

MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST UPDATED LANGUAGE GIFT EDITION

Clutching the red rose in his left hand, the brightly wrapped gift box half crushed in his right, Thomas Vanadium lay at Junior's mercy, with no tricks to perform, no quarter to set dancing across his knuckles. Although Dr. Lipscomb spoke almost as softly as the long-winded pianist, and though the physician's narrow face was homely and devoid of any trace of violent temperament, Neddy Gnathic flinched from him and retreated across the threshold, into the hallway. "Yeah, but I've been thinking about that. If he feels some kind of responsibility ... then why did he ever represent Cain in the first place?" Based on the evidence, perhaps Sklent never laughed, regardless of how clever the joke. He scowled fiercely at the paintings in the brochure, returned it to Junior, and snarled, "Shoot the bitch." Stopping at the door without opening it, Vanadium turned to stare at Junior, but said nothing. Every time Junior glanced back, Vanadium was following his wake through the throng. Stocky but almost gliding. Grim and grimmer. Hideous. And closer. On the third of June, he found another useless Bartholomew, and on Saturday, the twenty-fifth, two deeply disturbing events occurred. He switched on his kitchen radio only to discover that "Paperback Writer," yet another Beatles song, had climbed to the top of the charts, and he received a call from a ea woman. 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. Either operating on first-aid knowledge of his own or responding to an instruction from the medic, the cop slipped a foam pillow under Agnes's head. Saturday and Sunday, between sessions with the directory, Junior cruised around the county on a series of pleasure drives-testing the theory that the maniac cop was no longer following him. Apparently, Simon Magusson was correct: The case had been closed. Instead of sitting behind his desk, he settled into the second of two patient chairs, beside her. This, too, indicated bad news. 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. Above the wainscoting, the walls were Sheetrock, unlike the plaster elsewhere in the apartment. On one of them, Enoch Cain had scrawled Bartholomew three times. She switched off the hall light and stood at the half-open door, listening, waiting. Shortly after Agnes turned out the light, she said, "Kiddo, it's been one whole week since you walked where the rain wasn't, and I've been doing a lot of thinking about that." Celestina was amazed by her own courage in combat and by the steady calm that served her so well now. She wasn't shaken by the thought of what might have happened to her, and to her daughter, because her mind and her heart were with Wally-and because, having been watered with hope all of her life, she had a deep reservoir on which to draw in a time of drought. On New Year's Day, the town learned that it had lost its first son in Vietnam. Agnes had known the parents all her life, and she despaired that even with her willingness to help, with all her good intentions, there was nothing she could do to ease their pain. She recalled her anguish as she'd waited to learn if Barty's eye tumors had spread along the optic nerve to his brain. The thought of her neighbors losing a child to war made her turn to Paul in the night. "Just hold me," she murmured. Yet, uncaught, the quarter would have dropped to the floor. Junior would have heard it ring off the tiles. Which he hadn't. As they savored the icy martinis, she asked about the client, and Nolly said, "He bought the story. I won't be seeing him again." At the farthest end of the loft from the stereo speakers, voices nevertheless had to be raised in even the most intimate exchanges. The artist who had created In the Baby 's Brain Lies the Parasite of Doom, Version 6, however, possessed a voice as deep, sharp-edged, and penetrating as his talent. Precisely what type of prodigy Barty might be was initially not easy to deduce. He revealed many talents rather than just one. His in-laws' chances of receiving compensation for their pain and suffering over Naomi's death were seriously compromised if her husband did not hold the state or county responsible. In this, as in nothing previously, they felt the need to stand united as a family. 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. Fortunately, at least the desk was cigarette-scarred, because it came with the office. It had been the property of a skip-tracer named Otto Zelm, who'd made a good living at the kind of work Nolly avoided out of boredom: tracking down deadbeats and repossessing their vehicles. On a stakeout, Zelm fell asleep in his car, while smoking, thereby triggering the payoff of both life- and casualty-insurance policies, and freeing the lease on this furnished space. 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. After the latest concerned nurse departed, Sheena leaned close. She cruelly pinched Junior's cheek between thumb and forefinger, as if she' might tear off a goblet of flesh and pop it into her mouth. "Sometimes these sympathetic vibrations are very apparent, but alot of the time, they're so subtle that you can hear them only if you're unusually perceptive." Paul knelt on one knee beside her wheelchair. "This momentous day, Agnes. This momentous day, with all of its beginnings. Hmmm?" Celestina was maneuvered aside as the surgical team began resuscitation procedures. Stunned, she backed away from the table until she encountered a wall. In southern California, as dawn of this new momentous day looms. 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. He left the party and stood in the street for a while, taking slow deep breaths, letting the brisk night air clean the pot smoke out of his lungs, slow deep breaths, suddenly sober in spite of the beer he'd drunk, slow deep breaths, as chilled as a slab of beef in a meat locker, but not because of the cold night. One of the hardest things that she had ever done was to leave him then, alone in his room, with the hateful something still quietly growing in his eye. She wanted to move the armchair close to his bed and watch over him throughout the night. "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." Still cautious, Junior approached the back door, the window. Vanadium's body lay on the car floor, wrapped in the tumbled blanket. He had assumed that the dinner guest was Victoria's lover, but suddenly he realized that this might not be the case. The man might be nothing more than a friend. Her father or a brother. In which case the invitation to romance-posed by the coquettishly arranged wine and rose-would be so wildly inappropriate that the visitor would know at. Junior blinked and dared not speak, because he didn't know any Bartholomew, and now he was certain the cop was weaving an elaborate web of deceit, setting a trap. Why would he have spoken a name that meant nothing to him? Amused, Wally said, "You artists do love to dramatize-or have I forgotten the San Francisco blizzard of '65?" Throughout lunch and, indeed, during his hours as an outpatient at the hospital, Barty gave no indication that he understood the gravity of his situation. He remained cheerful, charming the doctors and technicians with his sweet personality and precocious chatter. Finally, only thirty miles south of Spruce Hills, he reluctantly acknowledged that slow deep breathing, positive thoughts, high self esteem, and firm resolve weren't sufficient to subdue his treacherous bowels. He needed to find lodging for the night. He didn't care about a swimming pool or a king-size bed, or a free continental breakfast. The only amenity that mattered was indoor plumbing. At the stream Serrenen, where it runs within the north wall of the city, the midwife gave Otter his true name, by which he is remembered in islands far from Havnor. She was four years older than Phimie. They hadn't seen a great deal of each other during the past three years, since Celestina had come to San Francisco. Although distance and time, the press of her studies, and the busyness of daily life had not made her forget that she loved Phimie, she had forgotten the purity and the power of love. Rediscovering it now, she was shaken so badly that she had to pull a chair to the side of the bed and sit down. "Maybe I won't have to try as hard as I think, because you make it so easy, Barty." "You might as well beat a cloud for raining," said Otter's mother. This claim wasn't true. His father, an unsuccessful artist and highly successful alcoholic, lived in Santa Monica, California. His mother, divorced when Junior was four, had been committed to an insane asylum twelve years ago. He rarely saw them. He hadn't told Naomi about them. Neither of his parents was a resume enhancer. It was the best he could do in protest against the misuse of good work and a good ship. He was pleased with himself. When the ship was launched (and all seemed well with her, for her fault would not show up until she was out on the open sea) he could not keep from his teachers what he had done, the little circle of old men and midwives, the young hunchback who could speak with the dead, the blind girl who knew the names of things. He told them his trick, and the blind girl laughed, but the old people said, "Look out. Take care. Keep hidden." Bad news. Having been identified by another guest put Junior at risk of later being tied to the killing; having been recognized by a close personal friend of Celestina White's was even worse. It had become imperative now that he know why the pianist had been watching him from across the room with such intensity. Tom stared down into the oceanic depths of the city, through the reefs of buildings, to the lamp-fish cars schooling through the great trenches. Phimie gazed upon the child briefly, then sought her sister's eyes again. Another word. In the dark dumpster, tormented by ceaseless torrents of what-ifs, convinced that the spirit of Vanadium was going to slam the lid and lock him in with a revived corpse, Junior had for a while been reduced to the condition of a helpless child. Paralyzed by fear, withdrawn to the corner of the dumpster farthest from the putrefying pianist, squatting in trash, he had shaken with such violence that his castanet teeth had chattered in a frenzied flamenco rhythm to which his bones seemed to knock, knock, like boot heels on a dance floor. He had heard himself whimpering but couldn't stop, had felt tears of shame burning down his cheeks but couldn't halt the flow, had felt his bladder ready to burst from the needle prick of terror but had with heroic effort managed to refrain from wetting his pants. evening. She brought her daughters, seven-year-old Bonita and six year-old Francesca, who came with their newest Barbie dolls-Color Magic Barbie, the Barbie Beautiful Blues Gift Set, Barbie's friends. The musician's eyes met Junior's for an instant, widening with surprise. Obviously he knew that Gammoner was a lie. So he must be aware of Junior's real identity. If the wife killer had cut himself accidentally, his writing on the wall indicated a hair-trigger temper and a deep reservoir of long-nurtured anger. Agnes pulled the stack of cards in front of her. She discarded the first two, as Maria would have done, and turned over the third. Barty rode with his mother in her green Chevrolet station wagon. Because the cakes, pies, and gifts were too numerous to be contained in one vehicle, Edom followed them in his flashier yellow-and-white '54 Ford Country Squire. They could not have been more solemn or more respectful if Naomi's corpse--stitched back together, pumped full of embalming fluid, painted with pancake makeup, dressed in white, with her cold hands clasping a Bible to her breast--had been reposing in a casket in this very room, surrounded by flowers and awaiting the arrival of mourners. They were all polite, soft-spoken, sad-eyed, oozing unctuous concern--and so full of feverish calculation that Junior wouldn't have been surprised if they had set off the ceiling-mounted fire sprinklers. Ordinarily, when Celestina was troubled, her art was a perfect sanctuary from all woes. When she was planning, composing, and rendering, time had no meaning for her, and life had no sting. "Then you have a big advantage, and you'll have to tell us all about yourselves," Agnes said. "I'll get the coffee brewing ... unless you'd like to help." He vanished through some hole, some slit, some tear bigger than anything through which Tom flipped his quarters. Eventually he found himself alone at the large viewing window of the neonatal-care unit. Seven newborns were in residence. Fixed to the foot of each of the seven bassinets was a placard on which was printed the name of the baby. Six paces past that marker floorboard, Barty had the strangest feeling that someone was in the hallway with him. Initially, the Pacific could not be seen beyond an opaque lens of fog, Yet later, when the mist retreated, the sea itself became a portent of sightlessness: Spread flat and colorless in the morning light, the glassy water reminded her of the depthless eyes of the blind, of that terrible sad vacancy where vision is denied. When his search of the desk drawers was only half completed, the telephone rang-not the usual strident bell, but a modulated electronic brrrrr. He had no intention of answering

it..She took a deep breath. She lifted her head, straightened her shoulders, and went inside, where a new life waited for her..Always, he was good with Barty, and on this occasion, he teased more than the usual number of smiles and giggles from the boy as he tried to get him to read the Snellen chart on the wall. Then he lowered the lights in the examination room to study his eyes with an ophthalmometer and an ophthalmoscope..From the door to the sink, nervously fishing a plastic pharmacy bottle out of a coat pocket, Junior counseled himself to remain calm. Slow deep breaths. What's done is done. Live in the future. Act, don't react. Focus. Look for the bright side..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.. "One of the things I was searching for in your house was a life insurance policy on your wife. I didn't find one. Didn't find any canceled checks for the premium, either.."or the barber. Never was he afraid to fall asleep, and having fallen asleep, he appeared to have only pleasant dreams..As kids-living in a house that was run like a prison, stifled by the oppressive rule of a morose father who believed that any form of entertainment was an offense against God-they conducted secret card games as their primary act of rebellion. A deck of cards was small enough to hide quickly and to keep hidden successfully even during one of their father's painstakingly thorough room searches..He left by the back door, to avoid the aftermath seeping across the foyer floor. Fog enveloped him, cool and refreshing..While the doctor proceeded with his evening rounds, the nurse remained with Junior until it was clear that the tranquilizer had calmed him and that he was no longer in danger of succumbing to another bout of hemorrhagic vomiting.."Agnes," said the magician, "you better start meeting with that librarian now to record your own life. If you don't get started for another forty years, by then you'll need a whole decade of talking to get it all down.."On a street a half mile from the airport in Eugene, he sat in the parked Dodge long enough to gingerly unwind the bandages and use a tissue to wipe off the pungent but useless salve he'd purchased at a pharmacy. Although he pressed the Kleenex to his face so gently that the pressure might not have broken the surface tension on a pool of water, the agony of the touch was so great that he nearly passed out. The rearview mirror revealed clusters of hideous, large, red knobs with glistening yellow heads, and at the sight of himself, he actually did pass out for a minute or two, just long enough to dream that he was a grotesque but misunderstood creature being pursued through a stormy night by crowds of angry villagers with torches and pitchforks, but then the throbbing agony revived him..He managed to hold the towel around his foot, but it grew dark red and disgustingly mushy..Judging by his great pleasure in learning, Barty didn't feel robbed of anything. To him, the world was an orange of infinite layers, which he peeled and savored with increasing delight..These Spartan arrangements were good enough for Vanadium. He had arrived from Oregon the previous night with three suitcases full of his clothes and personal effects. He expected that his unique combination of detective work and psychological warfare would enable him to entrap Cain in a month, before these accommodations began to feel too austere even for one to whom anything fancier than a monk's cell could seem baroque..Initially, when told that his patient was a Negro, Junior had been reluctant to serve as her physical therapist. Her program of rehab required mostly structured exercise to restore flexibility and to gain strength in the affected limb, but some massage would be involved, as well, which made him uncomfortable.."You may be eating yourself into an early grave, Vinnie, but poor Jacob has murdered his own soul, and that's infinitely worse.."The reception was from six o'clock to eight-thirty. If she were to arrive on time, guardian angels would have to be perched on all the traffic lights along the way..He was no longer hopeful that they could have a future together. After sampling the Junior Cain thrill machine, Celestina would want more, as women always did, but the time for a meaningful romance had now passed. For all the anguish he'd been put through, however, he deserved the consolation of her sweet body at least once. A little compensation. Payback..During the past ten days, he'd proved that he was clever, bold, with exceptional inner resources. He needed to tap his deep well of strength and resolve now, more than ever. He'd been through far too much, accomplished too much, to be brought down by mere biology..Thrilled to have inspired this awe in her, he closed the book. "Remember what we talked about a long time ago? You asked me how come, if I could walk where the rain wasn't. . .".Although Junior continued to feel threatened, continued to trust his instinct in this matter, he didn't devote his every waking hour to the hunt. He had a life to enjoy, after all. Self-improvements to undertake, galleries to explore, women to pursue..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.."Well, you see, that's the funny thing about all the important choices we make. If we make a really big wrong choice, if we do the really awful wrong thing, we're given another chance to continue on the right path. So the very moment I stupidly stepped off the curb without looking, I created another world where I did look both ways and saw the rhinoceros coming. And so-".Even at this post midnight hour, the lounge would sometimes be as crowded with worried loved ones as at any other time of the day. This morning, however, the only life under the threat of the scythe appeared to be Wally's; the sole vigil being kept was for him..Later, weak and shaken, as he was packing his suitcase, the urge overcame him again. He was astonished to discover that anything could be left in his intestinal tract..So smoothly did the waiter move, that three martinis on a corklined mahogany tray seemed to float across the room in front of him and then hover beside their table while he served the cocktails to the lady first, the guest second, and the host third.."Fifty died in London, in '57, when two trains crashed. And a hundred twelve were crushed, torn, mangled, in '52, also England.."He considered himself to be a thoroughly useless man, taking up space in a world to which he contributed nothing, but he did have a talent for baking. He could take any recipe, even one from a world-class pastry chef, and improve upon it.."It isn't just the rotten railing," Junior said, still paging through the report, his outrage growing. "The stairs are unsafe.."Celestina threw down the weapon even before she turned, and as two cops entered the room, she cried, "He's getting away!".Heaven, and his words touched a tenderness in her, overlaying an arc of pain across the curve of her

smile..Raising one hand, wiggling the fingers, he said, "Toes, toes, toes, toes, toes." "It's what?" asked the detective, for with the exception of his teeth, he was not a self-improved individual..He was a man with a plan, focused, committed, ready to act and then think, as soon as he was able to act. A spasm of pain weakened his hand. Cartridges slipped through his fingers, fell to the floor..He hadn't heard the cop get out of the chair and cross the dark room. Difficult.Junior didn't want an apology. The offer of a free lunch-or an entire week of lunches-didn't charm a smile from him. He had no interest in taking home a free apple pie..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..So they had cooked up this project, math and mayhem, geometry of limbs and branches, arboreal science and childish stunt, a test of strategy and strength and skill-and of the scary limits of nine-year-old bravado..Agnes had lifted him to this perch. Now she smoothed his hair, straightened his shirt, and retied his loosened shoelaces, finding it even harder than she had expected to say what needed to be said. She thought she might require Dr. Chan's presence, after all..One problem: Nolly Wulfstan, Quasimodo without a hump, probably repaired to this convenient club after work, to down a few beers, because this was surely as close as he would ever get to a halfway attractive woman. The detective would think that he and Junior were here for the same reason-to gawk at nearly naked babes and store up enough images of bobbling breasts to get through the night-and he would not be able to comprehend that for Junior the attraction was the dance, the intellectual thrill of experiencing a new cultural phenomenon..Celestina had wanted to go to Oregon for the service, but Tom, Max Bellini, the Spruce Hills police, and Wally Lipscomb-to whom, by Sunday, she'd begun talking almost hourly on the telephone-all advised strenuously against making the trip. A man as crazed and as reckless as Enoch Cain, expecting to find her at the funeral home or the cemetery, might not be deterred by a police guard, no matter what its size..The popeyed little toad smirked over there on the far side of his pretentious desk.."Sometimes it's sad here, Mommy. But it's not sad every place you are. Lots of places, Daddy's with you and me, and we're happier, and everything's okay."..He backed toward the hall door, watching as the fire spread. After lingering until certain that the house would soon be a seething pyre, he finally sprinted along the hall to the front door..Second, Thomas Vanadium received no mention: Therefore, his body hadn't been found in the lake. He still ought to be under suspicion in the Bressler case. And if new evidence cleared him of suspicion, then his disappearance should have been mentioned, and he should have been listed as another possible victim of the Shamefaced Slayer, the Bandaged Butcher, as the tabloids had dubbed Junior..The window gave way an instant before Celestina squeezed off the shot. The man dropped out of sight. She didn't know if she had scored a hit..He was having difficulty focusing his attention on the problem at hand. Through his mind, odd and disconnected thoughts rolled like slow, greasy, eye-of-the-hurricane waves on an ominous sea..In spite of its dazzle and power and comfort, however, the car was not able to lift his spirits as he cruised the hills of the city. Somewhere along these darkly glistening streets, in these houses and high-rises clinging to steep slopes awaiting seismic sundering, the boy was sheltered: half Negro, half white, full doom to Junior Cain.."I ALWAYS EAT CAV-EE-JAR FOR BREAKFAST," said Velveeta Cheese in her stuffed-bear voice..As outgoing as his twin uncles were introverted, Barty didn't withdraw from the festivities. Agnes never needed to remind him that family and guests took precedence over even the most fascinating characters in fiction, and the boy's delight in the company of others pleased his mother and made her proud.."December 1, 1958, in Chicago, Illinois, a parochial-school fire killed ninety-five."..Dr. Lipscomb inclined his head slightly toward the pianist, in the manner of a stem headmaster about to emphasize a lesson with a sharp twist of the offending boy's ear. "Miss White and the baby will have vacated these premises by the end of the week-unless you insist on bothering them with your chatter. For every minute you harass them, their departure will be extended one day."..Here, four days past Christmas, after two days of torment, Agnes knew the worst, that her treasured son must go eyeless or die, must choose between blindness or cancer of the brain..On Thursday, January 4, he used his John Pinchbeck identity to purchase a new Ford van with a cashier's check. He leased a private garage space in the Pinchbeck name, near the Presidio, and stored the van there..Even Barty seemed to be attentive, but Angel happily applied crayons to a coloring book and hummed softly to herself..Instead of engaging in the confrontation for which he had been pressing ever since his first visit, Vanadium surprised Junior by breaking eye contact, turning from the bed, and crossing the room to the door..It wasn't as if this was Junior's first encounter with a dead body. In the past few years, he'd become as comfortable with the deceased as any mortician might be. They were as unremarkable to him as cupcakes were to a baker.."Usually, I throw out a bunch of hocus-pocus, flourishes and patter, to distract people, so they don't even realize that what they've seen was real. They think the midair disappearance is just a trick.".."I get frustrated," he admitted. "Trying to learn how to do things in the dark ... I get peed off, as they say."..He no longer had any reason to follow an exercise regimen. For twenty-three years, he'd needed to maintain good health in order to meet his responsibilities, but all the responsibilities that mattered to him had been lifted from his shoulders..Junior opened his eyes and saw that only the second of the two rounds had found its intended mark. The first had cracked through the center of a cabinet door, surely shattering dishes within.."She's got preeclampsia. It's a condition that occurs in about five percent of pregnancies, virtually always after the twenty-fourth week, and usually it can be treated successfully. But I'm not going to sugarcoat this, Celestina. In her case, it's more serious. She hasn't been seeing a doctor, no prenatal care, and here she is in the middle of her thirtieth week, about ten days from delivery."..Junior jammed on the brakes, slammed the gearshift into park, threw open the door, and plunged from the car. He spun around to face the menace, loose gravel shifting treacherously underfoot..Jacob had become a card mechanic for one purpose. Not because he'd ever be a gambler. Not to wow friends with

card tricks. Not because the challenge intrigued him. He wanted to be able to give Agnes winning cards once in a while, if she was losing too frequently or needed to have her spirits lifted. He didn't feed her winning hands often enough to make her suspicious or to make the games less fun for Edom or Joey. He was judicious. The effort he expended—the thousands of hours of practice—was repaid with interest each time Agnes laughed with delight after being dealt a perfect hand. In the Suburban with Wally and Grace, as they waited to hit the trail, Celestina said, "He took her to a movie again, Tuesday night." The operator attempted to calm him, but he remained hysterical. Between gasps and sharp squeals of pretended pain, he shakily rattled off his name, address, and phone number. Because the upper part of the hospital bed was somewhat raised, he didn't have to lift his head from the pillow to study the corner where the phantom waited. He peered beyond the IV rack, past the foot of the bed. "I guess so, but it's not that. I was thinking of something my little girl said." Hesitantly, the ivory tickler shook hands. "I'm ... uh ... I'm Ned Gnathic. Everyone calls me Neddy." If he had cut himself intentionally for the express purpose of writing the name in blood, then the reservoir of anger was deeper still and pent up behind a formidable dam of obsession. "It's all right," Tom assured her. To Angel, he said, "No, I'm not sad. And you know why?" One hand on the railing, he ascended the first three steps slowly. Pausing on each, he slid his foot forward and back on the carpet, runner to judge the depth of the tread relative to his small foot. He ran the toe of his right shoe up and down the riser between each tread, gauging the height. More walls than not, in both rooms, were lined with bookshelves and file cabinets. Here he kept numerous case studies of accidents, man-made disasters, serial killers, spree killers: proof undeniable that humanity was a fallen species engaged in both the unintentional and calculated destruction of itself. Angel, on the window seat, wore nothing but white. White sneakers and socks. White pants. White T-shirt. Two white bows in her hair. almost recoiled in disgust. She held the newborn so that its mother could look into Junior, putting himself in the detective's place, could think of a few reasons for this visit to Seraphim's grave. Unfortunately, not one of them supported his contention that he was an innocent man. Celestina hadn't noticed the infant being taken away. She had wanted to see it once more, even though she was sickened by the sight of it. Earlier, before leaving home, he had taken a preventive dose of paregoric. For now, at least, his bowels were quiet. "Maybe." In truth, Tom didn't believe that any of this could be learned even by one adept taking instruction from another adept. They were born with the same special perception, but with different and strictly limited abilities to interact with the multiplicity of worlds that they could detect. He wasn't able to explain even to himself how he could send a coin or other small object Elsewhere; it was something he just felt, and each time that the coin vanished, the authenticity of the feeling was proved. He suspected that when Barty walked where the rain wasn't, the boy employed no conscious techniques; he simply decided to walk in a dry world while otherwise remaining in this wet one—and then he did. Woefully incomplete wizards, sorcerers with just a trick or two each, they had no secret tome of enchantments and spells to teach to an apprentice. The girl smiled, as stunningly beautiful as he remembered her, but she was no longer fifteen, as she had been when last he'd seen her. Since her death in childbirth nearly three years ago, she'd matured and grown lovelier than ever. Maintaining a brutal strangling pressure, Junior turned his head aside, to protect his eyes. He kneed Neddy in the crotch, crunching the remaining fight out of him. That was another thing. Junior hadn't gotten his noon meal, because the spirit of Vanadium had nearly caught up with him when he'd been browsing for tie chains and silk pocket squares before lunch. Then he missed dinner, as well, because he had to maintain surveillance on Celestina when she didn't go straight home from the gallery. He was hungry. He was starving. This, too, she had done to him. The bitch. In the dark woods of the dream, still the presence: faceless and silent, radiating a merciless intent. 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.

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