

THE STORY OF BETHLEHEM STEEL

Maria said, "It is ... the only thing ... I can do for him now, for you. I be nobody, not. As it turned out, Seraphim was a virgin. This thrilled Junior. He was inflamed also by the thought of ravishing her in her parents' house ... an by the kinky fact that their house was a parsonage..He could have killed Vanadium while the cop slept; however, that would be far less satisfying than engaging in a little psychological warfare and leaving the devious bastard alive to suffer remorse when two more children died under his watch..He nodded. "The effect not only comes before a cause in this case, but completely without a cause. The effect is staying dry in the rain, but the cause--supposedly walking in a dryer world--never occurs. Only the idea of it." "Evidence suggests Vanadium killed a woman here, a nurse at the hospital. Lover's quarrel, perhaps. He set her house on fire with her body in it, to cover his tracks, but he must have realized they would still finger him, so he lit out." Into Barty's darkness came light that he had not sought. He saw his smiling Mary on his lap as she lowered her hands from his temples, saw the faces of his family, the table set with Christmas decorations and many candles flickering..Glancing at his wristwatch with alarm, Edom bolted up from his chair. "Look at the time! Agnes gave me a lot to do, and here I am rattling on about earthquakes and cyclones." When the two vertical panes of the casement window were still less than seven inches apart, they stuttered. The mechanism produced a dismal grinding rasp that sounded like a guttural pronunciation of the problem itself, c-c-c-corrosion, and seized up.. "What room has Mrs. Lombardi been moved to?" she asked. "I'd like to ... to see her before I go."..obsessed with humanity's sorry penchant for destroying itself either by intention or ineptitude--491 suffocated and burned alive on an evening meant for champagne and revelry..This wasn't a new sensation. He had experienced it before. In the night just passed, when he awakened from an unremembered dream and saw the bright quarter dancing across Vanadium's knuckles.."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." When the long table was laden and the wine poured, when everyone but Mary settled into chairs, Angel said, "My daughter tells me she wants to make a short presentation before I say grace. I don't know what it is, but she assures me it doesn't involve singing, dancing, or reading any of her poetry." I."There must be something important I'm supposed to do here that I don't need to do everywhere I am, something I'll do better if I'm blind." At worst, Vanadium might begin to wonder if Junior had a link to Seraphim, might uncover the physical-therapy connection, and in his paranoia, might erroneously conclude that Junior had something to do with her traffic accident. That was nuts, of course, but the detective was evidently not a rational man..Saturday morning, Paul made himself useful by assisting Grace with food preparation and by setting out the plates, flatware, and glasses on the dining-room sideboard..And when she finally looked directly at him, blinked at him, her lashes flicking off a spray of fine droplets, Agnes saw that Barty was dry. Not a single jewel of rain glimmered in his thick dark hair or on the baby-smooth planes of his face. His shirt and sweater were as dry as if they had just been taken off a hanger and from a dresser drawer. A few drops darkened the legs of the boy's khaki pants--but Agnes realized this was water that had dripped from her arm as she'd reached across him to adjust the vent..Mrs. Lombardi had no visitors. She was alone in the world, her two children and her husband having passed away long ago..Leave the lamps burning, the door unlocked. A murderer, frantic to vanish while the victim remained undiscovered, wouldn't be worried about the cost of electricity or about protecting against burglary..By his twelfth month, he was toilet-trained, and every time that he had the need to use his colorful little bathroom chair, he proudly and repeatedly announced to everyone, "Barty potty."..sky grew sullen in the early twilight, and the city once more arrayed itself in the red gesso and gold leaf that had indirectly illuminated Celestina's apartment ceiling the previous night.."Hasn't the sheriff's department already reached a determination of accidental death?" Parkhurst asked. "They're good men, good cops, every last one of them," said Vanadiuin, "and if they've got more pity in them than I do, that's a virtue, not a shortcoming. What could Mr. Cain have taken to make himself vomit?" "Those were Rowena's affectionate names for the boys when they were babies. Her private nonsense names for them, because she said they were like two beautiful little elves and ought to have elfin names." As the storm failed to dampen Joey, so the rotating red-and-white beacons on the surrounding police vehicles did not touch him. The..As always, curious about how others lived-or, in this case, bad lived-Junior explored the house, poking in drawers and closets. For a widower, Bartholomew Prosser was neat and well-organized.."No. Charming," she disagreed. "There's a meaning to it. Everything has a meaning, dear." "Oh, Wally, I am worried. I'm deeply worried. My mama is going to buy herself a first-class ticket to the fiery pit if she doesn't stop this prevaricatin'." As his drying tears became stiff on his cheeks, Junior decided that he would most likely have to kill Vanadium to be rid of him and fully safe. No problem. And in spite of his exquisite sensitivity, he was convinced that wasting the detective would not trigger in him another bout of vomiting. If anything, he might pee his pants in sheer delight..In November, Edom asked Maria Gonzalez to dinner and a movie. Although he was only six years older than Maria, both agreed that this was a date between friends, not really a boy-girl thing..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..MONEY FOR THE DEAD. The decomposing flesh of a beloved wife and an unborn baby transmuted into a fortune was an achievement that put to shame the alchemists' dreams of turning lead to gold.. "Maria brought that from Mexico," Barty said. "She thought it was pretty funny. So do I. It's a hoot. Mom says it isn't really blasphemous, because it wasn't meant to be by the people who made it, and because Jesus would want you to have cookies, and, besides, it reminds us to be thankful for all the good things we get." Seeing her, Joey leaped up from his armchair again. He managed to hold on to his book this time, but he stumbled into the footstool and nearly lost his balance..Neddy talked when Celestina paused for breath, talked over her when she didn't pause, heard only his own mellifluous voice and was pleased to conduct both sides of the conversation, wearing her down as surely as-though far more rapidly than-the sand-filled winds of Egypt diminished the pharaohs' pyramids. He talked through the first polite "Excuse me" of the tall man who stepped into the open doorway behind him, through the second and third, and then with an abruptness that was as miraculous as any cure at the shrine of Lourdes, he fell silent when the visitor put a hand on his shoulder, eased him gently aside, and entered the apartment..As the paramedic shoved the gurney across the step-notched bumper, its collapsible legs scissored down. Agnes was rolled headfirst into the ambulance..Inevitably, man of the arts that he was, his slouching brought him to several galleries. In the window of the fourth, not one of his favorite establishments, he saw an eight-by-ten photograph of Seraphim White..Animal instinct told Junior that the business with the quarter in the diner and now these quarters in his living room were related to his failure to find Bartholomew, Seraphim White's bastard child. He couldn't logically explain the connection; but as Zedd teaches, animal instinct is the only unalloyed truth we will ever know..In fifty years, until Angel, Tom had found no other like himself and now a second in little more than a week. "I can't do what you did." Having been a volunteer instructor of English to twenty adult students over the years, having taught Maria Elena Gonzalez to speak impeccable English without a significant accent, Agnes was little needed as a teacher by her son. Even more than other children, he asked why with numbing regularity, why this and why that, but never the same question twice; and as often as not, he already knew the answer that he sought from her and was only confirming the accuracy of his deduction. He was such an effective autodidact, he schooled himself better than any college of professors that could have been assigned to him..Junior intended to pack only a single bag, leaving most of his clothes behind. He could afford a fine new wardrobe..As Barty stepped across the threshold into the upstairs hall, Miss Pixie Lee said, "You're sweet, Barty..He heard her explain that the title of the exhibition had been inspired by one of her father's sermons, which aired on a nationally syndicated weekly radio program more than three years ago. This wasn't a religious program, per se, but rather one concerned with a search for meaning in life; it usually broadcast interviews with contemporary philosophers as well as speeches by them, but from time to time featured a clergyman. Her father's sermon received the greatest response from listeners of anything aired on the program in twenty years, and three weeks later, it was rerun by popular demand..Finally: "A trial lawyer, whether specializing in criminal or civil matters, is like an actor, Mr. Cain. He must believe deeply in his role, in the truth of his portrayal, if he's to be convincing. I always believe in the innocence of my clients in order to achieve the best possible settlement for them." Deciding that he didn't need an exit line, Junior headed toward the service road and his Suburban.. "Oh," Celestina White replied, "yes, every day. I'm currently engaged on an entire series of works inspired by Bartholomew." The musician's bird-sharp gaze grew dull. His pink tongue protruded from his mouth, like a half-eaten worm..The detective shrugged. "The girl might've had her baby at a third rate hospital, one with poor control of patients' records and a less professional staff. Or the kid might have been placed for adoption through some baby brokerage in it strictly for the money. Then there would've been opportunities to learn something. But as soon as I discovered it was St. Mary's, I knew we were screwed." "Well, we have earthquakes here," Jolene said, "but back east they have all those hurricanes." The night was in flight, however, and he had a lot to do before it swooped straight into morning..That night her sleep was deeper than it had been in a long time, deep as she had expected sleep would never be again, and she was not plagued by any dreams at all, not a dream of children suffering, nor of tumbling in a car along a rain-washed street, nor of thousands of windblown dead leaves rattling-hissing along a deserted street and every leaf in fact a jack of spades..If that was the bright side, however, it was a piss-poor bright side (no pun intended), because he was still stuck in this men's room with a corpse, and he couldn't stay here for the rest of his life, surviving on tap water and paper-towel sandwiches but he couldn't leave the body to be found, either, because the police would be all over the gallery before the reception ended, before he had a chance to follow Celestina home..Perhaps he would not have leaped along this chain of conclusions if he'd not been an admirer of Caesar Zedd, for Zedd teaches that too often society encourages us to dismiss certain insights as illogical, even when in fact these insights arise from animal instinct and are the closest thing to unalloyed truth we will ever know..Too late. The parsonage was fully engulfed. With luck, they would save the church..Celestina looked out a kitchen window and saw Agnes in the Lampion driveway, where the three-vehicle caravan was assembled. She was loading her station wagon..Off the hard surfaces of cabinets, refrigerator, and ovens, the twin reports crashed and rattled. The windowpanes briefly thrummed..Finally wimping out completely, Parkhurst left the room. The heavy door sighed softly shut, silencing the squeak of rubber-soled shoes, the swish of starched uniforms, and other noises made by the busy nurses in the corridor..Her name was Victoria Bressler, and she was an attractive blonde. She would never have been serious competition For Naomi, because Naomi had been singularly stunning, but Naomi, after all, was gone..Eleven days had passed since Wally stopped three bullets. He still had a little residual weakness in his arms, grew tired more easily than before he'd wound up on the wrong end of a pistol, complained of stiffness in his muscles, and used a cane to keep his full weight off his wounded leg. The rest of the medical care he required, as well as physical rehabilitation, could be had in Bright Beach as well as in San Francisco. By March, he should be back to normal, assuming that

the definition of normal included massive scars and an internal hollow space where once his spleen had been..After arranging to have the gallery deliver his acquisition, Junior stopped in a nearby diner for lunch. The place specialized in superb heartland food: meat loaf, fried chicken, macaroni and cheese..At home, after phoning her folks, Celestina made a ham sandwich. She ate a quarter of it. Then two bites of a chocolate croissant. One spoonful of butter pecan ice cream. Everything was without taste, more bland than Phimie's hospital food, and it cloyed in her throat..Opening his eyes, still not daring to meet Victoria's gaze, Junior knew she had registered and properly interpreted his response to her seductive spooning. She had frozen, the utensil in midair, and her breath had caught in her throat. She was thrilled..HAVING COMPLETED HER English lesson, Maria Elena Gonzalez went home with a plastic shopping bag full of precisely damaged clothes and a smaller, paper bag containing cherry muffins for her two girls..While Angel continued her relentless interrogation of Paul Damascus, Tom joined her mother in front of the large window at the end of the room farthest from the dinner table.. "Bullpoo might not be what they say, but it's the worst that we say. And in fact, in this house, bulldoody is preferred." Beside her, the passenger's door barked and shrieked as though alive as though suffering, and these sounds were uncannily like the cries of torment that only Agnes could hear in the haunted chambers of her heart..Raise high the candlestick. In spite of the masking music, breathe shallowly and through the mouth. Remain poised, ready..By now, all here assembled knew Celestina well enough that Tom's final example raised an affectionate laugh from the group.. "No member of the society ever violates a secret confidence," Agnes assured him..For a moment, Junior drew a blank on Renee. Reluctantly, he trolled the past and fished up the painful memory: the gorgeous transvestite in the Chanel suit, heir or heiress to an industrial-valve fortune..The end of his quest was near, so near, the right Bartholomew almost within 'mullet range. He was furious with Neddy Gnathic for possibly screwing this up..This was not the same card he'd found at his bedside, under two dimes and a nickel, on the night following Naomi's funeral. He had torn that one and had thrown it away..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..The weather was good, so he went for a walk, though he crossed the street repeatedly to avoid passing newspaper-vending machines.. "There is no king in Earthsea," the young man said, stern and righteous, "In my master's service, then," Hound amended, patient..Outside, he turned to look at the display windows. He expected to see the candlestick, supernaturally apparent only from this side of the glass, but it wasn't there. Throughout the autumn, Junior read book after book about ghosts, poltergeists, haunted houses, ghost ships, s?ances, spirit rapping, spirit manifestation, spirit writing, spirit recording, trance speaking, conjuration, exorcism, astral projection, Ouija-board revelation, and needlepoint..Posing as a counselor with Catholic Family Services, he phoned each listed Bartholomew, with a question related to his or her recent adoption. Those who expressed bafflement, and who claimed not to have adopted a child, were generally stricken from his list.. "Now this. But even if your dad had cooperated with me, nothing would have changed. Since Phimie never revealed his name, I wouldn't have been able to go after Cain any differently or more effectively."..1969 through 1973: the Year of the Rooster, chased by the Year of the Dog, followed fast by the Pig, faster by the Rat, with the Ox passing in a stampede pace. Eisenhower dead. Armstrong, Collins, Aldrin on the moon: one giant step on soil untouched by war. Hot pants, plane hijackings, psychedelic art. Sharon Tate and friends murdered by Manson's girls seven days before Woodstock, the Age of Aquarius stillborn, but the death unrecognized for years. McCartney split, Beatles dissolved. Earthquake in Los Angeles, Truman dead, Vietnam sliding into chaos, riots in Ireland, a new war in the Middle East, Watergate..He hadn't paid close attention to those patrons seated at the bar behind him. Now, he turned in his chair to study them.. "-and when I get up off the street, my clothes are a mess, and I've got this face." Tom proved to be more useful than either a cop or a priest to Pie Lady Services, when he discovered a talent for money management that protected their funds from twelve percent inflation and in fact brought them a handsome return in real terms.. "It's chilly and foggy and late, and there might be villains afoot at this hour," he intoned with mock gravity. "The two of you are Lipscomb women now, or soon will be, and Lipscomb women never go unescorted through the dangerous urban night." He sprang to his feet, or maybe only staggered up, depending on whether his image of himself right now was pulp or real, and surveyed the scene, looking for the bandaged man. A few neighbors crossed the lawn toward Grace, and others approached along the street. But the killer was gone..Apparently Maria wished that she'd brought a rosary to dinner. With the fingers of her right hand, she pinched the knuckles of her left, one after the other, as if they were beads.. "Last I noticed, his car was out. Let me check." Sparky put down his phone and went to look in the garage. When he returned, he said, "Nope. Still out. When he parties, he usually parties late." She looked around the room. "He's invisible like the Cheshire cat?" "His whole world is as real as ours, but we can't see it, and people in his world can't see us. There're millions and millions of worlds all here in the same place and invisible to one another, where we keep getting chance after chance to live a good life and do the right thing." Junior was glad for the chance to eavesdrop, not only because he hoped to learn the nature and depth of Vanadium's suspicions, but also because he was curious-and concerned-about the cause of the disgusting and embarrassing episode that had landed him here..In Oregon, standing at Junior Cain's bedside, turning a quarter across the knuckles of his left hand, Thomas Vanadium asks about the name that his suspect had spoken in the grip of a nightmare..a time, from the carafe on the nightstand. She spooned the ice into Junior's mouth not with the businesslike Junior knew that he looked as guilty as any man had ever looked this side of the first apple and the perfect garden. The sweating, the spasms of violent tremors, the defensive note that he could not keep out of his voice, the inability to look anyone directly in the eyes for more than a few seconds-all were telltales that none of these professionals would overlook. He desperately needed to get a grip on himself, but he couldn't find a handle..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..And in time, the surgeon did appear, bearing the good news that neither of the malignancies had spread to the orbit and optic nerve, but he had no greater miracle to report..Given a child-size harmonica, he extemporized simplified versions of songs he heard on the radio. The Beatles' "All You Need Is Love." The Box Tops' "The Letter." Stevie Wonder's "I Was Made to Love Her." After hearing a tune once, Barty could play a recognizable rendition..Out of a sphinx face, Obadiah conjured a smile that lifted the point of his white goatee when he turned his head to look at Edom. "Ah ... so long ago," he murmured, as though speaking to himself. "So long ago ... but I remember now." He winked at Edom..With all twelve fragments destroyed, the curse should have been lifted from little Bartholomew: the threat of the unknown, violent enemy who was represented by the four knaves. Somewhere in the world, an evil man existed who would one day have killed Barty, but now his journey through life would take him elsewhere. Eleven saints had been given twelve shares of responsibility for lifting this curse..His artificial eyes were almost a month old. He'd been through surgery to have the eye-moving muscles attached to the conjunctiva, and everybody told him that the look and movement were absolutely real. In fact, they had told him this so often, in the first week or two, that he became suspicious and figured that his new eyes were totally out of control and spinning like pinwheels..In time, his hand tightened feebly on hers. And a while after that hopeful sign, his eyelids fluttered, opened..Into the autumn of 1967, Junior reviewed hundreds of thousands of phone listings, and occasionally he located a rare Bartholomew. In San Rafael or Marinwood. In Greenbrae or San Anselmo. Located and investigated and cleared them of any connection with Seraphim White's bastard baby.."Don't get me started on cyclones!" Edom hurried through the house and out to the station wagon, to fetch the boxes of groceries.."No. But I'm sure as can be, the kid is better off undiscovered by the likes of him." After Bellini left, Tom questioned Celestina extensively, with an emphasis on Phimie's rape. Although the subject was painful, she was grateful for the questions. Without this distraction, in spite of her well of hope, she might have allowed her imagination to fashion terror after terror, until Wally had died a hundred times over in her mind..Even Angel, mere wisp of a cherubim, couldn't squeeze through a seven-inch opening..She heard the door, and when she opened her eyes, the bay had already slid out of the car, into the downpour again. She called him back, but he kept going..In spite of the thousands of hours that Paul was afoot, he seldom thought about why he walked. He met people along the way who asked, and he had answers for them, but he never knew if any answer might be the truth..Junior was not immune to traditional logic, but in this case he recognized the superior wisdom of Zedd's philosophy. His dread of Bartholomew and his gut-level animosity toward a child he'd never met defied all reason and exceeded simple paranoia; therefore, it must be purest, infallible animal instinct..Fully clothed, she lay atop the bedspread. She intended to listen to a little classical music before brushing her teeth...He spat on his right thumb, scrubbed the thumb against one of the dried drips on the floor, rubbed thumb and forefinger together, and brought the freshened spoor to his nose. He smelled blood..In a stolen black Dodge Charger 440 Magnum, Junior Cain shot out of Spruce Hills on as straight a trajectory to Eugene as the winding roads of southern Oregon would allow, staying off Interstate 5, where the policing was more aggressive..Nearly two weeks ago, in the Spruce Hills hospital, Junior had been drawn by some strange magnetism to the viewing window at the neonatal-care unit. There, transfixed by the newborns, he sank into a slough of fear that threatened to undo him completely. By some sixth sense, he had realized that the mysterious Bartholomew had something to do with babies..Quick introductions were made in the process of moving from the porch to the foyer, and Agnes said, "Come on back to the kitchen, I'm baking pies." 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..Hope, on many wings, hovered all around the physician, but he was afraid to let it roost.."No, I don't see it," Chicane repeated. "There's no benefit to a meditation marathon. Twenty minutes is enough, man. Half an hour at the most. You relied on your internal clock, didn't you?" At sunset, the boy stood in the backyard, gazing up through the branches of the giant oak as an orange sky darkened to coral, to red, to purple, to indigo..He wanted the most expensive box for Joey; but Joey, a modest and prudent man, would have disapproved. Instead, he selected a handsome but not ornate casket just above the median price..A pathologically suspicious cop, aware of Junior's acute.; emesis following Naomi's death, might imagine a connection between this epic bout of diarrhea and Victoria's murder, and Vanadium's disappearance Here was an avenue of speculation that he did not want to encourage..This colored person's grave, however, was uphill of Naomi's. Over time, as the body decomposed up there, its juices would mix with the soil. When rain saturated the ground, subsurface drainage would carry those juices steadily downslope, until they seeped into Naomi's grave 'let mingled with her remains. This seemed highly inappropriate to Junior..Junior picked up his pace, pushing through the crowd, repeatedly glancing back, and although he caught only quick squints of the dead cop's face, he could tell that something was terribly wrong with it. Never a candidate for matinee-idol status, Vanadium looked markedly worse than before. The port-wine birthmark still pooled around his right eye. His features were not merely pan-flat and plain, as they had been before, but were ... distorted..Otter was reluctant to answer. He had to like Hound, but didn't have to trust him. "Shape-changing," he mumbled at last..After undressing for the night, he sat on the edge of the bed for a while, rubbing the coin between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, brooding about Thomas Vanadium. He tried rolling it across his knuckles; he dropped it repeatedly..As a matter of principle, Junior considered firing the slit-mouthed troll on the spot, but then Magusson said, "You shouldn't be bothered any further by Detective Vanadium." During the past three years, he'd suffered much because of these sisters, including most recently the humiliation in the Dumpster with the dead musician, Celestina's pencil-necked friend with a propensity for postmortem licking. The memory of that horror flared so vividly-every

grotesque detail condensed into one intense and devastating flash of recollection-that Junior's bladder suddenly felt swollen and full, although he had taken a long satisfying leak in an alleyway across the street from the restaurant at which the postcard-painting poseur had enjoyed a leisurely dinner with Ichabod..Agnes dropped to one knee before the boy and held him gently by the shoulders. "Let me look." 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..Friday morning, Junior resigned his position as a physical therapist at the rehabilitation hospital. He expected to be able to live well off interest and dividends for the rest of his life, because his tastes were modest.."I'm really not sad, Mom. I'm not. I don't like it this way, being blind. It's ... hard." His small voice, musical as are the voices of most children, touching in its innocence, spun a fragile thread of melody in the dark, and seemed too sweet to be speaking of these bitter things. "Real hard. But being sad won't help. Being sad won't make me see again." Behind his masking hands, the physician let out a thin sound, as though he were trying to pull from his heart an anguish that was embedded like a burr with countless sharp, hooked thorns..After clicking off the kitchen lights, the hall light, and the light in the foyer, he pulled shut the front door, leaving the house dark and silent behind him..Not one day in anyone's life, so her father taught, is an uneventful day, no day without profound meaning, no matter how dull and boring it might seem, no matter whether you are a seamstress or a queen, a shoeshine boy or a movie star, a renowned philosopher or a Downs syndrome child. Because in every day of your life, there are opportunities to perform little kindnesses for others, both by conscious acts of will and unconscious example. Each smallest act of kindness-even just words of hope when they are needed, the remembrance of a birthday, a compliment that engenders a smile-reverberates across great distances and spans of time, affecting lives unknown to the one whose generous spirit was the source of this good echo, because kindness is passed on and grows each time it's passed, until a simple courtesy becomes an act of selfless courage years later and far away. Likewise, each small meanness, each thoughtless expression of hatred, each envious and bitter act, regardless of how petty, can inspire others, and is therefore the seed that ultimately produces evil fruit, poisoning people whom you have never met and never will. All human lives are so profoundly and intricately entwined-those dead, those living, those generations yet to come-that the fate of all is the fate of each, and the hope of humanity rests in every heart and in every pair of hands. Therefore, after every failure, we are obliged to strive again for success, and when faced with the end of one thing, we must build something new and better in the ashes, just as from pain and grief, we must weave hope, for each of us is a thread critical to the strength-to the very survival-of the human tapestry. Every hour in every life contains such often-unrecognized potential to affect the world that the great days for which we, in our dissatisfaction, so often yearn are already with us; all great days and thrilling possibilities are combined always in this momentous day.."Well, it still is to me. But what I've been wondering ... when you talk about all the ways things are ... is there someplace where you don't have this problem with your eyes?" Evidently, the hero was accustomed to encounters of this nature. He rose, pulled out the unused fourth chair. "Please sit with us." He didn't want to lean inside and peer over the front seat. He had no weapon. He would be unbalanced, vulnerable..Angel didn't want to go, maybe because the boogeyman schemed beneath the bed in some of her nightmares..The Bones of the Earth.Matching her fierce attention with a sudden intensity of his own, Joey said, "Bartholomew." Fortifying herself with more coffee, Jolene said, "Edom, you were going to tell us how Joey's coping with fatherhood." Fragments of the broken wineglass crunched under his shoes as he crossed the small kitchen to the dinette. He opened the bottle of vodka and put it on the table in front of the dead woman..He nervously fingered the fabric of his slacks, outlining the quarter in his pocket. Still there..Grace knew it, too, because she went limp with misery in his arms, ceased struggling against him..When Junior cut open a grapefruit for breakfast, he didn't find a quarter in it.."Maybe he's a character I saw in a movie or read in a novel. I'm a member of the Book-of-the-Month Club. I'm always reading one thing or another. I don't remember a character named B-Bartholomew, but maybe I read the book years ago." He realized that like so many women, Seraphim wanted it, asked for it-yet had no place in her self-image to accommodate the truth that she was sexually aggressive. She wanted to think of herself as shy, demure, virginal, as innocent as a minister's daughter ought to be which meant that to get what she wanted, she required Junior to be a brute. He was happy to oblige..Enigmatic as ever on this subject, he continued: "I'm probably not blind more places than I am. Yeah, sure, I'd rather be me in one of the other places where my eyes are good, but this is the me I am. And you know what?""Most tornadoes stay on the ground twenty miles or less," Edom explained, "but this one kept its funnel to the earth for two hundred nineteen miles! And it was one mile wide. Everything in its path--torn, smashed to bits. Houses, factories, churches, schools-all pulverized. Murphysboro, Illinois, was wiped off the map, erased, hundreds killed in that one town." If Cain had been attracted to one woman by her looks, surely he would be attracted to the other. And perhaps the sisters shared a quality other than beauty that drew Cain with even greater power. Innocence, perhaps, or goodness: both foods for a demon.

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