

QUIT YOUR DAY JOB

Glass in the door next to Agnes cracked, dissolved. Pebbly blacktop like a dragon flank of glistening scales hissed past the broken window, inches from her face..He wanted Celestina to sit in her seat and use her lap belt, but she insisted on cuddling next to him, as if she were a high-school girl and he were her teenage beau..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..And now Cain was aware of her, interested in her. Informed of this development, Harrison would no doubt rethink his position..So burning with anger was he that his car, by direct thermal transmission from his hands upon the wheel, should have been glowing cherry red in the January night, should have been scorching tunnels of clear dry air through the cold fog. Rancor, virulence, acrimony, vehemence: All words learned for the purpose of self-improvement were useless to him now, because none adequately conveyed the merest minimum of his anger, which swelled as vast and molten as the sun, far more formidable than his assiduously enhanced vocabulary..Although the Rolex was expensive, Junior cared nothing about the monetary loss. He could afford to buy an armful of Rolexes, and wear them from wrist to shoulder..Agnes had read the last half of Red Planet to Barty just the previous night, but he brought the book with him, to read it again..Murmuring on the edge of sleep, Barty spoke to his father in all the places where Joey still lived: "Good-night, Daddy."From these ominous spatters, several fibers bristled, having stuck to the pewter when the drizzle was still wet. They appeared to be human hairs..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.."Imagine me thinking you'd be gone," she said to Barty. "Your old mum is losing it. I never made a deal with Rumpelstiltskin, so there's nothing for him to collect."This didn't work for Junior. Strangely, when he focused on a mental image of any fruit-apple, peach, banana-his thoughts drifted to sex. He became aroused and had no hope of clearing his mind..Junior considered leaving before Vanadium-still seventy-five yards away-arrived. He was afraid he would appear to be fleeing..Junior was pleasantly surprised by his flexibility and by his audacity. He was, indeed, a new man, a daring adventurer, and by the day he grew more formidable..At the end of the famous sermon, Celestina's father had wished to all well-meaning people that into their lives should fall a rain of benign effects from the kind and selfless actions of countless Bartholomews whom they would never meet. And he assures those who are selfish or envious or lacking in compassion, or who in fact commit acts of great evil, that their deeds will return to them, magnified beyond imagining, for they are at war with the purpose of life. If the spirit of Bartholomew cannot enter their hearts and change them, then it will find them and mete out the terrible judgment they deserve..As red as Angel had been for her evening outing, she was that yellow for retirement to bed in her own home. Two-piece yellow jersey pajamas. Yellow socks. At the girl's request, Celestina had tied a soft yellow bow in her mass of springy hair..Behind his masking hands, the physician let out a thin sound, as though he were trying to pull from his heart an anguish that was embedded like a bur with countless sharp, hooked thorns..With his bent thumb against the crook of his forefinger, he flipped the quarter. Even as the coin snapped off the thumbnail and began to stir the air, Tom flung up both hands, fingers spread to show them empty and to distract. Yet on a second look, the coin was not airborne as it had seemed to be, no longer spinning-wink, wink-before their dazzled eyes. It had vanished as though into the payment slot of an ethereal vending machine that dispensed mystery in return..Like all women past puberty and this side of the grave, she was attracted to him. She never told him as much, not in words, but he detected this attraction in the way she looked at him, in the tone that she used when she spoke his name. Throughout three weeks of therapy, Seraphim revealed countless small but significant proofs of her desire..He fiddled with the cylinder until it swung open. Five chambers, a gleaming cartridge in each..could not be a person of the best intentions. Doctors and nurses wouldn't monitor their patients with the lights off..He opened the solid doors on the bottom of the breakfront, did not find what he was looking for, checked in the sideboard next, and there it was, a small liquor supply. Scotch, gin, vodka. He selected a full bottle of vodka..To Edom, humanity was obviously not the greater of these two destructive forces. Men and women were part of nature, not above it, and their evil was, therefore, just one more example of nature's malignant intent. They had stopped debating this issue years ago, however, neither man conceding any credibility to the other's dogma..Junior picked up his pace, pushing through the crowd, repeatedly glancing back, and although he caught only quick squints of the dead cop's face, he could tell that something was terribly wrong with it. Never a candidate for matinee-idol status, Vanadium looked markedly worse than before. The port-wine birthmark still pooled around his right eye. His features were not merely pan-flat and plain, as they had been before, but were ... distorted..glimmered along the barrel of a hypodermic syringe in the hand of the paramedic..Applying enough pain, he could have gotten cooperation even from Vanadium. The detective had said he'd heard Junior fearfully repeat Bartholomew in his sleep, which Junior believed to be true, because the name did resonate with him; however, he wasn't sure he believed the cop's claim to be ignorant of the identity of this nemesis..Junior was free of superstition. He believed in neither gods nor demons, nor in anything between..In his seventies but vigorous and full of fun, Sparky liked to take an occasional jaunt to Reno, to pump the slot machines and try a few hands of blackjack. The off-the-record, tax-free monthly checks from Simon were gratefully received, ensuring the old man's cooperation with the conspiracy.."Yes," she assured him, though her gaze had dropped from his mouth to his hand, so small, which she held in hers..The full nature of the nightmare continued to elude him, but he became convinced that good reason for his fear existed, that the dream had been more than a dream. He had a nemesis named Bartholomew not merely in dreams, but in the real world, and this Bartholomew

had something to do with ... babies..the stems, thorns sharp against his tongue. And then Agnes. Agnes in the yard, screaming.He doubted that the singer had been Victoria Bressler, dead nurse, but he believed this was the same voice he'd heard on the telephone, back on the twenty-fifth of June, when someone purporting to be Victoria had called with an urgent warning for Bartholomew.."I'll teach her," Wally said, moving past them to the apartment door, fishing a ring of keys out of his coat pocket..I believe the universe is sort of like an unimaginably vast musical with an infinite number of strings."..He would come. She knew. She had always known, but had half forgotten. There was something special about Angel, and because of that specialness, she lived under a threat as surely as the newborns of Bethlehem under King Herod's death decree. Long ago, Celestina glimpsed a complex and mysterious pattern in this, and to the eye of the artist, the symmetry of the design required that the father would sooner or later come..After taking a preliminary statement from Celestina, Bellini left to romance a judge out of bed and obtain a search warrant for Enoch Cain's residence, having already ordered a stakeout of the Russian Hill apartment. Celestina's description of her assailant was a perfect match for Cain. Furthermore, the suspect's Mercedes had been abandoned at her place. Bellini sounded confident that they would find and arrest the man soon..The dinner guest leaned back into the car, as though to retrieve something. Perhaps he, too, had been considerate enough to bring a small gift for his hostess..Junior lifted the pattie with a fork, found no quarter under it, and put the meat on one half of the bun. He constructed the sandwich from these fixings, added ketchup and mustard, and took a great, delicious, satisfying bite..Barty had never been instructed in the rules of grammar, but had absorbed them as the roots of Edom's roses absorbed nutrients. "Sure. Does and is."..She didn't hide the diagnosis from the family, but she delayed telling them the prognosis, which was bleak. Already, her bones were tender, packed full of mutated immature white cells that hindered the production of normal white cells, red cells, and platelets..As mentally demanding and stressful as it was to maintain this borrowed sight, the harder thing was looking once more upon her face, after all these years of blindness, only to see her gaunt, so pale. The vital, lovely woman whose image he had guarded so vigilantly in memory would be nudged aside hereafter by this withered version..Bearing roses upon their arrival, they hadn't bothered with umbrellas. Besides, although the sky glowered, the forecast had predicted no precipitation..The only bad moment in the evening came when the pianist played "Someone to Watch over Me."..The Benediction service had concluded, and the worshipers had departed. Gone, too, were the priest and the altar boys..WEDNESDAY, fully two days after delivering honey-raisin pear pies with Agnes, Edom worked up the nerve to visit Jacob..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."..The following April, when he proposed to her, she wouldn't have him. "You're sweet, Paul, but I can't let you throw your life away on me. You're this ... this beautiful ship that will sail a long way, to fascinating places, and I'd only be your anchor."..Instinct, even reason, told him that some connection existed between this person, this Bartholomew, and Celestina. The name had terrified Cain in a bad dream, the very night of the day that he'd killed Naomi, and Vanadium therefore had incorporated it into his psychological-warfare strategy without knowing its significance to his suspect. As strongly as he sensed the connection, he couldn't find the link. He lacked some crucial bit of information..Abruptly alert, sitting up on the edge of the bed, Celestina knew the caller could not be the comatose old woman, so she said angrily, "Who the hell is this?"..In the front wall of the living room, where once had been a fine bay window, the parsonage lay open to the sunny day. Tom shrubbery, carried in from outside, marked the path of destruction. In the very middle of the room, plowed against a toppled sofa and a thick drift of broken furniture, a battered red Pontiac sagged to the left on broken springs and blown tires. A portion of the crazed windshield quivered and collapsed inward, while plumes of steam hissed from under the buckled hood.."It's a boy," Joey assured her, as though he had been given a vision. Thick blood sluiced across his lower lip, down his chin, bright arterial blood. "Baby, no," she pleaded..Lipscomb said, "We're only two and a half blocks from the best Armenian restaurant in the city. I'll dash over there, bring back some chilled bubbly and an early dinner, if you'll allow me."..Taking her silence for assent, Tom continued: "Your father is gone from here, gone forever, but he still lives in other worlds. This isn't a statement of faith alone. If Albert Einstein were still alive and standing here, he'd tell you that it's true. Your father is with you in many places, and so is Phimie. In many places, she didn't die in childbirth. In some worlds, she was never raped, her life never blighted. But there's an irony in that, isn't there? Because in those worlds, Angel doesn't exist-yet Angel is a miracle and a blessing." He looked up from the city to the woman. "So when you're lying in bed tonight, kept awake by grief, don't think just about what you've lost with your father and Phimie. Think about what you have in this world that you've never known in some others-Angel. Whether God's a Catholic, a Baptist, a Jew, a Muslim, or a quantum mechanic, He gives us compensation for our pain, compensation right here in this world, not just in those parallel to it and not just in some afterlife. Always compensation for the pain ... if we recognize it when we see it."..Mrs. Cain's little boy felt small, weak, sorry for himself, and terribly alone. The detective was still here, but his presence only aggravated Junior's sense of isolation..To have the best chance of becoming a master mechanic, any young apprentice needs a mentor. The art of total card control cannot be learned entirely from books and experimentation..A dumpster and a dead musician had humbled him as thoroughly as he had ever been humbled before, as completely as violent nervous emesis and volcanic diarrhea had humbled him, and he had no tolerance for being humbled. Humility is for losers..Suddenly remembering the doctor's assurance to Neddy that they would be out of this building by week's end, Celestina said, "But we've nowhere to go."..In the neatly ordered bedroom, he removed his shoes. Stretching out on the bed, he stared at the ceiling, feeling useless.."I don't know." He was silent a moment. "That's what's going to be interesting."..At the beginning of his third month, instead of at the end of his fifth, he

was combining vowels and consonants: "ba-ba-ba, ga-ga-ga, la-la-la, ca-ca-ca." Amazed, Agnes gaped at her baby. The throat lump that blocked her speech was part pride, part awe, and part fear, though she didn't at once understand why this wonderful precociousness should frighten her. The ship of night floated over the city and cast down nets of darkness, gathering millions of lights like luminous fishes in its black toils. Tom would have edged to his right, away from Edom, if Jacob hadn't flanked him. He remembered the odd comment that the more dour of the twins had made about the Bakersfield train wreck. Tuesday morning, while he showered with a swimming cockroach that was as exuberant as a golden retriever in the motel's lukewarm water, Junior vowed never to kill again. Except in self-defense. 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. 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. Perhaps because Celestina was her father's daughter, with his faith in humanity, she was always deeply moved by the kindnesses of strangers and saw in them the shape of a greater grace. "Does your wife know what a lucky woman she is?" An affecting but difficult-to-define note in Dr. Lipscomb's voice brought Celestina slowly out of the office chair, to her feet. Perhaps it was wonder. Or fear. Or reverence. Perhaps all three. Outside, he turned to look at the display windows. He expected to see the candlestick, supernaturally apparent only from this side of the glass, but it wasn't there. Throughout the autumn, Junior read book after book about ghosts, poltergeists, haunted houses, ghost ships, spaces, spirit rapping, spirit manifestation, spirit writing, spirit recording, trance speaking, conjuration, exorcism, astral projection, Ouija-board revelation, and needlepoint. 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. He stabbed Prosser, however, merely to relieve his frustration and to enliven the dull routine of a life made dreary by the tedious Bartholomew hunt and by loveless sex. In return for more excitement, he'd assumed greater risk, to mitigate risk, he must have insurance. Too late, Paul thought of the one more thing he had wanted to say. Too late, he said it anyway, "God bless you." "If you ranted at him about earthquakes, tornadoes, erupting volcanoes, and all that stuff, how could he mistake you for me?" Victoria Bressler lay on the floor of the small foyer, left arm extended past her head, palm revealed, as though she were waving at the ceiling, right arm across her body in such a way that her hand cupped her left breast. One leg was extended straight, the other knee drawn up almost demurely. If she had been nude, lying against a backdrop of rumpled sheets or autumn leaves, or meadow grass, she would have had the perfect posture for a Playboy centerfold. "With this money, you won't have to cut back on the number of pies you give away--and all of that." He was astonished that adoption records would be sealed and so closely guarded when a child was being placed with a member of its immediate family, with its mother's sister. The grass, silent because he is barely conscious, too badly beaten to protest or to plead for mercy, but also Junior's throat wasn't half as sore as it had been the previous afternoon, and to these men, his soft, coarse voice must have sounded not abraded, but raw with emotion. "I don't care what's customary. I don't want anything. I don't blame anyone. These things happen. If you have a liability release with you, I'll sign it right now." Junior hurried out of the kitchen and along the hallway to the front door. He ran silently, landing on his toes like a dancer. His natural athletic grace was one of the things that drew so many women to him. "But what made you choose that life? You must have committed to the seminary awfully young." Mary Lampion, little light, was home-schooled as her father and mother had been. But she didn't study just reading, writing, and arithmetic. Gradually she developed a range of fascinating talents not taught in any school, and she went exploring in a great number of the many ways things are, journeying to worlds right here but unseen. He went directly to the kitchen and drew a glass of water at the sink faucet. He swallowed two antiemetic tablets that he had brought with him, to guard against vomiting. AFTER THE ENCOUNTER with the quarter-spitting vending machines, Junior wanted to kill another Bartholomew, any Bartholomew, even if he had to drive to some far suburb like Terra Linda to do it, even if he had to drive farther and stay overnight in a Holiday Inn and eat steam-table food off a buffet crawling with other diners' cold germs and garnished with their loose hairs. After he is rolled onto his back by his father, now, here, roses by the fistful jammed in his face, crushed and ground. A delay of a few hours, before getting her under a physician's care, might still be risky. But so was forcing her into a local hospital to endure the mortification she desperately wanted to avoid. He said, "There's a whiteness in Barty's right pupil ... which I think indicates a growth. The distortions in his vision are still there, though somewhat different, when he closes his right eye, so that indicates a problem in the left, as well, even though I'm not able to see anything there. Dr. Chan has a full schedule tomorrow, but as a favor to me, he's going to see you before his usual office hours, first thing in the morning. You'll have to start out early." He paused, giving them a chance to ask the obvious question-and then smiled at their reticence. Forward, under the spreading black branches of the massive tree, receiving continuous green-tongued murmurs of encouragement from the breeze-stirred leaves, Barty was Barty, determined and undaunted. Again he fired into the lock, squeezed the trigger a second time, and discovered that no rounds remained in the magazine. Extra cartridges were distributed in his pockets. In that slow, flat delivery with which Junior was becoming increasingly impatient, Detective Vanadium said, "We all were, Doctor. It was another election year, remember? More than once during that campaign, I could've chugged ipecac. What else would work if I wanted to have a good vomit?" Walking away, he was aware of the many faces at the windows, all as stupid as the faces of cud-chewing cows. He had given them something to talk about when they returned from lunch to their shops and offices. He'd reduced himself to an object of amusement for strangers, had briefly become one of the city's army of eccentrics. During the following day, January 6, as Phimie was wheeled around the hospital for tests in various departments, Celestina

remained in 724, working on her portfolio for a class in advanced portraiture. She was a Junior at the Academy of Art College..Surprisingly, dolls. Quite a few dolls. Apparently the bastard boy was effeminate, a quality he sure as hell hadn't inherited from his father..Whether the cop was unhinged or not, Junior had nothing to gain by talking to him, especially in this disorienting darkness. He was exhausted, achy, with a sore throat, and he couldn't trust himself to be as.The cheerful tides of friends and neighbors, over the years, had washed away nearly all the stains that the dark rage of Agnes's father had impressed on these rooms. She hoped her brothers might eventually see that hatred and anger are only scars upon a beach, while love is the rolling surf that ceaselessly smooths the sand..-nor cruel, nor hateful, nor envious, nor mean," Phimie recited, "for all these are sicknesses of this fallen world-".Barty had awakened able to read. On the page, lines of type no longer twisted under his gaze.."Nevertheless, even if Muffin assaulted you, she's otherwise such a sweet little thing. What would Maria think of you if you told her you'd smashed poor Muffin with a shovel?".Everyone agreed, and the order was placed when their waiter brought appetizers: crab cakes for Nolly, scampi for Kathleen, and calamari for Tom..When the ophthalmologist saw her misery, his kind face softened further, and his pity became palpable..He briefly closed his hand around the three coins, then with a snap of his wrist, flung them at Nolly, who flinched. But either the coins were never flung or they vanished in midair-and his hand was empty..He held forth the single red rose. "For you. Not that it compares. No flower could.".At first all had gone well. Agnes, Maria, and Edom were rightly amazed. A thrill of wonder and big smiles all around the table. They were enthralled by the astoundingly favorable fall of cards, a breathtaking mathematical improbability..In the six weeks since conception, she must have missed at least one menstrual period. She hadn't complained of morning sickness, but surely she'd experienced it. It was highly unlikely that she'd been unaware of her condition..During the past week, Junior had undertaken quiet background research on the prestidigitator with a badge. The cop was unmarried. He lived alone, so this bold visit entailed no risk..The adoption records on Seraphim White's baby weren't sealed by law, because custody of the child was being retained by family..There was an otter in our brook.Agnes's faith told her that the world was infinitely complex and full of mystery, and in a peculiar way, Barty's talk of infinite possibilities supported her belief and gave her the comfort to sleep. Monday morning, New Year's Day, Agnes carried two suitcases out of the back door, set them on the porch, and blinked in surprise at the sight of Edom's yellow-and-white Ford Country Squire parked in the driveway, in front of the garage. He and Jacob were loading their suitcases into the car..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..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..He couldn't work up sufficient saliva to get the rasp out of his voice: "Then you could learn to do it.".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..He didn't rely, either, on a sixth sense to detect obstacles or open spaces, which some blind people claimed to have. Sometimes instinct told him that in his path was an object that ordinarily would not have been there; but as often as not, it went undetected, and unless he was using his cane, he tripped over it. The sixth sense was greatly overrated..Junior was glad for the chance to eavesdrop, not only because he hoped to learn the nature and depth of Vanadium's suspicions, but also because he was curious-and concerned-about the cause of the disgusting and embarrassing episode that had landed him here.."Indeed, you did," said Magusson. "And I dismissed him as a well intentioned crusader, a holy fool. Looks like you had a better take on him than I did, Mr. Cain.". "If I ever have trots, you'll know." And then in the Cheese voice: "CAN WE LISTEN TO THE BOOK TALK IN YOUR ROOM?".Although a cold current crackled along the cable of her spine, Agnes smiled at the card. She was determined to change the dark mood that had descended over them..One of the gifts of power is to know power. Wizard knows wizard, unless the concealment is very skillful. And the boy had no skills at all except in boat-building, of which he was a promising scholar by the age of twelve. About that time the midwife who had helped his mother at his birth came by and said to his parents, "Let Otter come to me in the evenings after work. He should learn the songs and be prepared for his naming day.".After taking a minute to steel himself, Junior squatted next to the dead detective..To become a physical therapist, Junior had taken more than massage classes, so he knew what hematemesiis meant. Hematemesis: vomiting of blood.. "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.".By the first of November, they moved his mother's bed into the living room, so she could be in the center of things, where always she had been, though they admitted no guests now, only members of their family with its many names..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..She wanted to tell him not to say these queer things, not to talk this way, yet she couldn't speak those words. When Barty asked her why, as inevitably he would, she'd have to say she was worried that something might be terribly wrong with him, but she couldn't express this fear to her boy, not ever. He was the lintel of her heart, the keystone of her soul, and if he failed because of her lack of confidence in him, she herself would collapse into ruin..summoned an expression no less dubious than that of a policeman listening to the alibi of a suspect with bloody hands. Then: "I'm quite sure that Wroth Griskin does not make candlesticks. If that's what you're looking for, I'd recommend the housewares department at Gump's.". "Nervous," he said, and howled when one of the paramedics proved to be a sadist masquerading as an angel of mercy..People like Enoch Cain, of course, never choose between the right and the wrong thing, but between two evils. For themselves, they create world after world of despair. For others, they make worlds of pain..When she looked up from Barty, she saw the attorney with his hands full of documents. "Surprise? I know what's in Joey's will.".Agnes could almost

visualize the three-dimensional geometric model that her little prodigy had created in his mind, which he now relied upon to reach the upper floor without a serious stumble. Pride, wonder, and sorrow pulled her heart in different directions. The popeyed little toad smirked over there on the far side of his pretentious desk. Commodified fantasy takes no risks: it invents nothing, but imitates and trivializes. It proceeds by depriving the old stories of their intellectual and ethical complexity, turning their action to violence, their actors to dolls, and their truth-telling to sentimental platitude. Heroes brandish their swords, lasers, wands, as mechanically as combine harvesters, reaping profits. Profoundly disturbing moral choices are sanitized, made cute, made safe. The passionately conceived ideas of the great story-tellers are copied, stereotyped, reduced to toys, molded in bright-colored plastic, advertised, sold, broken, junked, replaceable, interchangeable. Previously, Miss Pixie Lee had been from Texas, but Angel had recently heard that Georgia was famous for its peaches, which at once captured her imagination. Now Pixie Lee had a new life in a Georgia mansion carved out of a giant peach. San Francisco's pre-Christmas cheer had deserted it. The glow and glitter of the season had given way to a mood as dark and ominous as *The Cancer Lurks Unseen, Version 1*. "What do you think of the exhibition," Junior asked, taking one step toward the musician, crowding him. The man, whom the others called Licky, led him out into a hot, bright morning that dazzled his eyes. Leaving his cell he had felt the spellbonds loosen and fall away, but there were other spells woven about other buildings of the place, especially around a tall stone tower, filling the air with sticky lines of resistance and repulsion. If he tried to push forward into them his face and belly stung with jabs of agony, so that he looked at his body in horror for the wound; but there was no wound. Gagged and bound, without his voice and hands to work magic, he could do nothing against these spells. Licky had tied one end of a braided leather cord around his neck and held the other end, following him. He let Otter walk into a couple of the spells, and after that Otter avoided them. Where they were was plain enough: the dusty pathways bent to miss them. 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. As Junior was about to knock again, the door flew inward, and over Sinatra having fun with "When My Sugar Walks Down the Street," Victoria said, "You're early, I didn't hear your car--" She was speaking as she pulled the door open, and she cut herself off in midsentence when she stepped up to the threshold and saw who stood before her. A sudden strange weakness, a formless dread, dropped Agnes out of her crouch and onto her knees beside the boy. On Sunday, New Year's Eve, Edom and Jacob came for dinner. Following dessert, when Barty went to his room to continue reading *Starman Jones*, which he had begun late that afternoon, Agnes told her brothers the truth about their nephew's eyes. 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. Of course, he had the Pinchbeck and Gammoner identities waiting, two escape hatches. But he didn't want to use them. He liked his life on Russian Hill, and he was loath to leave it. Dusk had arrived, strangling the day, and the throttled sky hung low, as blue-black as bruises. The streetlights had come on. Gouts of red light from pulsing emergency beacons alchemized the rain from teardrops into showers of blood. Had he ever thought he could get away with this? He must have been delusional, temporarily mad. Closing her eyes, Agnes whispered, "Bartholomew," in a reverent voice full of wonder, full of awe. Repressing a smirk, feigning a respectful solemnity, he dared to glance at Vanadium, but the detective stared into Naomi's grave as though he hadn't heard the mockery-or, having heard it, didn't recognize it for what it was. Eventually, of course, dear Edom held forth about tornadoes--in particular the infamous Tri-State Tornado of 1925, which ravaged portions of Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana. Although a believer, Agnes was not at the moment able to spread the flowers and ferns of faith over the hard, ugly reality of death. Cowled and skeletal, Death was here, all right, scattering his seeds among all her gathered friends, one day to reap them.

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