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He nervously fingered the fabric of his slacks, outlining the quarter in his pocket. Still there..He might suspect, but he couldn't know. He would but would be left with at least a shred of doubt about Junior's hooves. This was no demon child. Its father's evil wasn't visibly reflected in its small. The bow business had started a few months ago. Angel said she wanted to look pretty in her sleep, in case she met a handsome prince in her dreams..He left by the back door, to avoid the aftermath seeping across the foyer floor. Fog enveloped him, cool and refreshing..No longer able to judge the boy's degree of sleepiness by his eyes, she relied on him to tell her when to stop reading. At his request, she closed the book after forty-seven pages, at the end of Chapter 2..The currents of irrational fear, which bring periodic turbulence to virtually every childhood, didn't disturb the smoothly flowing river of Barty's first three years. He showed no fear of the doctor or the dentist..Looking up at the mirror above the sink, he saw reflected not the self-improved and fully realized man that he'd worked so hard to become, but the pale, round-eyed little boy who had hidden from his mother when she had been in the deepest and darkest end of one of her cocaine-assisted, amphetamine-spiced mood swings, before she traded cold reality for the warm coziness of the asylum. As if some whirlpool of time was spinning him backward into the hateful past, Junior felt his hard-won defenses being stripped away..Now, the hateful music unnerved him. He became convinced that if he went home alone, the phantom chanteuse-whether Victoria Bressler's vengeful ghost or something else-would croon to him once more. He wanted company and distraction, after all..You scrawl names on the walls with your own blood, play Psycho with a Sheetrock stand-in for Janet Leigh-and then fly off to Reno for a weekend of blackjack, stage shows, and all-you-can-eat buffets. Not likely..Neddy possessed all the musical talent, but Junior had the muscle. Pinned against the wall, his throat in the vise of Junior's hands, Neddy needed a miracle if he were ever again to sweep another glissando from a keyboard.. "No, the monster lives in there," Barty said, which was a joke, because he'd never suffered night frights of that-or any--sort..draftsman? Having never been nudged in that direction, would Cain have followed a different path that took him far from Celestina and Angel?.And the irony of ironies: With her talent deepening to a degree that she had never dared hope it would, with collectors responding to her vision to an extent she had never imagined possible, with her goals already exceeded, and with great vistas of possibility opening before her, she would throw it all away with some regret but with no bitterness if required to choose between art and Angel, for the child had proved to be the greater blessing. Phimie was gone, but Phimie's spirit fed and watered her sister's life, bringing forth a great abundance.. "Quick, very quick," he warned, helping Grace through the fire framed window and onto the roof of the porch..Drawn one after the other, two knaves of spades didn't signify two deadly enemies, but meant that the enemy already predicted by the first would be unusually powerful, exceptionally dangerous..Before they set out for the amusement park, Agnes pulled him aside, held him close, and said, "Listen, kid of mine, I'm not giving up. Don't think I ever would. Let's have fun today. This evening, you and I and Angel will convene a meeting of the North Pole Society of Not Evil Adventurers"-the girl had become the third member years ago" and all truths will be told and secrets known. ".mother's understanding of the world and of her own existence. Unlike most other toddlers, Barty was entirely comfortable with change. From bottle to drinking glass, from crib to open bed, from favorite foods to untried flavors, he delighted in the new. Although Agnes usually remained near at hand, Barty was as pleased to be put temporarily in the care of Maria Gonzalez as in the care of Edom, and he smiled as brightly for his dour uncle Jacob as for anyone..Glancing at the plump pie in Edom's hands, the gentleman replied to Agnes in a musical yet gravelly voice worthy of Louis Armstrong: "You must be the lady Reverend Collins told me about." Putting an arm around Paul's shoulders, Dr. Salk walked with him along a street lined with eucalyptuses and Torrey pines, to a nearby pocket park. They sat on a bench in the sunshine and watched duck waddle on the shore of a man-made pond..Shortly past nine o'clock, an hour after Edom and Jacob had gone, Barty came downstairs, book in hand. "The twisties are back." Slowly rotating his raised hands before his eyes, as if he saw them young and supple-fingered, the magician described the amazing manipulations that a master card mechanic could perform. Though he spoke without flash or filigree, he made these feats of skill sound more sorcerous than hares from hats, doves from scarves, and blondes bisected by buzz saws..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..Everyone was silent. The day was morgue-still. The crows had fled the sky, but a single hawk gilded soundlessly, like justice with its prey in sight, high above the tower..He had been walking ever since, two and a half years, with brief respites in Bright Beach..The only bad moment in the evening came when the pianist played "Someone to Watch over Me." As he'd proved to himself on his previous two visits-his first night in town and then two nights thereafter-this number was merely part of the pianist's repertoire. Nothing supernatural here..He had considered tracking down Celestina-and the bastard boy--prior to her exhibition. The alumni office of her college might be one route to her. And further inquiries in the city's fine-arts community would no doubt eventually provide him with her address..He paid cash to the locksmith, and included in the payment were the two dimes and the nickel Vanadium had left on his nightstand.. "When you didn't answer the doorbell, man, I just knew what must have happened," Chicane told Junior..Sometimes, while shaving or combing his hair, as he was looking in the bathroom or foyer mirror, Junior thought that he glimpsed a presence..dark and vaporous, less substantial than smoke, standing or moving behind him. At other times, this entity seemed to be within the mirror. He couldn't focus on it, study it, because the moment he became aware of the presence, it was gone..Although the distance to the ground was only ten feet, she would be risking too much by running blindly off the roof and leaping to clear the fringe of fire at the edge. A landing on the lawn might end well. But if she fell onto the walkway, she might break a leg or her back, depending on

the angle of impact..Now out of the kitchen, along the hall, and up the stairs, two at a time, into Victoria's bedroom. Not with the intention of snaring a perverse souvenir. Merely to find a blanket..He capped the bottle, pocketed it, and then kicked the dead man, kicked him again, and spat on him..Perhaps the paramedic had given him an injection, a sedative. the howling ambulance rocked along on this most momentous day, Junior Cain wept profoundly but quietly--and achieved temporary peace in a dreamless sleep..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: Wednesday, with a swiftness that confirmed its eagerness to make a deal, the state supplied records on the fire tower. For five years, a significant portion of the maintenance funds had been diverted by bureaucrats to other uses. And for three years, the responsible maintenance supervisor filed an annual report on this specific tower, requesting immediate funds for fundamental reconstruction; the third of these documents, submitted eleven months prior to Naomi's fall, was composed in crisis language and stamped urgent..Anyway, if Seraphim were still alive, she would be only nineteen now, too young to have graduated from Academy of Art College..No doubt thinking about the land of the big bugs, into which she had pushed Enoch Cain, which was exactly what Barty had suddenly thought about, Angel said, "Honey, this is amazing, it's wonderful, but you've got to be careful..".Shadows still perched throughout most of the room. They no longer reminded her of roosting birds, but of a featherless flock, leathery of wing and red of eye, with a taste for unspeakable feasts..Against the sight of Franklin Chan's pity, which implied the hopelessness of Barty's condition, Agnes closed her eyes. But she opened them at once, because this chosen darkness reminded her that unwanted darkness might be Barty's fate.. "A ship without an anchor can never be at rest," he answered. "It's at the mercy of the sea..".He nodded. "The effect not only comes before a cause in this case, but completely without a cause. The effect is staying dry in the rain, but the cause--supposedly walking in a dryer world--never occurs. Only the idea of it..".He first eased from aisle to aisle, but soon moved more quickly, convinced that the singer would be found beyond the next turn, and then the next. Was that her trailing shadow he had glimpsed, slipping around the corner ahead of him? Her womanly scent lingering in the air after her passage?.Turning in circles, he tipped his head back, presenting his face to the streaming sky, laughing..It's unsettling. For all our delight in the impermanent, the entrancing flicker of electronics, we also long for the unalterable..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..A fine carpenter can wield a hammer with an economy of movement and accuracy as elegant as the motions of a symphony conductor with a baton. A cop directing traffic can make a rough ballet out of the work. However, of all the humble tasks that men and women can transform into visual poetry by the application of athletic agility and grace, clambering into a Dumpster holds the least promise of beautification..Junior suspected that no one other than this man's mother called him Tom. He was probably "Detective" to some and "Vanadium" to most who knew him..If the state police did get involved, and even if they found evidence that the accident was staged, they would most likely point the finger of blame at the man for whom Victoria had been preparing dinner..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..Junior remembered the very words the detective had used: They say she died in a traffic accident..Once he had toured the exhibition, managing not to shudder openly, he tried to hang out within hearing distance of Celestina White, but without appearing to be listening with special intensity..Her eyes, lustrous pools, brimmed with the need to know, but she respected the deal. "I only half understood all that, and I don't even know which half, but in some strange way, it feels true. Thank you. I will think about it tonight, when I can't sleep." She stepped close and kissed him on the cheek. "Who are you, Tom Vanadium?".In Oregon, standing at Junior Cain's bedside, turning a quarter across the knuckles of his left hand, Thomas Vanadium asks about the name that his suspect had spoken in the grip of a nightmare..Paul's Mediterranean complexion didn't make a blush easy to detect, but Tom thought his face brightened until it was a shade or two closer to the color of his rust-red hair. His eyes, usually so direct, evaded Celestina..Not a word of that would come to Paul, but his frustrating speechlessness might have been for the best. From everything he knew about this hero, such effusive praise would embarrass him..sky grew sullen in the early twilight, and the city once more arrayed itself in the red gesso and gold leaf that had indirectly illuminated Celestina's apartment ceiling the previous night..The reverend said, "I'm sure you underestimate my parishioners, Celestina. They won't be scandalized. They'll open their hearts..".able to reconcile these opposed forces, she was all but paralyzed by indecision.. "I don't have to graduate in the spring of next year. I can take fewer classes, graduate the spring after. That's no big deal..".Although the only light on the back porch came from the pale beams that filtered out through the curtains on the kitchen windows, all these faces seemed luminous, almost preternaturally aglow, like the kiln-fired countenances of saints in a dark church, lit solely by the flames of votive candles. The rain--a music of sorts, and the jasmine and incense, and the moment sacred.. "Oh? Do they rent their house out to pirates with little pirate children, clowns with little clown children?".Opening his eyes, still not daring to meet Victoria's gaze, Junior knew she had registered and properly interpreted his response to her seductive spooning. She had frozen, the utensil in midair, and her breath had caught in her throat. She was thrilled..There were effective actions and ineffective actions, socially acceptable and unacceptable behavior, wise and stupid decisions that could be made. But if you wanted to achieve maximum self-realization, you had to understand that any choice you made in life was entirely value neutral. Morality was a primitive concept, useful in earlier stages of societal evolution, perhaps, but without relevance in the modern age..From San Francisco south to Orange County Airport on a crowded commuter flight, then farther south along the coast by rental car, Paul Damascus brought Grace, Celestina, and Angel to the Lampion house. "Before we go to my

place, there's someone I very much want you to meet. She's not expecting us, but I'm sure it'll be okay." In the neatly ordered bedroom, he removed his shoes. Stretching out on the bed, he stared at the ceiling, feeling useless. "Less than a year and a half ago, Hurricane Flora--she killed over six thousand in the Caribbean." As the afternoon waned toward a portentous dusk and toward the gallery reception for Celestina White, Junior prepared his knives and guns. Without commenting, Tom continued: "And worlds just like ours--except that my parents never met, and I was never born. Worlds in which Wally was never shot because he was too unsure of himself or just too stupid to take Celestina to dinner that night or to ask her to marry him." He did not answer Hound's question. The detective shrugged. "The girl might've had her baby at a third rate hospital, one with poor control of patients' records and a less professional staff. Or the kid might have been placed for adoption through some baby brokerage in it strictly for the money. Then there would've been opportunities to learn something. But as soon as I discovered it was St. Mary's, I knew we were screwed." Yet through the summer of 1966, following this call, he acted like a man who was haunted. A sudden draft, even if warm, chilled him and caused him to turn in circles, seeking the source. In the middle of the night, the most innocent of sounds could scramble him from bed and send him on a search of the apartment, flinching from harmless shadows and twitching at looming invisibilities that he imagined he saw at the edges of his vision. Because, since childhood, Jacob had been drawn to stories and images of doom, to catastrophe on both the personal and the planetary scale--from theater fires to all-out nuclear war--he had a flamboyant imagination second to none and a colorful if peculiar intellectual life. For him, therefore, the most difficult part of learning card manipulation had been coping with the tedium of practice, but for years he had applied himself diligently, motivated by his love and admiration for his sister, Agnes. In a monotone that gave new meaning to deadpan, the detective added: "I'm the only one who was there who doesn't have a dry-cleaning bill." "This is going to be an enormous settlement," the attorney promised. "And there's more good news. County and state authorities have agreed to close the case on Naomi's death. It's now officially an accident." NOLLY FELT A little silly, walking the mean streets of North Beach under a white umbrella with red polka dots. It kept him dry, however, and with Nolly, practical considerations always triumphed over matters of image and style. "I don't stumble. Not much, anyway." To the girl, Bartholomew said, "Angel, are you okay?" Already, he was up two hours past his bedtime. In recent months, he'd exhibited the more erratic sleeping habits of older children. Some nights, he seemed to possess the circadian rhythms of owls and bats; after being sluggish all day, he suddenly became alert and energetic at dusk wanting to read long past midnight. "I was never Cary Grant, to begin with," said Vanadium, still ceaselessly rolling the quarter across his fingers, "so I had no big emotional investment in my appearance. Cosmetic surgery would have added another year of recuperation time, probably much longer, and I was anxious to get after Cain. Seemed to me this mug of mine might be just the thing to scare him into an incriminating mistake, even a confession." CELESTINA RETURNED TO Room 724 to collect Phimie's belongings from the tiny closet and from the nightstand. Fascinated by this strange new realm, Angel returned to her chair periodically, between explorations, to sip apple juice and to reveal her latest discoveries: "They got yellow shelf paper. They got potatoes in a drawer. They got four kinds of pickles in the refrigerator. They got a toaster under a sock with pictures of birds on it." From the darkness of his room, Barty now spoke the words for which Agnes had been waiting, his whisper soft yet resonant in the quiet house: "Good-night, Daddy." Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Le Guin, Ursula K., 1929-. He switched off the flashlight and stood solemnly for a moment, paying his respects to Seraphim. She had been so sweet, so innocent, so supple, so exquisitely proportioned. After clicking off the kitchen lights, the hall light, and the light in the foyer, he pulled shut the front door, leaving the house dark and silent behind him. For an instant, his attention had been distracted by Vanadium's presentation of his empty hands. Nevertheless, there was no way the cop could have snatched the coin out of the air. 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. As the unwanted change pinged against the concrete at his feet, Junior--snap, snap--saw the source of the next two rounds. They spat out of the vertical pay slot on a newspaper-vending machine; one hit his nose, and the other rang off his teeth. Maybe he would get lucky, and an airliner would fall out of the sky right now, right here, obliterating him in an instant. Finally sleeping, he had anxiety dreams of being in a public rest room, overcome by urgent need, only to find that every stall was occupied by someone he had killed, all of them vengefully determined to deny him a chance for dignified relief. "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." Leaving Spruce Hills, Junior thought he was putting distance between himself and his enigmatic enemy, gaining time to study the county phone directory and to plan his continuing search if that avenue of investigation brought him no success. Instead, he had walked right into his adversary's lair. At the foot of the bed: a cedar chest. Four feet long, two feet wide, perhaps three high. Brass handles. Fourth and last, he was surprised that Kickmule was a legitimate surname. This information wasn't of immediate importance to him, but if ever his Gammoner and Pinchbeck identities were compromised and he required false ID in a new name, he would call himself Eric Kickmule. Or possibly Wolfgang Kickmule. That sounded really tough. No one would mess with a man named Kickmule. A quick survey of the lavatory floor. The musician hadn't left anything behind, neither a popped button nor crimson petals from his boutonniere. Holding the mug in his right hand, Tom picked up the coin and rolled it across the knuckles of his left. Paul's quarter, after all. A two-bit temptation to panic. As gifted with physical grace as with good looks, Junior stepped into the bedroom doorway, lithely and with feline stealth. He leaned against the jamb. Everyone regarded him

expectantly, as if there would be more magic, as if flipping a coin into another reality was something you saw every week or two on the Ed Sullivan Show, between the acrobats and the jugglers who could balance ten spinning plates on ten tall sticks simultaneously..In agreement, Maria pushed the stack of unused cards aside, and she peered at her hands as if she wanted to scrub them for a long time under hot water.."I can talk to you," he said to Salk. "You'll understand. She was hero, the only one I ever knew till I met you. I've read about them all my life, in pulp magazines and paperbacks. But Perri ... she was the real thing. She didn't save tens of thousands-hundreds of thousands of children like you've done, didn't change the world as you've changed it, but she faced every day without complaint, and she lived for others. Not through them. For them. People called her to share their problem, and she listened and cared, and they called her with their good news because she took such joy in it. They asked for her advice, and though she was inexperienced, really, so short of experience in so many ways, she always knew what to say, Dr. Salk. Always the right thing. She had great heart and natural wisdom, and she cared so much."."Your father denies the rape ever occurred, apparently out of what I'd call a misguided willingness to trust in divine justice."The symptoms that terrified Phimie-the headache, crippling abdominal pain, dizziness, vision problems-had entirely relented. Possibly they had been more psychological than physical in nature..The hospital room was softly lighted, and shadows roosted on all sides like a flock of slumbering birds..and humble. They managed to worry up tuition for art school, but Celestina worked as a waitress to pay for her studio apartment and other needs..THE CRISP CRACKLE of faux flames, the way they made them in the days of radio dramas, back in the 1930s and '40s, when he was a boy: cellophane..Filled with the songs of swallows that evidently preferred these precincts to the more famous address of San Juan Capistrano, this mild March morning was perfect for pie deliveries. Agnes and Grace had produced a bakery's worth of glorious vanilla-almond pies and coffee toffee pies..Finally he switched on the light, and illuminated Neddy at ease, silent in death as never in life: lying on his back, head turned to the right, swollen tongue lolling obscenely..Having anticipated a problem of one kind or another, Junior withdrew a packet of crisp new hundred-dollar bills from an inside jacket pocket. The bank band still wrapped the stack, and on it was printed \$10,000..Grace knew it, too, because she went limp with misery in his arms, ceased struggling against him.."September 27, 1962. Barcelona, Spain. A flood killed four hundred forty-five people."On the second morning of Barty's illness, Agnes came downstairs and found him at the kitchen table, in his pajamas, happily applying unconventional hues to a scene in a coloring book..AS THE WULFSTAN PARTY was being seated at a window table, slowly tumbling masses of cottony fog rolled across the black water, as if the bay had awakened and, rising from its bed, had tossed off great mounds of sheets and blankets..When Renee, sweetly oblivious of her looming doom, claimed to have inherited a sizable industrial-valve fortune, Junior thought she might be inventing the wealth or at least exaggerating to make herself more desirable. But when he accompanied her back to her place, he discovered a level of luxury that proved she wasn't a shop girl with fantasies..He chased after none of these lovelies beyond a few dates, and none of them pursued him when he was done with them, although surely they were distressed if not bereft at losing him..were a favorite pair when he was puttering around the house on weekends. "Oh," he said, "that dog."THE DEAD DETECTIVE, grinning in the moonlight, a pair of silvery quarters gleaming in the sockets once occupied by his eyes..Celestina was unable to talk reason to him, and even her mother, Grace, who was living here for the interim and who was always oil on the stormiest of waters, couldn't bring a moment's calm to the velvet squall that was Neddy Gnathic in full blow. He had learned about the baby five days ago, and he had been building force ever since, like a tropical depression aspiring to hurricane status.."One hour," he announced, establishing a countdown. In sixty minutes, his internal clock would rouse him from a meditative state..At the far end of the table, Agnes shot up from her chair as her son said rain, and as he said wet, she spoke warningly: "Barty!"Leashed like a dog, he walked along, sullen and shivering with sickness and rage. He stared around him, seeing the stone tower, stacks of wood by its wide doorway, rusty wheels and machines by a pit, great heaps of gravel and clay. Turning his sore head made him dizzy..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..Grinning but with an odd edge of concern in his expression that Celestina could see even through her tears, Wally said, "Does that mean you ... you will?"."Yeah, they think we're with Candid Camera. So Jimmy points to this United Parcel truck parked across the street and says the cameras are in there."Barty stood in the rain, surrounded by the rain, pummeled by the rain, with the rain. Saturated grass squished under his sneakers. The droplets, in their millions, didn't bend-slip-twist magically around his form, didn't hiss into steam a millimeter from his skin. Yet he remained as dry as baby Moses floating on the river in a mother-made ark of bulrushes..All he cared about was Red Planet, and what might happen after page 103. He had carried the book with him to the doctor's office, and on the way home in the car; he repeatedly opened it, squinting at the lines of type, trying to read around or through the "twisty" spots. "Jim and Frank and Willis, they're in deep trouble."."Paul," she said, "you've got a lovely house, but Celestina and Grace are doers. They need to keep occupied. They'll go stir-crazy if they don't stay busy. Am I right, ladies?"A cold wetness just above the crook of his left elbow. A sting. A tourniquet of flexible rubber tubing had been tied around his left arm, to make a vein swell more visibly, and the sting had been the prick of a hypodermic needle..The announcement poster seemed enormous, huge, far bigger than she remembered it, crazily-recklessly large. By its very size, it challenged critics to be cruel, dared the fates to celebrate her triumph by shaking the city to ruin right now, in the quake of the century. She wished Helen Greenbaum had opted, instead, for a few lines of type on an index card, taped to the glass..The old man assumed the solemn and knowing expression of one guarding mysteries, a sphinx without headdress and mane. "If I told you, dear lady, it wouldn't be magic anymore. Merely a trick."

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