

## I DEN STORA REGRAFEN

As was true of the entire house, the bedroom was immaculate. The wood floor gleamed as though polished by hand. A simple white chenille spread conformed to the bed as smoothly and tautly as the top blanket tucked around a soldier's barracks bunk..And somewhere Selma Galloway, their neighbor, was not a spinster but a married woman with grandchildren..To the waiter, Nolly was Nolly, Kathleen was Mrs. Wulfstan, and Tom Vanadium was sir--though not the usual perfunctorily polite sir, but sir with deferential emphasis. Tom was unknown to the waiter, but his shattered face gave him gravitas; besides, he possessed a quality, quite separate from carriage and demeanor and attitude, an ineffable something, that inspired respect and even trust..The lid of the cooler wasn't on as tight as it ought to have been. From around one edge slipped a thin and sinuous stream of smoke. Something on fire..Lord, listen to me-but I've really got to know if you can, if you are, how you feel, whether you feel, I mean, whether you think you could feel--".I Junior didn't believe in ghosts, anyway. He believed in flesh and bone, stone and mortar, money and power, himself and the future..of fists, hard blows, and his father's heavy breathing as he deals out the punishment. Edom himself lies face down in.almost recoiled in disgust. She held the newborn so that its mother could look into.In the park, rocketing along on the roller coaster, Barty had an experience, a reaction to more than the canted turns and steep plunges. He grew excited in much the way that Agnes had seen him excited when grasping a new and arcane mathematical theory. At the end of the ride, he wanted to get back on immediately, and so they did. There are no long waits for the blind at amusement parks: always to the head of the line. Agnes rode twice again with him, and then Paul twice, and finally Angel accompanied him three times. This roller-coaster obsession wasn't about thrills or even amusement. His exuberance gave way to a thoughtful silence, especially after a seagull flew within inches of his face, feathers thrumming, startling him, on the next-to-last rollick along the tracks. Thereafter, the park held little interest for him, and all he would say was that he'd thought of a new way to feel things-by which he meant all the ways things are-a fresh angle of approach to that mystery..At home, Agnes had no appetite, but she fixed Barty a cheese sandwich, spooned potato salad into a dish, added a bag of corn chips and a Coke, and served this late dinner on a tray, in his room, where he was already in bed and reading Tunnel in the Sky..He hadn't the slightest doubt that eventually he could romance Renee into marriage, regardless of her wealth and sophistication. He could shape women to his desire as easily as Sklent could paint his brilliant visions on canvas, easier than Wroth Griskin could cast bronze into disturbing works of art..More likely than not, he would cross Bartholomew's path when he least expected, not as a consequence of his searching, but in the normal course of a (lay. If that happened, he must be prepared to eliminate the threat immediately, by any means available to him..A mutual interest in ballroom dancing had resulted in their introduction when each needed a new partner for a fox-trot and swing competition. Nolly had started taking lessons five years before he had met Kathleen..She started to get up from the chair behind the desk, but he encouraged her to stay seated..An hour later, when Barty decided he wanted a soda, he switched off the book and asked Angel if she would like something to drink..I suspect," Tom said, "that any job you set your mind to, you'd be as good as you are at teeth."..Recently, Wally administered to Angel a set of apperception tests for three-year-olds, and the results indicated that she might not ever be a math whiz or a verbal gymnast, but that she might be highly talented in other ways. Her appreciation of color, her innate understanding of the derivation of secondary hues from the primary colors, her sense of spatial relationships, and her recognition of basic geometric forms regardless of the angle at which they were presented were all far beyond what was exhibited by other kids her age. Wally said she was visually, rather than verbally, gifted, that she would undoubtedly exhibit increasing precociousness in matters artistic, that she might follow Celestina's career path, and that she might even prove to be a prodigy..Assuming this criticism was amusing hyperbole, Junior laughed, but Sklent squinted those virtually colorless eyes, and Junior's laugh withered in his throat. "Well, maybe that's how it'll work out," he said, wanting to be on Sklent's good side, but he was at once sorry he'd spoken those words in front of witnesses..Frowning, Angel studied the tasty strip of meat pinched between her fingers, reevaluating everything she thought she knew about the source of bacon..Elsewhere in the cemetery, about 150 yards away, another interment service-with a much larger group of mourners-had begun prior to this one for Naomi. Now it was over, and the people were dispersing to their cars..The unmatched suite of bedroom furniture, cheap and scarred, might have been purchased at a thrift shop. A double bed and one nightstand. A small dresser..White as a Viking winter, these magnificent choppers, and as straight as the kernel rows in the corn on Odin's high table. Superb occlusal surfaces. Exquisite incisor ledges. Bicuspid of textbook formation nestled in perfect alignment between molars and canines..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..Golden lamplight gilded the front windows downstairs. He would sit with Victoria on the living-room sofa, sipping wine as they got to know each other. She might tell him to call her Vicky, and maybe he'd ask her to call him Eenie, the affectionate name Naomi had given him when he wouldn't tolerate Enoch. Soon, they would be necking like two crazy kids. Junior would disrobe her on the sofa, caressing her smooth pliant body, her skin buttery in the lamplight, and then he would carry her, naked, to the dark bedroom upstairs..He hadn't lied to his mother. She assumed that by some quantum magic, he had regained his sight permanently, and that this came with no cost. He merely allowed her to go to her rest with the comforting misapprehension that her son had been freed from darkness..Unfortunately, Caesar Zedd had not written a self-help book on how to commit homicide and escape the consequences

thereof, and as before, Junior was entirely on his own..Just as the man turned away, Junior got a glimpse of what he wore under a London Fog raincoat. Between the lapels of the coat: a white shirt with a wing collar, a black bow tie, the suggestion of black-satin lapels like those on a tuxedo jacket..And the mills of capitalism provide them. Supply meets demand. Fantasy becomes a commodity, an industry..Somewhere, he does. Daddy died here, but he didn't die every place I am. it's lonely for me here, but not lonely for me everywhere..Junior couldn't see the lights of the nearest other houses. Either those structures were screened by trees or the neighbors weren't home.. "If he gets back within the next hour, better ring me at his place so I can scoot." In August, he developed an interest in meditation. He began with concentrative meditation-the form called meditation "with seed"--in which you must close your eyes, mentally focus on a visualized object, and clear your mind of all else.. "Why should I be afraid of a stumbling blind boy?" asked Junior again. But this time the words issued from him in a different tone of voice, because suddenly he sensed something knowing in this boy's attitude, if not in his manufactured eyes, a quality similar to what the girl exhibited..Gore made him sick. He refused to attend movies that dwelt on the consequences of violence, and he had even less of a stomach for blood in real life..The diminutive mortician spoke a few comforting words instead of commenting on the dental history of the deceased, and when he put a consoling hand on Jacob's shoulder, Jacob cringed from his touch..Barty never cried. In the hospital neonatal unit, he'd been a marvel to the nurses, because when the other newborns were squalling in chorus, Barty had been unfailingly serene.. "That won't do it." wickedly sharp silver scimitar suspended by a filament more fragile than a human hair.. "That's right," Celestina told Wally. "This isn't wagering. What's wrong with you?" Junior examined the music collection. The policeman's taste ran to big band music and vocalists from the swing era..Because drugs foil all efforts at self-improvement, Junior had no use for the cocaine and acid. He didn't dare sell them to recover his money; even five thousand dollars wasn't worth risking arrest. Instead, he gave the pharmaceuticals to a group of young boys playing basketball in a schoolyard, and wished them a Merry Christmas. The twenty-fourth of December began with rain, but the storm moved south soon after dawn. Sunshine tinselled the city, and the streets filled with last-minute holiday shoppers..In his masterpiece *The Beauty of Rage: Channel Your Anger and Be a Winner*, Zedd explains that every fully evolved man is able to take anger at one person or thing and instantly redirect it to any new person or thing, using it to achieve dominance, control, or any goal he seeks. Anger should not be an emotion that gradually arises again at each new justifiable cause, but should be held in the heart and nurtured, under control but sustained, so that the full white-hot power of it can be instantly tapped as needed, whether or not there has been provocation..Celestina had a delayed reaction to Barty's name. An odd look came over her. "Barty? Short for ... Bartholomew?" After following the blacktop fifty feet, Junior headed downhill through the close-cropped grass, between the tombstones. He switched on his flashlight and trod cautiously, for the ground sloped unevenly and, in places, remained soggy and slippery from the rain..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.. "Oh, it doesn't mean you're nervous in that sense. Nervous in this case means psychologically induced. Grief, Enoch. brief and shock and horror-they can have profound physical effects." Her special son, walking where the rain wasn't, had made all things seem possible.. "Bartholomew, huh?" asked Wally as he piloted them through banks of earthbound clouds..Since the cops believed that Junior accidentally shot himself while searching for a nonexistent burglar, he was already in their book as an idiot. If he tried to explain how Vanadium had tormented him with the quarter, and how a quarter turned up, of all places, in his cheeseburger, they would figure him for a hopeless hysteric..Unable to speak, the girl kissed her and then gently placed her head against Agnes's breast, capturing forever in memory the pure sound of her heart..This thought startled Agnes, disturbed her-yet, inexplicably, it also poured a measure of warm comfort into her chilled heart.. "We don't sell no pizza," Angel said, because lately they had received a few calls for a new pizzeria with a phone number one digit different from theirs..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.. 'She didn't reach into your thoughts and pluck out the name Rowena. Or Beezil or Feezil.' Besides, he wasn't on the Greenbaum Gallery customer list and didn't have an invitation..From a cutlery drawer, Tom withdrew a knife. The largest and sharpest blade in the small collection..Dropped cartridges gleamed on the carpet. Stoop to snatch them up? No. That was asking for a skull-cracking blow.. "You should call San Francisco police, have them put your place under surveillance and nail him if he turns up." Designed by Linda Lockowitz Text set in Adobe Jenson First edition ACBGIKJHFDB.This ended any hope of romance, and he was disappointed. A less self-controlled man might have seized a nearby bronze vase-fashioned to resemble dinosaur stool-and stuffed her into it or vice versa.. "Brush your teeth, too," Celestina said, leaning against the jamb in the open doorway..To the phone, the police. No dial tone. Pointless to rattle the disconnect switch. The line had been cut.. "So entertaining, I felt I should have paid for those seats. When the third machine starts whizzing coins at him, he bolts like a kid running a graveyard at midnight on a dare." Nolly laughed, remembering..Rena laughed. "Oh, but true! And not just a garden. I'm a field of flowers!" She let go of her skirt, which shimmered like cascades of falling petals. "So tonight will be a famous night, Celestina." Instead of staring at Barty directly, he watched Angel as she studied the eyeless boy. She had exhibited no horror at the concave slackness of his closed lids, and when one lid fluttered up to reveal the dark hollow socket, she hadn't shown any revulsion. Now she moved closer to Barty's chair, and when she touched his cheek, just below his missing left eye, the boy didn't flinch in surprise.. "Nature has no maternal instincts," Edom said quietly but with conviction. "To think otherwise is sheer sentimentality at its worst. Nature is our enemy. She's a vicious killer." The candlestick was gone. The pedestal on which it had stood now held a Griskin bronze so devastatingly brilliant that one quick look at it would give nightmares to nuns and assassins alike..This was one of many things about Agnes that

amazed Edom. If he had dared to make a list of all the qualities that he admired in her, he would have sunk into despair at the consideration of how much better she had coped with adversity than either he or Jacob..The wedding reception-big, noisy, and joyous-spread across the three properties without fences. His mother's name was so often mentioned, her presence so strongly felt in all the lives that she had touched, that sometimes it seemed that she was actually there with them..Neddy, dressed for work but overdressed for his own funeral, slumped against the wall, head bowed, chin on his chest. His pale hands were splayed at his sides, as though he were trying to strike chords from the floor tiles..Skinny, pasty-faced, chattering sissy," he hissed, still so furious with Neddy that he wanted to jam the pianist's head in the toilet even though he was dead. Jam his head in and stomp on him. Stomp him into the bowl. Flush and flush, stomp and stomp..Agnes found this turn of events amazing, amusing, ironic-and a little sad. She would have dearly loved to teach the boy to read and write, to see his knowledge and competence slowly flower under her care. Although she fully supported Barty's exploration of his gifts, and although she was proud of his astounding achievements, she felt that his swift advancement was robbing her of some of the shared joy of his childhood, even though he remained in so many ways a child..She stood just inside the front door of the apartment, admiring herself in a full-length mirror, waiting patiently for Celestina, who was packing dolls, coloring books, tablets, and a large collection of crayons into a zippered satchel..Bright though they were at all times, Barty's Tiffany eyes shone brighter now with beams of North Pole magic. "Maybe I do feel it."..In the cab, pulling into traffic, the driver said, "The mister tells me you're the star of the show tonight.".."I didn't know her well. She didn't hang out or party much--especially after the baby."..By lunch, he had turned the final page, and he was so full of the tale that he seemed to have no room for food. While his mother kept reminding him to eat, he regaled her with the details of John Thomas Stuart's great adventures with Lummo, as though every word that Heinlein had written were not science fiction, but truth..The boy wasn't translucent, as his father's ghost had been on that drizzly January night almost three years ago. The same drowned light of this gray afternoon that revealed the gravestones and the dripping..Already another contraction racked her, so intense that the pain was not limited to her lower back and abdomen, but seared the length of her spine, like an electric current leaping vertebra to vertebra. Her breath pinched in her chest as though her lungs had collapsed..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."..For more than two weeks, Agnes's heart had been a clangorous place, filled with the rattle and bang of hard emotions, but now a sort of quiet had come upon it, a peace that, if it held, might one day allow joy again..He fished the sound-suppressor from a jacket pocket, drew the pistol from his shoulder holster, and began to screw the former to the latter. He misthreaded it at first because his hands had begun to shake..She kissed his cheek, and he pulled his arms out from under the covers to hug her. Such small arms, but such a fierce hug.."Soon as Cain is out of sight, we yank up our tricky vending machines, then haul the real ones out of the van and bolt 'em down again. Slick, fast. People are still picking up quarters when we finish. And get this-they want to know where the camera is."..Holding the pistol, fully extending his right arm in execution style, the gunman approached the fallen minister..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: "I already told you-anything in your heart is as easy to read as the open page of a book."..During the course of this momentous day, he had employed Zedd learned techniques to channel his hot anger into a red-hot rage. Now, without any conscious effort on his part, rage grew into molten-white fury..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..A sedan had come to a stop in the graveled driveway, over to the right of the house, almost out of view. As Junior watched, the headlights were doused. The engine shut off. The driver's door opened. A man got out of the car, a shadowy figure in the fearsome yellow moonlight. The dinner guest..Five days later, on Barty's birthday morning, when Agnes and Edom were in the kitchen, making preparations for the visits that had earned her the affectionate title of Pie Lady, Barty was in his highchair, eating a vanilla wafer lightly dampened with milk. Each time a crumb fell from the cookie, the boy plucked it off the tray and neatly conveyed it to his tongue..This baffled Junior. To the best of his recollection, during the weeks that Seraphim had come to him for physical therapy, she had never mentioned an older sister or any sister at all.."Everyone knows about Vanadium. He's a crusader, self-appointed champion of truth, justice, and the American way. A holy fool, if you will. With the case closed, he has no authority to harass you.".."Toes," he repeated immediately in his sweet, piping voice. This was a new word for him..Maria, after a single sip of Chardonnay, fled to the kitchen, ostensibly to check on the apricot flan that she'd brought, but in reality to press a cool and slightly damp dishtowel against her eyes..Carrying him to the window, gazing up at the stars, the moon, she said, "I'll always read to you, Barty."..By the time all the details of mortuary and cemetery services were settled, Walter Panglo had a nervous tic in his left cheek. His eyes were open wide, as if he'd been so startled that his lids froze in a position of ascension, locked by a spasm of surprise. His hands must have grown clammy; he blotted them repeatedly on his suit..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..The house was hers, free and clear of mortgages. There were two savings accounts to which Joey had diligently made deposits weekly through nine years of marriage..The cop had unzipped the top of her jogging suit and pulled up the roomy T-shirt..She appeared to be in her early thirties, perhaps six years older than Junior, but he didn't hold that against her. He wasn't any more prejudiced against older people than he was against people of other races and ethnic origins..As Edom crossed the threshold, moving outside to the landing at the top of the stairs, Jacob followed, proselytizing for his

faith: "Christmas Eve, 1940, St. Anselmo's Orphanage, San Francisco. Josef Krepp killed eleven boys, ages six through eleven, murdering them in their sleep and cutting a different trophy from each-an eye here, a tongue there." Celestina slammed the door, pressed the lock button in the knob, shoved-rocked-muscled the dresser in front of the door, astonished by her own strength, and heard Angel speaking into the phone: "Mommy's moving furniture." Busily, earnestly, with great satisfaction, Junior redirected his anger at Celestina and at the man with her. These two were, after all, guardians of the true Bartholomew, and therefore Junior's enemies..First he tore two paper towels from a wall-mounted dispenser and held one in each hand, as makeshift gloves. He was determined to leave no fingerprints..When she closed the front door and turned away from it, Agnes bumped her swollen belly into Joey. His eyebrows shot up, and he put his hands on her distended abdomen, as if she were more fragile than a robin's egg and more valuable than one by Faberge..Drawing from a well of inspiration deeper than instinct, Junior knew that if ever he crossed paths with a man named Bartholomew, he must be prepared to deal with him as aggressively as he had dealt with Naomi. And without delay.. "After the quake," Edom said, "forty thousand people took refuge in a two-hundred-acre open area, a military depot. A quake-related fire swept through so fast they were killed standing up, so tightly packed together they died as a solid mass of bodies."..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..She twisted her sweat-drenched face in what might have been frustration, closed her..In the foyer, Hanna Rey and Nellie Oatis sat side by side on the stairs. Hanna, the housekeeper, was gray-haired and plump. Nellie, was Perri's daytime-companion, could have passed for Hanna's sister..Now, trouble. Different from what he'd experienced before but just as powerful and terrifying. He didn't need to regurgitate, but he desperately needed to evacuate..The moment he had seen the building in which Nolly maintained an office-an aged three-story brick structure in the North Beach district, a seedy strip club occupying the ground floor-Junior knew he'd found the breed of snoop he needed. The detective was at the top of six flights of narrow stairs-no elevator-at the end of a dreary hallway with worn linoleum and with walls mottled by stains of an origin best left unconsidered. The air smelled of cheap disinfectant, stale cigarette smoke, stale beer, and dead hopes.."Loved her? Of course I loved her. Naomi was beautiful and so kind ... and funny. She was the best ... the best thing that ever happened to me.".."Then you only have to wait eighteen years," he said, opening the apartment door and stepping aside once more, allowing Celestina to precede him.."Did they rush you straight in here or did you arrange all the insurance matters at reception, Mr. Pinchbeck?"..He went upstairs to change out of his dark blue suit and badly scuffed black shoes..Licky did not take him into the roaster tower, but back to the barracks. From a locked room he brought out a small, soft, thick, leather bag that weighed heavy in his hands. He opened it to show Otter the little pool of dusty brilliance lying in it. When he closed the bag the metal moved in it, bulging, pressing, like an animal trying to get free.."Ordinarily, I'd recommend that you apply hot compresses every two hours to relieve discomfort and to hasten drainage, and I'd send you home with a prescription for an antibiotic."..Convinced that the house was playing tricks on him, Barty went downstairs, step by measured step, to the foyer and the ground-floor hall..The detective gazed at the cash as longingly as a glutton might stare at a custard pie, as intensely as a satyr might ogle a naked blonde. "Impossible. Too damn much integrity in their system. You might as well ask me to go to Buckingham Palace and fetch you a pair of the queen's undies."..A quick survey of the lavatory floor. The musician hadn't left anything behind, neither a popped button nor crimson petals from his boutonniere..White's paintings, which Junior found naive, dull, and insipid in the extreme. She imbued her work with all the qualities that real artists disdained: realistic detail, storytelling, beauty, optimism, and even charm..The sill was about four and a half feet off the lavatory floor. With both hands, Junior levered himself onto it..He didn't allow himself to ponder why Vanadium had come here or what relationship might have existed between the cop and Victoria. All that was for later consideration, after he had dealt with this unholy mess..Fortifying herself with more coffee, Jolene said, "Edom, you were going to tell us how Joey's coping with fatherhood."..The ninth card was a jack of spades. Maria called it a knave of and at the sight of it, her bright smile dimmed..Victoria lived on the northeast edge of Spruce Hills, where streets petered into country lanes. Here the houses tended to be more rustic, built on larger and less formally landscaped lots than those closer to the center of town, and set back farther from the street..He did not answer Hound's question..The nurse raised her eyes from Agnes to this other person. "Yes a chip of ice would be all right."..Junior was vigilant. He took note of all those who approached the piano, whether they dropped money in the fishbowl or not..Barty wore elfin-size, knitted blue pajamas complete with feet, white rickrack at the cuffs and neckline, and a matching cap. His white blanket was decorated with blue and yellow bunnies..Edom marveled at Agnes's ability to rise above the past and to transcend so many years of torment. She was able to see the house as simple shelter, whereas to her brothers, it was-and always would be-the place in which their spirits had been shattered. Even living within sight of it would have been out of the question if they had been employed, with options.."A nose, now, is a useful thing, a salable thing," Hound went on. "Not that I'm looking for competition. But a finder can always find work, as they say... You ever been in a mine?"..Since dealing with Victoria and the detective, Junior had taken pride in the fact that he'd kept his equanimity and, more important, his lunch. No acute nervous emesis, as he'd suffered following poor Naomi's death. Indeed, he had an appetite..Too late for interrogation now, with Vanadium bludgeoned into eternal sleep and resting under many fathoms of cold bedding..She walked the corridor until she came to a room with empty beds. Without turning on the lights, she entered, put down the suitcase, and sat in a chair by the window.."Lock it anyway. And don't hang up. Stay on the line until the patrolmen get

there." When he held fast to his sanity, common sense eventually told him that the coin must have been left much earlier in the night, soon after he had set out for Victoria's house. In fact, in spite of the new locks, Vanadium must have stopped here on his way to see Victoria, unaware that he would meet his death in her kitchen-and at the hands of the very man he was tormenting..From the devil to the sacred and then beyond, Junior drove north on State Highway 160, which was proudly marked as a scenic route, although in these predawn hours, all lay bleak and black. Following the serpentine course of the Sacramento River, Highway 160 wove past a handful of small, widely separated towns..Outside, flames churned to the left and right of the opening. The front of the house was afire..Edom and Jacob came to the house, asking what Dr. Chan had said, and Agnes lied to them. "There are some test results we won't have until Monday, but he thinks Barty is going to be all right." "Look at it this way, Aggie. All the pies, all the things you do-that's betting on life. And now you've just been given the great blessing of being able to place larger bets." Consequently, he scheduled more time every day with the phone books. He had obtained directories for all nine counties that, with the city itself, comprised the Bay Area." "Oh, that's me, all right. I'm on the FBI's most-wanted list for criminal pie jostling." She wanted to go to San Francisco with Celestina, to have the baby in the city, where the father-and not incidentally her friends and Reverend White's parishioners-would never know she'd given birth. The more her parents and sister argued against this plan, the more agitated Phimie became, until they worried that they would jeopardize her health and mental stability if they didn't do as she wished..Bill wasn't impressed. "They build houses out of mud in China. No wonder everything falls down." The blue vault above, cloudless now, was the most threatening sky that Edom had ever seen. The air was astonishingly dry so soon after a storm. And still. Hushed. Earthquake weather. Before this momentous day was done, great temblors and five-hundred-foot tidal waves would rock and swamp the coast.

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