

C MODERN THE CHALLENGE OF TOTALITARIANISM AND THE REMAKING OF THE

Celestina gave birth to Seraphim in '69, saw her painting on the cover of American Artist in '70, and gave birth to Harrison in '72..The five tales in this book explore or extend the world established by the first four Earthsea novels. Each is a story in its own right, but they will profit by being read after, not before, the novels.. "Mr. Magusson, you once told me that if Detective Vanadium ever bothered me again, you'd have his choke chain yanked. Well, I think you need to talk to someone about that." Maria set aside two cards before turning another faceup. This was also an ace of hearts..find reason to celebrate every development in life, including the cruelest catastrophe, by discovering the bright side to even the darkest hour..Although Thomas Vanadium was unconscious, perhaps even dead, and though both nailhead-gray eyes were closed, Junior knew those eyes were watching him, watching through the lids.. "And, of course, you'll need to make arrangements for the body," said Dr. Lipscomb. "Sister Josephina will provide you with a room, a phone, privacy, whatever you need, and for however long you need." Fortunately, he'd kept neither cash nor his checkbook in the suitcase. With Zedd intact, his losses were tolerable..Remember the beauty of rage. Channel the anger and be a winner. Act now, think later..Of course, there was no possibility whatsoever of 'drawing four identical jacks from combined decks that had been exquisitely manipulated and meticulously arranged by a master mechanic-unless the effect of the jacks was intended, which in this case it was not. The odds couldn't be calculated because it could never happen. No element of chance was involved here. The cards in that stack should have been as predictably ordered-to Jacob-as were the numbered pages in a book..He wanted Celestina to sit in her seat and use her lap belt, but she insisted on cuddling next to him, as if she were a high-school girl and he were her teenage beau..After poring through enough sensational newspaper accounts to be convinced that the curse-casting reverend was undeniably dead, Junior had acquired four pieces of surprising information. Three were of vital importance to him..A quick survey of the lavatory floor. The musician hadn't left anything behind, neither a popped button nor crimson petals from his boutonniere..She could have used the chair. Sitting, however, she wouldn't be able to see his face..He paused, giving them a chance to ask the obvious question-and then smiled at their reticence..Although the piano was at some distance and the restaurant was a little noisy, Kathleen recognized the tune at once. She looked up from her veal, her eyes full of merriment..Agnes had the craziest notion that he was counting them, when at is age, Of course, he would have no concept of numbers..Too late, Paul thought of the one more thing he had wanted to say. Too late, he said it anyway, "God bless you." By Thursday, September 23, due to Junior's accident and surgery, the draft board-which had reinstated his I -A status after he'd lost the exemption that had come with his former job as a rehabilitation therapist-agreed to schedule a new physical examination in December..Angel returned to the table for apple juice and to announce, "They got a cookie-jar Jesus!". Needlepoint, meditation, and even sex had not recently provided him with significant relief of tension. The paintings of Sklent and the works of Zedd were packed in the van, where he couldn't at the moment take solace from them..He went in a pretense of blindness, gripping Angel's arm, but he missed nothing, and etched every detail in his memory, against the need of them in the coming dark..By now, Junior realized that he had been locked in a meditative trance for at least eighteen hours. He had settled into the lotus position at five o'clock Monday afternoon-and Bob Chicane had shown up or their regular instruction session at eleven Tuesday morning..Then the hero got in the sedan with his friends, and they drove away into the sun-splashed morning..Because he hadn't heard Victoria Bressler speak in so long-and then only on two occasions-and because the woman on the phone had spoken so softly, Junior couldn't tell whether or not their voices were one and the same..When she went upstairs at 2:10 in the morning, she found the boy fast asleep in the soft lamplight, Tunnel in the Sky at his side..Besides, being a future-focused guy who believed that the past was a burden best shed, he never made an effort to nurture memories. Sentimental wallowing in nostalgia had none of the appeal for him that it had for most people..the social worker and her family. Husband, wife, daughter, son. The little girl smiled shyly through braces. The boy was impish.. "Great guy. Do you have an address for her, a way maybe I could get in touch about her brother?" He turned from the cowering girl and studied the boy, who stood a few steps inside the room, holding a can of soda in each hand. The artificial eyes were convincing, but they didn't possess the knowing look that so troubled him in the strange girl..Those words, in a vertiginous spiral, spooled through the memory tapes in Junior's mind, as clear and powerfully affecting-and every bit as alarming-as the memory flash of the ordeal in the Dumpster. He couldn't recall where he'd heard them, who had spoken them, but revelation trembled tantalizingly along the rim of his mind..As he headed toward the door, the detective said, "Don't forget your apple juice. Got to build some strength for the trial." Surprised, Tom leaned in his chair to look more directly at the blind boy. On the telephone, Celestina had mentioned only that Barty was a prodigy, which didn't quite explain the aptness of the oak-tree metaphor..Bent like an ape, he humped the musician north along the alley. The original cobblestone pavement had been coated with blacktop, but in places the modem material had cracked and worn away, providing a treacherously uneven surface made even more treacherous by a skin of moisture shed by the fog. He stumbled and slipped repeatedly, but he used his anger to keep his balance and be a winner, until he found a distant enough dumpster..He halted, made a quick calculation, turned, and moved toward where the back door ought to be. He found it half open..Turning in circles, he tipped his head back, presenting his face to the streaming sky, laughing..During this same period, having subscribed to the opera, Junior attended a performance of Wagner's The Ring of the Nibelung..The night seemed to be longer than a Martian month. Agnes dozed, fitfully, waking more than once, sweaty and shaking, from a dream in which her son was taken from her in pieces: first his eyes, then his hands, then his ears, his legs.....The kitchen door stood open and full of light, but he missed it by two feet. He felt along the back wall of the house, discovered the door casing and then

the opening, probed with the cane for the threshold, and stepped into the doorway..just as Sinatra broke into song again, Junior thought he heard a footstep on the wood floor of the hallway, and the creak of a board. The music masked the sounds of the visitor's approach if, indeed, he was approaching..In a swirl of London Fog and righteous indignation, Neddy turned his back on Junior and drifted away through the nibbling, nattering crowd..Although first-rate, the surgical team wasn't able to reattach the badly torn extremity. Tissue damage was too extensive to permit delicate bone, nerve, and blood-vessel repair..The kiss was lovely, long and easy, full of restrained passion that boded well for nights to come in the marriage bed..No one could put him in prison because of his dreams. "I can't remember. Those are the worst, when you're not able to remember them-don't you think? They're always so silly when you can recall the details. When you draw a blank ... they seem more threatening." "I thought there was a burglar," Junior groaned, but he knew better than to spit out his entire story at once, for then he would appear to be reciting a script..Music played within. An up-tempo number. Possibly swing. He couldn't quite identify the tune..This Monday afternoon, he longed for the escape and solace of half-hour pulp adventure. But he decided that he ought to at last compose the letter he'd been meaning to write for at least ten days..The funeral director and his assistant were the only people, other than Junior, remaining at the grave. They asked if they might lower the casket or if he would rather that they wait until he was gone..Tom had no idea who Perri might be, but something in the way Grace asked the question and the way she regarded Paul suggested that she knew something about Perri that had won her deep respect and admiration..A pang of regret pierced her, that her boy's precocity should deny him this fine fantasy, as her morose father had denied it to her. "He's real," she asserted..Tom Vanadium liked this man at once. Cop instinct told him that Damascus was honest and reliable. Priestly insight suggested even more impressive qualities..Returning his attention to his own shoes, Jacob said, "So ... what am I supposed to do about this?" "I really am sorry about this," Junior said, regretting the necessity to deny her the right to look good at her own funeral, "but it's got to appear to be a crime of passion." "My little girl," she said, and belatedly she realized that this might not be a policeman, after all, but someone trying to determine if she and Angel were alone in the apartment..The next thing he knew, he was at the kitchen sink, turning off the water, which he couldn't remember having turned on. He appeared to have washed the bloody candlestick-it was clean-but he had no recollection of this bit of housekeeping..His conscience as a craftsman would not let him fault the carpentry of the ship in any way; but his conscience as a wizard told him he could put a hex on her, a curse woven right into her beams and hull. Surely that was using the secret art to a good end? For harm, yes, but only to harm the harmful. He did not talk to his teachers about it. If he was doing wrong, it was none of their fault and they would know nothing about it. He thought about it for a long time, working out how to do it, making the spell very carefully. It was the reversal of a finding charm: a losing charm, he called it to himself. The ship would float, and handle well, and steer, but she would never steer quite true..He had met her in a university adult-extension course titled "Increasing Self-Esteem Through Controlled Screaming." Participants were taught to identify harmful repressed emotions and dissipate them through the authentic vocal imitations of a variety of animals..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..He rode up to the third of five floors in the service elevator, which other tenants were permitted to use only when moving in or moving out, or when taking delivery of large items of furniture. Another elevator, at the front of the building, was too public to suit his purposes..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..The third-floor apartment directly over Enoch Cain's unit had been leased by Simon Magusson, through his corporation, ever since it became available in March of '66, twenty-two months ago..At the conclusion of the ceremony, he relinquished his secondhand sight. He would live in darkness until Easter of 1986, though every minute of the day was brightened by his wife..He felt lightheaded again. But this time he knew why. Not an oncoming case of the flu. He was straining against the cocoon of his life to date, straining to be born in a new and better form. He had been a pupa, encased in a chrysalis of fear and confusion, but now he was an imago, a fully evolved butterfly, because he had used the power of his beautiful rage to improve himself. When Bartholomew was dead, Junior Cain would at last spread his wings and fly..The fully evolved man never has to rely on the gods of fortune, Zedd tells us, because he makes his luck with such reliability that he can spit in the faces of the gods with impunity..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.. "Two weeks to go. I'm not going to miss that. I've cleared all appointments off my calendar." .to prayer instead, asking for the wisdom to understand why this was happening to her and for the strength to cope with her pain and with her loss..were a favorite pair when he was puttering around the house on weekends. "Oh," he said, "that dog." Truly, the time spent helping Agnes had given her uncountable new subjects for paintings and had begun to bring to her work a new depth that excited her. "When you pour out your pockets into the pockets of others," Agnes had once said, "you just wind up richer in the morning than you were the night before." Kaitlin had the piercing voice and talent for vituperation that marked her as a member of the Hackachak tribe, but for now she was content to leave the vocal assault to her parents. The stare with which she drilled Junior, however, if brought to bear on a promising geological formation, would core the earth and strike oil in minutes..Phimie's stubbornly high blood pressure, the presence of protein in her urine, and other symptoms indicated her preeclampsia wasn't a recent development; she was at increased risk of eclampsia. Her hypertension was gradually coming under control-but only by resort to more aggressive drug therapy than the physician preferred to use..AT ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL, where Wally had brought Angel into this world three years ago, he was now fighting for his life, for a chance to see the girl grow and to be the father she needed. He'd been taken to surgery already when Celestina and Angel arrived a

few minutes behind the ambulance.. "Stop it, stop it!" Agnes, only ten years old, slender and shaking, but wild with righteousness, until now held in thrall by her own fear, by the memory of all the beatings that she herself has taken. She screams at their father and strikes him with a book she's brought from the house. The Bible. She strikes their father with the Bible, from which he's read to them every night of their lives. He drops the roses, tears the holy book out of Agnes's hands, and pitches it across the yard. He rakes up a handful of the scattered roses, intending to make his son resume this dinner of sin, but here comes Agnes once more, the Bible recovered, brandishing it at him, and now she says what all of them know to be true but what none of them has ever dared say, what even Agnes herself will never again dare to say after this day, not while the old man lives, but she dares to say it now, holding the Bible toward him, so he can see the gold-embossed cross upon the imitation-leather cover. "Murderer," Agnes says. "Murderer." And Edom knows that they're all as good as dead now, that their father will slaughter them right here, right this minute, in his rage. "Murderer," she says accusingly, behind the shield of the Bible, and she doesn't mean that he is killing Edom, but that he killed their mother, that they heard him in the night, three years before, heard the short but awful struggle, and know that what happened was no accident. Roses fall from his skinned and pierced hands, a flurry of petals yellow and petals red. He rises and takes a step toward Agnes, his dripping fists crimson with his blood and with Edom's. Agnes doesn't back away, but thrusts the book toward him, and scintillant sunlight caresses the cross. Instead of tearing the book out of her hands again, their father stalks away, into the house, surely to return with club or cleaver ... yet they will see no more of him this day. Then Agnes-with tweezers for the thorns, with a basin full of warm water and a washcloth, with iodine and Neosporin and bandages-kneels beside him in the yard. Jacob, too, comes forth from the dark crawlspace under the porch, having watched in terror from behind the latticework skirt. He is shaking, crying, flushed with embarrassment because he didn't intervene, although he was wise to hide, for the disciplinary beating of one twin usually leads to the pointless beating of the other. Agnes gradually settles Jacob by involving him in the treatment of his brother's wounds, and to Edom she says, often thereafter, "I love your roses, Edom. I love your roses. God loves your roses, Edom." Overhead, agitated wings quiet to a soft flutter, and the shrieking crows grow silent. The air pools as still and heavy as the water in a hidden lagoon within a secret glade, in the perfect garden of the unfallen.... Jacob feared what men could do with clubs, knives, guns, bombs, with their bare hands, but he was most preoccupied by the unintended death that humanity brought upon itself with its devices, machines, and structures meant to improve the quality of life.. Three and a half days had passed since he'd pushed his wife off the tower, and in that time he'd had no real fun. He was gregarious by nature, never one to turn down a party invitation. He liked to laugh, to love, to live, but he couldn't enjoy life when he must remember at all times to appear bereft and to keep sorrow in his voice.. Routinely she dreamed of Joey. Not nightmares. No blood, no reliving of the horror. In her dreams, she was on a picnic with Joey or at a carnival with him. Walking a beach. Watching a movie. A warmth pervaded these scenes, an aura of companionship, love. Except eventually she always glanced away from Joey, and when she looked again, he was gone, and she knew that he was gone forever.. At best, Vanadium might decide Junior had come here to learn what other funeral his nemesis had attended-which was, in fact, the true motivation. But this made it clear that Junior feared him and was striving to stay one step ahead of him. Innocent men didn't go to such length. As far as the fruitcake cop was concerned, Junior might as well have painted I killed Naomi on his forehead.. A table candle glowed in an amber glass. To Nolly, in this glimmering light, Kathleen's face was more radiant than the flame.. THE RAIN THAT HAD threatened to wash out the morning funeral finally rinsed the afternoon, but by nightfall the Oregon sky was clean and dry. From horizon to horizon spread an infinity of icy stars, and at the center of them hung a bright sickle moon as silver as steel.. Still relishing her little pretense of rejection, Victoria did not touch the rose. "What kind of woman do you think I am?" As hard of head as she was hard of heart, Victoria had not sustained serious brain damage, only a concussion.. As Lipscomb picked up the freshened baby, Grace said, "That was as effective as any minister's wife could've been with an impossible parishioner-and, oh, do I wish we could sometimes be that pointed." Vanadium owned so few clothes that the two bags had sufficient capacity to accommodate half the contents of the closet and dresser.. With her rock of faith under her, and breathing hope as much as ever, she was nevertheless unable to be as strong for him as she wanted to be. She felt her face go soft, her mouth tremble, and when she tried to repress a sob, it burst from her with wretched force.. 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.. WEDNESDAY, fully two days after delivering honey-raisin pear pies with Agnes, Edom worked up the nerve to visit Jacob.. This comment left Tom nonplussed. He could only imagine that Jacob had known someone who died in that crash-yet the twin's tone of voice and his expression seemed to suggest that a world without the Bakersfield train wreck would be a less convivial place than one that included it.. The reverend couldn't easily escape church obligations on such short notice, but Grace wanted to be with her daughters. Phimie, however, pleaded that only Celestina accompany her.. This didn't work for Junior. Strangely, when he focused on a mental image of any fruit-apple, peach, banana-his thoughts drifted to sex. He became aroused and had no hope of clearing his mind.. Surprising himself more than anyone, Edom also presented his collection to the university. Out with tornadoes, hurricanes, tidal waves, earthquakes, and volcanoes; bring in the roses. He lightly renovated his small apartment, painted it in brighter colors, and throughout the autumn, he stocked his bookshelves with volumes on horticulture, excitedly planning a substantial expansion of the rosarium come spring.. Hound meant well in sending the young man to Samory, but he did not understand the quality of Otter's will. Nor did Otter himself. He was too used to obeying others to see that in fact he had always followed his own bent, and too young to believe that anything he did could kill him.. Rena was cheerful, short, and solid. Her waist

measurement must have been two-thirds her height, and she favored floral dresses that emphasized her girth. With a German accent and in a voice that always seemed about to dissolve in a great gale of mirth, she said, "Madchen lieb, you look like a Christmas candle to me." Rising, Celestina said to Tom, "Last Tuesday night, we had to switch on the lawn sprinklers. This will be much better." Returning the newborn to the nun, Celestina asked for the use of a phone, and for privacy. The kids insisted on knowing what was meant by the line about the chicken, and this led to the laying of a coopful of Why-did-the chicken-cross-the-road jokes, which Edom and Jacob had memorized in childhood as an act of rebellion against their humorless father. Sitting on the edge of the bed, taking his hand, she stared at his sweet little bow of a mouth, whereas before she would have met his eyes. "Tell me." Nolly finally disturbed the quiet: "Well, sir ... you're quite a psychologist." The Finder. For the first few bites of crab in a light cornmeal crust, Nolly suspended their conversation. Bliss. In the execution, he was likewise scrupulous, for he didn't want the grownups to see what Angel saw; he preferred they believe it was sleight of hand-or magic. After the usual moves, he briefly closed his right hand around the coin, then with a snap of his wrist, flung it at Angel, simultaneously distracting with flourishes aplenty. Startled, he snatched his hand back. The object fell, ringing faintly against the pavement. The customers were in a mood, most of them grumbling about their ailments. Others complained about the dreary weather, the increasing number of kids zooming along sidewalks on these damn new skateboards, the recent tax increases, and the New York Jets paying Joe Namath the kingly sum of \$427,000 a year to play football, which some saw as a sign that the country was money-crazy and going to Hell. playing cards, Agnes fixated on Deed's blond bangs, which curled across his broad brow. 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. This philosophy had worked for him previously, but forgetting the aftermath was more difficult when the aftermath was your own poor, torn, severed toe. Your own poor, torn, severed toe was infinitely more difficult to ignore than a busload of dead nuns. Missing windshield. Considering that the space was pinched by the crumpled roof, however, and in light of Agnes's pregnancy and imminent second-stage labor, the severe contortions involved in this extraction would be too dangerous. At the end of their second date, however, Frieda invited Junior up to her apartment, to see her Lientery collection and, no doubt, to take a ride on the Cain ecstasy machine. She owned seven canvases by the painter, received as partial payment of his PR bills. Although weak, he was no longer in danger of spewing bile and blood like a harpooned whale. The siege had passed. Shortly after six o'clock, Saturday morning, she stirred from a fretful dream and saw Barty sitting up in bed, reading. She was so hot that the ice melted quickly. A thin trickle slid down her throat, but not enough to take the Sahara out of her voice when she said, "More." As red as Angel had been for her evening outing, she was that yellow for retirement to bed in her own home. Two-piece yellow jersey pajamas. Yellow socks. At the girl's request, Celestina had tied a soft yellow bow in her mass of springy hair. Meanwhile, she could offer him only a few pieces of ice, which he was forbidden to chew. "Let them melt in your mouth." Instead of immediately killing anyone, Junior returned to his apartment on the afternoon of December 29, and went to bed, fully clothed. To calm down. To think about focus. A supply of ammunition lined the bottom of all the dresser and bureau drawers, concealed by underwear and other garments. Junior appropriated a box of 9-mm. cartridges. He wiped the steering wheel and every surface that he might have touched during the drive from Victoria's to the detective's place, where he'd acquired the gardening gloves that he still wore. He got out of the car and, with the door open, wiped the exterior handle. To Perri's bed, a journey of only a few steps, but farther than unwanted Rome. The carpet seeming to pull at his feet, to suck like mud under his shoes. The air as thick as liquid in his resistant to his progress. As though Amelia Earhart, the long-lost aviatrix, had reached out of her twilight zone and snared the two bits, no tumbling coin glinted in the air above the desk. Lipscomb women gladly obey the wishes of Lipscomb men-unless they disagree, of course, or don't disagree but are just feeling mulish. To Nolly, Kathleen said, "This is why I married you. To be around talk like this." "Miss White," he continued, still facing the window, "not long before you arrived in surgery this morning, your sister died on the table. We hadn't delivered the baby yet, and perhaps couldn't have done so, by cesarean, in time to prevent brain damage, so for both the sake of the mother and child, heroic efforts were made to bring Phimie back and ensure continued circulation to the fetus until we could extract it." Junior was reminded of a scene in an old movie, something Naomi wanted to watch, a love story set during the Black Plague: a horse drawn cart rolling through the medieval streets of London or Paris, the driver ringing a hand bell and crying, "Bring out your dead, bring out your dead!" If contemporary San Francisco had provided such a convenient service, he wouldn't have had to toss Neddy Gnathic in the Dumpster in the first place. Calling after her, Agnes said, "No, wait, sugarpie. He should be coming down right now, before it gets dark." Nolly raised his martini glass in a toast. "To Kathleen Klerkle Wulfstan, dentist and associate detective." The three of them, gathered around her in the quick, held fast to her, as if Death couldn't take what they refused to release. MONDAY MORNING, far above Joe Lampion's grave, the translucent blue California sky shed a rain of light so pure and clear that the world seemed to have been washed clean of all its stains. "No, I didn't see him," Junior reminded the attorney. "I just assumed, when this harassment started here." The prickly-bur ghosts of two little children didn't concern him. At worst, they were spiritual gnats. As she clambered through the open door into Celestina's lap, the girl said, "Uncle Wally gave me an Oreo." He woke several times that night, instantly alert for a ghostly serenade, but he heard no otherworldly crooning. The roses filling the countersunk vases in the comers of Joey's gravestone were not Edom-grown, but they were Edom-bought. He had visited the florist himself, personally selecting each bloom from the inventory in the cooler; but he didn't have the courage to accompany Agnes and Barty to the grave. Junior forgot all about seduction. "And she--what?--She adopted her sister's baby?" The big trees on Vanadium's property also stood bare, allowing a relatively unobstructed view of the house. The back of the residence as dark, but a soft light

warmed two windows at the front..He knocked the pepper shaker on its side, and then with a groan put it upright once more.."Maybe because we didn't want to be called witches," said Obadiah with a smile, "and give folks one more reason to hang us.".Agnes thought crazily of their early dates and the first years of their marriage. They had occasionally gone to the drive-in, sitting close.,than the crows. Tumbled on the grass, in fragments: the broken trophy for the prize rose, the symbol of his sinful.The nurse raised her eyes from Agnes to this other person. "Yes a chip of ice would be all right.".Focus, Caesar Zedd teaches, is the sole quality that separates millionaires from the flea-ridden, sore-pocked, urine-soaked winos who five in cardboard boxes and discuss vintages of Ripple with their pet rats. Millionaires have it, winos don't. Likewise, nothing but the ability to focus separates an Olympic athlete from a cripple who lost his legs in a car wreck. The athlete has focus, and the cripple doesn't. After all, Zedd notes, if the cripple had it, he would have been a better driver, an Olympic athlete, and a millionaire..At dawn, he and his mother went down to the sea, to watch the rolling waves filigreed with foam and gilded with the molten gold of morning sun, to see the kiting gulls and to scatter bread that brought the winged multitudes to earth..Pain again, but not a mere contraction. Such an excruciation, unendurable. The hobnailed wheels ground through her once more, as though she were being broken on a medieval torture device..of fists, hard blows, and his father's heavy breathing as he deals out the punishment. Edom himself lies face down in."I'll teach her," Wally said, moving past them to the apartment door, fishing a ring of keys out of his coat pocket..The need for relief was tremendous, inexpressible, and the urge to urinate was irresistible, and yet he could not let go. For more than eighteen hours, his natural urinary process had been overridden by concentrative meditation. Now the golden vault was locked tight. Every time that he strained for release, a new and more hideous cramp savaged him. He felt as if Lake Mead filled his distended bladder, while Boulder Dam had been erected in his urethra..Sitting forward in his armchair, Obadiah lowered his hands to his knees, and in thoughtful silence, he stared at them..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..Neighbors might not be home. And by the time he knocked, asked to use the phone, dialed ... Too great a waste of time..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.

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