from Seraphim's grave-although at the time he'd known only that it was a Negro being buried, not that it was his former lover-and thinking that the rains would over time carry the juices of the decomposing Negro corpse into the lower grave that contained Naomi's remains. Had that been a half-psycho moment on his part, a dim awareness that another and far more dangerous connection between dead Naomi and dead Seraphim had already been formed?.Deed flinched. "No reason. But I sure never did mean you or your husband any harm, Mrs. Lampion. And not your baby, either, not little Bartholomew."..No weekend had ever passed so quickly, and no midnight had ever brought with it such dread..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..Something was very wrong with her, and she tried to speak, but again her voice failed her..Junior was accustomed to having women seduce him. His good looks were a blessing of nature. His commitment to improving his mind made him interesting. Most important, from the books of Caesar Zedd, he had learned how to be irresistibly charming..hearts represented either a rival in love or a lover who would betray an enemy who would deeply wound the heart. The knave of diamonds was someone who would cause financial grief. The knave of clubs was someone who would wound with words: one who libeled or slandered, or who assaulted you with mean-spirited and unjust criticism..Tom Vanadium, on the other hand, was certain that Cain, having prepared for the possibility that something would go wrong during his assault on Celestina, wouldn't be easy to locate or to apprehend. In Vanadium's view, the maniac either had a bolt-hole waiting in the city or was already out of the SFPD's jurisdiction.."..called himself King Obadiah, Pharaoh of the Fantastic. He traveled all over the country playing nightclubs-"..Somehow, Agnes knew that in his younger days, Obadiah had been a stage magician. Artlessly, she drew him out on the subject..Vanadium couldn't know the whereabouts of the quarter. Besides, even when he'd swung the lunch tray over Junior's lap, the detective hadn't been close enough to pick the pocket of the robe.."You feel remorse, though," said Agnes. "I can see you do. And not just because of what happened to your hands."..Harrison and Grace had welcomed him in spite of the fact that a friend and parishioner had died on Thursday, leaving them both bereft and with church obligations..Taking her mother's advice to heart, Celestina sighed. "All right. Let's just pray they catch him. But if they don't ... two weeks, and then the rest of the plan, the way you said, Tom. Except that I can't tolerate two weeks-in a hotel, cooped up, afraid to go into the streets, no sun, no fresh air."..He tried to lean back as he dropped, with the hope that he would fall under her, providing cushion if they met with sidewalk instead of lawn..For all his brilliance, however, he was still a boy who loved to run and jump and tumble. Who swung from the backyard oak tree in a rope-and-tire swing. Who was thrilled when given a tricycle. Who giggled in delight while watching his uncle Jacob roll a shiny quarter end over-end across his knuckles and perform other simple coin tricks..This bond between the Lampion and White families, which

Grace had already heard about from Paul, came as news to Celestina as much as to Agnes. It inspired more reminiscences of lost husbands and the wistful wish that Joey and Harrison could have met. "I'll come by at eight o'clock for breakfast," Wally suggested. "We have to set a date." He had taken refuge in meditation, because he'd been frustrated by his continuing failure in the Bartholomew hunt and disturbed by his apparently paranormal experiences with quarters and with phone calls from the dead. More deeply disturbed than he had realized or had been able to admit. He wanted to fling it into the graveyard, send it spinning far into the darkness. Those who had just met her and those who were overly charmed by eccentricity called her Seraphim, her name complete. Her teachers, neighbors, and casual acquaintances called her Sera. Those who knew her best and loved her the most deeply--like her sister, Celestina called her Phimie. 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 Hackachaks had arrived post-grief, brought to the hospital by the news that Junior had expressed distaste at the prospect of profiting from his wife's tragic fall. They knew he had turned away Knacker, Hisscus and Nork. On the back of the watch case, however, were the incriminating words of a commemorative engraving: To Eenie/Love/Tammy Bean. Hers were the most feminine hands he'd ever seen. Slender, soft, prettier than Naomi's. He had no idea what she was talking about. Anyway, if Seraphim were still alive, she would be only nineteen now, too young to have graduated from Academy of Art College. Heedless of the rules of standard police procedure, Tom raced to the doorway, crossed the threshold, and saw Barty throw a can of soda at the shaved head and pocked face of a transformed Enoch Cain. As a homicide detective, Vanadium had a career-spanning ninety eight percent closure-and-conviction record on the cases he handled. Once convinced he had found the guilty party, he didn't rely solely on solid police work. He augmented the usual investigative procedures and techniques with his own brand of psychological warfare-sometimes subtle, sometimes not-which frequently encouraged the perpetrator to make mistakes that convicted him. Joey was standing just outside, gazing in at her. His blue eyes were seas where sorrow sailed. Rolling onto her side, fumbling in the dark, Celestina White snared the phone on the third ring. Her hello was also a yawn. Knacker or Hisscus, or Nork, was talking about an offering, as though Naomi were a goddess to whom they wished to present a penance of gold and jewels. Although Junior had not answered, Vanadium said, "Yes, I thought you heard it." "Maybe I won't have to try as hard as I think, because you make it so easy, Barty." The poor girl's blood pressure soared in spite of the medication. She suffered a violent seizure. She expected him to be gone, snatched by an accomplice who had come in the back way while Deed had distracted her at the front door. "This meeting of the North Pole Society of Not Evil Adventurers is officially closed." "It's not scary," said Mary. "I just step into another place for a little, and then back. It's just like going from one room to the next. I can't get stuck over there or anything." She looked at Barty. "You know how it is, Dad." Drawn by voices on the second floor, Tom took the stairs two at a time. A man and a boy. Barty and Cain. To the left in the hallway, and then to a room on the right. Of course, he had the Pinchbeck and Gammoner identities waiting, two escape hatches. But he didn't want to use them. He liked his life on Russian Hill, and he was loath to leave it. "Even in an infinite number of worlds," Wally objected, "there's no place I was that stupid." "I never spoke with God--Nor visited in Heaven--Yet certain am I of the spot--As if the Checks were given." They were married in September of that year, much later than even Grace White's wager date. As Grace's guess had been closer than her daughter's, however, Celestina paid with a month of kitchen duty. "Sure. There's lots of places where he didn't get shot, but there's places where he got shot and died, too." She fussed over him, took his temperature, and spooned two chips of ice into his parched mouth. Leaving, she gave Celestina a meaningful look and tapped her wristwatch. Although Junior continued to feel threatened, continued to trust his instinct in this matter, he didn't devote his every waking hour to the hunt. He had a life to enjoy, after all. Self-improvements to undertake, galleries to explore, women to pursue. "This will stay with you," Mary said. "It's shared sight from all the other yous in all the other places, but you won't have to make any effort to hold on to it. No headaches. No problems ever. Merry Christmas, Daddy." The singular beauty of San Francisco and the exquisite patina of its colorful history spoke to her heart and kindled in her such an unreasonable passion that she sometimes wondered, at least half seriously, if she had spent other lives here. Often, streets were wondrously familiar to her the first time that she set foot on them. Certain great houses, dating from the late 1800s and early 1900s, inspired her to imagine elegant parties thrown. Tom Vanadium was too unnerved by the Cain scare to be interested in the newspaper anymore. The strong black coffee, superb before, tasted bitter now. Incredibly, the thief left behind the most valuable items: the collection of hardcover first editions of Caesar Zedd's complete body of work. The box stood open, its contents having been explored in haste, but not a single volume was missing. He stepped to the front door, which was framed by curtained side lights. He drew one of the curtains aside and peered out. Agnes had lifted him to this perch. Now she smoothed his hair, straightened his shirt, and retied his loosened shoelaces, finding it even harder than she had expected to say what needed to be said. She thought she might require Dr. Chan's presence, after all. Perhaps Dr. Parkhurst, too, was disturbed by this fascistic and fanatical spew sampling, because he became brusque. "I have a few appointments to keep. By the time I make evening rounds, I expect Mr. Cain to. The ball of sodden Kleenex was gripped so tightly in Junior's left hand that had its carbon content been higher, it would have been compacted into a diamond. He saw Vanadium staring at his clenched fist and sharp white knuckles. He tried to ease up on the wad of Kleenex, but he wasn't able to relent." And even in her dreams, you're determined to be there for her. There was a boogeyman, I have no doubt you would kick his hairy ass, and he wouldn't come around again, ever. So you just go in this gallery. Worse, the vengeful and vicious bitch-or bastard, whatever-evidently had made up vile stories about him, which on a slow evening she'd shared with Neddy, with the bartender, with anyone who would listen. The staff of the lounge believed Junior was a dangerous sadist, No doubt she had concocted other lurid stories, as well, charging him

with everything from a degenerate interest in bodily wastes to the selfmutilation of his genitalia..He jammed the 9-mm pistol under his belt, grabbed Ichabod by the feet, and dragged him quickly toward the door to Apartment 1. Smears of blood brightened the pale limestone floor in the wake of the body..Upon arriving at the creche window, he had been in a buoyant mood. As he studied the quiet scene, however, he grew uneasy.. "The one I'm about to start is Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, which is maybe pretty scary. ".From out of the fog and darkness came the slap of running feet on bricks. He was sprinting toward the back of the house..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..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..Risking all, he turned his back on her and fled, and in spite of his expectations to the contrary, she allowed him to escape.. "Maybe it's not where the heart is," Wally corrected himself. "Maybe it's where the buffalo roam. ".When the ophthalmologist saw her misery, his kind face softened further, and his pity became palpable..Junior flung back the covers and came to his feet, but his knees proved weak, and he sat at once on the edge of the bed..mouth was turned down in half a frown. From the corner of her lips oozed a stream.Junior attended a New Year's Eve party with a nuclear-holocaust theme. Festivities were held in a mansion usually hung with cutting-edge art, but all the paintings had been replaced with poster-size blowups of photos of ruined Nagasaki and Hiroshima..Artificial eyes were on order. He would soon return to Newport Beach for a third fitting before implant. They weren't glass, as commonly believed, but thin plastic shells that fit neatly behind the eyelids in the cavities left after surgery. On the inner surface of the transparent artificial cornea, the artificial iris would be skillfully hand-painted, and movement of the ocular prosthesis could be achieved by attaching the eye-moving muscles to the conjunctiva..He'd been invited to a Christmas Eve celebration with a satanic theme, but he hadn't intended to go. The party was not being thrown by real Satanists, which might have been interesting, but by a group of young artists, all nonbelievers, who shared a wry sense of humor..While Jacob had shuffled, Agnes had taken little Barty from his bassinet into her arms. She was surprised and discomfited to discover that the baby was to have his fortune told first.. "When you didn't answer the doorbell, man, I just knew what must have happened," Chicane told Junior..She shook her head. "No way back." She pointed to the sketch pad on the floor. "I pushed him there. ".He had nothing against men or women of color. Live and let live. One earth, one people. All of that.. "I'll never forget it," Dr. Salk promised. With his attention still on Perri's pictures, he said, "But I'm afraid you give me far too much credit. I'm no superman. I didn't do the work alone. So many dedicated people were involved. ".Heart racing, but reminding himself that strength and wisdom arose from a calm mind, Junior stood in the center of the small kitchen, slowly turning to study every angle of the room..Instead, she saw Phimie reborn. She saw, as well, a child endangered. Somewhere out there was a rapist capable of extreme cruelty and violence, a man who would--if Phimie was correct--react unpredictably if ever he learned of his.Sunday morning, when Agnes returned from church, Edom and Jacob joined her for lunch. During the afternoon, Jacob helped her bake seven pies for Monday delivery..Dr. Walter Lipscomb's fingers were longer and more supple than the pianist's, and he had the presence of a great symphony conductor for whom a raised baton was superfluous, who commanded attention by the mere fact of his entry. A tower of authority and self-possession, he said to the becalmed Neddy, "I am this child's physician. She was born underweight and held in hospital to cure an ear infection. You sound as if you have an incipient case of bronchitis that will manifest in twenty-four hours, and I'm sure you wouldn't want to be responsible for this baby being endangered by viral disease. ".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..They came to her, picked up the luggage that she had put down, and Edom said, "I'll drive. ".For a while he enjoyed being challenged to figure the number of seconds elapsed since a particular historical event. Given the date, he did the calculations in his head, providing a correct answer in as little as twenty seconds, rarely taking more than a minute..Livor mortis had already set in, blood draining to the lowest points of her body, leaving the fronts of her bare legs, one side of each bare arm, and her face ghastly pale..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..Three years ago, in St. Mary's Hospital, with Phimie's warning fresh in her mind, Celestina swore that she would be ready when the beast came, but here he came, and she was as not ready as possible. Time passes, the perception of a threat fades, life becomes busier, you work your butt off as a waitress, you graduate college, your little girl grows to be so vital, so vivid, so alive that you know she just has to live forever, and after all, you are the daughter of a minister, a believer in the power of compassion, in the Prince of Peace, confident that the meek shall inherit the earth, so in three long years, you don't buy a gun, nor do you take any training in self-defense, and somehow you forget that the meek who will one day inherit the earth are those who forego aggression but are not those so pathetically meek that they won't even defend themselves, because a failure to resist evil is a sin, and the willful refusal to defend your life is the mortal sin of passive suicide, and the failure to protect a little yellow M&M girl will surely buy you a ticket to Hell on the same express train on which the slave traders rode to their own eternal enslavement, on which the masters of Dachau and old Joe Stalin traveled from power to punishment, so here, now, as the beast throws himself against the door, as he shoves aside the barricade, with what precious little time you have

left, fight. Junior shoved through the blocked door, into the bedroom, and the bitch hit him with a chair. A small, slat-back side chair with a tie-on seat cushion. She swung it like a baseball bat, and there must have been some Jackie Robinson blood in the White family line, because she had the power to knock a fastball from Brooklyn to the Bronx..Naked, dripping, he roamed the apartment. As on the night of December 13, the voice seemed to arise from thin air: ahead of him, then behind him, to the right, but now to the left..Dr. Leland Daines, Celestina's internist, arrived directly from dinner at the Ritz-Carlton. Although Dairies had receding white hair and a seamed face, time had been kind enough to make him look not so much old as dignified. Long in practice, he was nevertheless free of arrogance, soft-spoken and with a bottomless supply of patience..Copyright (c) 1997 by Ursula K. Le Guin..He might suspect, but he couldn't know. He would but would be left with at least a shred of doubt about Junior's

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