

HEN AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN VOL 45 MATHEMATISCH NATURWISSENS

The walk-in closet, which Vanadium next explored, contained fewer clothes than he expected. Only half the rod space was being used. A lot of empty hangers rang softly, eerily against one another as he conducted a casual examination of Cain's wardrobe. 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. 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. Breath repeatedly catching in her throat, heart thudding, Agnes watched her son through the open car door. "and wherever he went, between his shows, he always gave free performances at nursing homes, schools for the deaf." 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. Inexplicably, each repetition of Bartholomew heightened Junior's anxiety. The name resonated not just in his ear, but in his blood and bones, in body and mind, as if he were a great bronze bell and Bartholomew the clapper. She was sopping, shivering. Water streamed from her soaked hair, down her face, as she wiped at her beaded eyelashes with one dripping hand. Jacob cooked corn bread, cheese-and-parsley omelettes, and crisp home fries with a dash of onion salt. Recognizing the danger of saying the wrong thing, the potential for self-incrimination, Junior clenched his jaws and waited. Before Junior had become a physical therapist, he had considered studying to be a dentist. A low tolerance for the stench of halitosis born of gum disease had decided him against dentistry, but he still could appreciate a set of teeth as exceptional as these. Two staff members were at the front desk, when last he'd seen them, out of sight now and too far away to hear the crooning. Junior had been waiting at the doors when the library opened, and thus far he'd encountered no other patrons. In this brighter light, he further examined the gallery brochure and discovered Celestina's photograph. She and her sister were not as alike as twins, but the resemblance was striking. "All right. I get my new eyes from a doctor. They're not real eyes, just plastic, to fill in where my eyes used to be." This was the same woman who had been stripping the second bed when Celestina arrived earlier. Now she was here to remake the first. The candlestick was dry. Holding this pewter bludgeon with a paper towel, Junior replaced it on the table as he had found it. He picked up the candle from the floor and married it to the stick. The police. The stupid police. Ringing the bell when they knew he'd been shot. Ringing the damn doorbell when he lay here helpless, the Industrial Woman lurching toward him, his toe on the other side of the kitchen, ringing the doorbell when he was losing enough blood to give transfusions to an entire ward of wounded hemophiliacs. The stupid bastards were probably expecting him to serve tea and a plate of butter cookies, little paper doilies between each cup and saucer. Maybe his pursuit of the matter sprang from mere curiosity, the desire to discover what a child of his might look like; however, if something else lay behind his interest, the motivation would not be benign. Whatever Cain's intentions, he would prove to be at least an annoyance to Celestina and the little girl-and possibly a danger. Pecan cakes, cinnamon custard pies boxed in insulated coolers, gifts wrapped with bright paper and glittery ribbons. Agnes Lampion made deliveries to those friends who were on her list of the needful, but also to friends who were blessed with plenty. The sight of each beloved face, each embrace, each kiss, each smile, each cheerfully spoken "Merry Christmas" at every stop fortified her heart for the sad task awaiting her when all gifts were given. For a moment, Junior was mystified. Vanadium's movements had the quality of ritual, vaguely reminiscent of a priest raising high the Eucharist. The night of Barty's birth, when Joey actually lay dead in the pickup-bashed Pontiac, as a paramedic had rolled Agnes's gurney to the back door of the ambulance, she had seen her husband standing there, untouched by that rain as her son was untouched by this. But Joey-dry-in-the-storm had been a ghost or an illusion fostered by shock and loss of blood. Junior worried that he might not locate the correct Dumpster among the many. Yet he didn't switch on the flashlight, suspecting that he would be better able to find his way if the conditions of darkness and fog were exactly as they had been earlier. In fact, this proved to be the case, and he instantly recognized the hulking Dumpster when he came upon it..that he could not entirely analyze. Any amateur magician-indeed, anyone willing to practice enough hours, magician or not-could master this trick. It was mere skill, not sorcery. "What was your motive, Enoch?". With a smudge of flour on one cheek, wiping her hands on a red-and-white checkered dishtowel, Agnes answered the door, saw the car in the driveway, and said, "Paul! You're not walking?". Magusson's idea of a laugh. "And they didn't even bother to post a warning. In fact, that sign was still up, inviting hikers to enjoy the view from the observation deck." So many stops, too little time at each, a dazzle of Christmas trees decorated every one to a different taste, offers of butter cookies and hot chocolate or lemon crisps and eggnog, morning chats in bright kitchens steeped in wonderful cooking odors and-in the chillier afternoon good wishes exchanged in front of hearth fires, gifts accepted as well as given, cookies taken in trade for pecan cakes, "Silver Bells" and "Hark How the Bells" and "Jingle-Bell Rock" on the radio: Therewith they arrived at three o'clock in the afternoon, Christmas Eve, their deliveries completed before Santa's had begun. Returning to his apartment, Edom had to pass under the limbs of the majestically crowned oak that dominated the deep yard between the house and the garage. "No. Just tricks. Turn a leaf to a gold piece. Seemingly." Celestina had chosen to shelter the bastard boy, and in so doing, she had declared herself to be Junior's enemy, though he'd never done anything to her, not anything. She didn't deserve him, really, not even one quick bang before the bang of the gun, and maybe after he shot Ichabod, he'd let her beg for a taste of the Cain cane, but deny her. And so Agnes went alone to her bedroom and there, as on so many nights, sought the

solace of the rock who was also her lamp, of the lamp who was also her high fortress, of the fortress who was also her shepherd. She asked for mercy, and if mercy was not to be granted, she asked for the wisdom to understand the purpose of her sweet boy's suffering..Dropped cartridges gleamed on the carpet. Stoop to snatch them up? No. That was asking for a skull-cracking blow..He was glad that he'd taken the double dose of antiemetics. In spite of this provocation, his stomach felt as solid and secure as a bank vault..Whether or not the visitor in the client's chair had ever known much romance, he unquestionably had experienced too much adventure and more than his share of tragedy. Thomas Vanadium's face was a quake-rocked landscape: cracked by white scars like fault lines in a strata of granite; the planes of brow, cheeks, and jaws canted in odd relationships to one another. The hemangioma that surrounded his right eye and discolored his face had been with him since birth, but the awful damage to his bone structure was the work of man, not God..He feared that suicide was a ticket to Hell, and he knew that sinless Perri was not waiting for him in those lower realms..Junior was motivated not by twisted needs, but by rational self interest. Consequently, he opted to load the detective's body into the cramped backseat of the Studebaker with all limbs intact and head attached..Nevertheless, being cautious even as he seized the day--or the night, in this case--he parked a short distance from his destination, on a parallel street. He walked the last three blocks..Although not quite as young as Baval Poriferan, this artist was equally adored by critics and widely regarded as a genius. He went by a single and mysterious name, Sklent, and in the publicity photo of him that was posted in the gallery, he looked dangerous..On this occasion, however, he couldn't have focused on a book even if he'd had the strength to hold it. The fierce paroxysms that clenched his guts also destroyed his ability to concentrate..Focus. Prepare to kill Bartholomew and anyone who tries to protect Bartholomew on January 12. Prepare for all contingencies..Although she was aware that these extraordinary events would shape the rest of her life, beginning with her actions in the hours immediately ahead of her, she could not clearly see what she ought to do next. At the core of her confusion was a conflict of mind and heart, reason and faith, but also a battle between desire and duty. Until she was..place settings. He returned with them to the kitchen and put them in the lower oven, as though Victoria were using it as a plate warmer..That saving smile once more returned lost harmony to the scarred and broken face. "Not me. From my perspective, psychology is just one more of those easy sources of false meaning--like sex, money, and drugs. But I will admit to knowing a thing or two about evil." "Yes, I was." She didn't tell him that her fear had not been allayed by his assurances or by his second walk in the rain..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..Uncle Jacob, cook and baby-sitter and connoisseur of watery death, cleaned off the table and washed the dishes while Barty patiently endured a rambling postbreakfast conversation with Pixie Lee and with Miss Velveeta Cheese, whose name wasn't an honorary title earned by winning a beauty contest sponsored by Kraft Foods, as he had first thought, but who, according to Angel, was the "good" sister to the rotten lying cheese man in the television commercials..He missed Naomi. She'd always known exactly the right thing to say or do, improving his mood with a few words or with just her touch, when he was feeling down..Phimie gazed upon the child briefly, then sought her sister's eyes again. Another word..By November 1967, the Father Brown detective stories, written for mystery-loving adults by G. K. Chesterton, thrilled Barty. This series of books would retain a special place in his heart for the rest of his life--as would Robert Heinlein's *The Star Beast*, which was among his Christmas gifts that year..At the sight of her photograph, she felt herself flush. She hoped none of the pedestrians passing between her and the gallery would look from the photo to her face and recognize her. What had she been..He almost laughed at himself, but he recalled the disconcerting laugh that earlier had trilled from him in the men's room, when he'd thought about stuffing Neddy Gnathic into the toilet. Now he pinched his tongue between his teeth almost hard enough to draw blood, hoping to prevent that brittle and mirthless sound from escaping him again..Nothing he had learned about the supernatural had led him closer to a belief in ghosts and in all that ghosts implied. His faith still reposed entirely in Enoch Cain Jr., and he refused to make room on his altar for anyone or anything other than himself."God bless us, every one," Agnes repeated with all her extended family, and after a sip of the wine, she made an excuse to check on something in the kitchen, where she pressed hot tears into a cool, slightly damp dishtowel to prevent the telltale swelling of her eyes..OTTER WAS THE SON of a boatwright who worked in the shipyards of Havnor Great Port. His mother gave him his country name; she was a farm woman from Endlane village, around northwest of Mount Onn. She had come to the city seeking work, as many came. Decent folk in a decent trade in troubled times, the boatwright and his family were anxious not to come to notice lest they come to grief. And so, when it became clear that the boy had a gift of magery, his father tried to beat it out of him..When the sound-suppressor was properly attached to the pistol, Junior Cain leaned closer to the girl, peered into her eyes, and whispered, "Naomi, are you in there?" Near the top of the stairs, Barty thought he heard voices in his bedroom. Soft and indistinct. When he stopped to listen, the voices fell silent, or maybe he only imagined them..In the face of his kindness, however, she couldn't refuse his request. She nodded..In spite of the bravado of the responses in Junior's unspoken half of the conversation, he was increasingly unnerved by Vanadium. The cop was a lunatic, all right, but he was something more than a mere nut case..If Junior was patient, he could slip in there, find Bartholomew, kill the boy in bed, whack Ichabod second, and still have a chance to make love to Celestina..Wally's own house was in the same neighborhood, a block and a half away, a three-story Victorian gem that he entirely occupied..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..Friday morning, Junior resigned his

position as a physical therapist at the rehabilitation hospital. He expected to be able to live well off interest and dividends for the rest of his life, because his tastes were modest. "Why do they let a man like that keep his badge?" Junior asked. "He's outrageous, wholly unprofessional." Airborne, Phimie complained of ringing in her ears, which might have been related to the flight. She also suffered an episode of double vision and, in the airport after landing, a nosebleed, which appeared to be related to her previous symptoms. Being ruthlessly honest with himself, as always, he acknowledged that killing Tammy would not solve his problem. She might have told friends and colleagues about the Rolex, just as she had surely shared with her girlfriends the juiciest details about Junior's unequalled lovemaking. During the two months that he and the cat woman dated, others had heard her call him Eenie. He couldn't kill Tammy and all her friends and colleagues, at least not on a timely enough schedule to thwart the police. Out of a sphinx face, Obadiah conjured a smile that lifted the point of his white goatee when he turned his head to look at Edom. "Ah ... so long ago," he murmured, as though speaking to himself. "So long ago ... but I remember now." He winked at Edom. Kathleen and Nolly shifted their attention to Tom's clenched left hand, although the quarter could not possibly have traveled from one fist to the other. Kathleen savored her martini. "Mmmm ... as cold as a hit man's heart and as crisp as a hundred-dollar bill from the devil's wallet." Celestina, standing next to Agnes, put an arm around her waist, as perhaps she had once been in the habit of doing with her sister. And now she didn't need him anymore. He gazed at her face, held her cooling hand; his anchor was slipping away from him, leaving him adrift. As though one of the quarters had dropped into his ear and triggered a golden oldie in the jukebox of his mind, Junior heard Vanadium's voice in the hospital room, in Spruce Hills, on the night of the day when Naomi died: "en you cut Naomi's string, you put an end to the effects that her music would have on the lives of others and on the shape of the future.... 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. Angel didn't join the grieving women, but sat on the floor in front of the television, switching back and forth between Gunsmoke and The Monkees. Too young to be genuinely involved in either show, nevertheless she occasionally made gunfire sounds when Marshal Dillon went into battle or invented her own lyrics to sing along with the Monkees. Celestina expected to be taken to a waiting room, but instead the nun escorted her to surgical prep. Too much had happened in those rooms. They were stained dark with family history, and in the night, when either Edom or Jacob slept under that gabled roof, the past came alive again in dreams. If Junior were weak-minded enough to succumb to madness, this was the moment when he should have fallen into an abyss of insanity. He heard an internal cracking, felt a terrible splintering in his mind, but he held himself together with sheer willpower, remembering to breathe slowly and deeply. Yet he brooded even at breakfast, in spite of the consolation of clotted cream and berries, raisin scones and cinnamon butter. In better worlds, wiser Tom Vanadiums chose different tactics that resulted in less misery than this, in a far swifter conveyance of Enoch Cain to the halls of justice. But he was none of those Tom Vanadiums. He was only this Tom, flawed "land struggling, and he couldn't take comfort in the fact that elsewhere he had proved to be a better man. Two things about him were remarkable, beginning with his face. His head was wrapped with white gauze bandages, so he looked like Claude Rains in The Invisible Man or like Humphrey Bogart in that movie about the escaped convict who has plastic surgery to foil the police and to start a new life with Lauren Bacall. Blond hair sprouted from the top of the elaborate wrappings. Otherwise, only his eyes, his nostrils, and his lips were uncovered. Agnes supposed Jacob trembled in anticipation of the crash of an airliner or at least a light aircraft. Edom might be calculating the odds that this serene place-at this specific hour-would be the impact point for one of those planet-killing asteroids that reputedly wiped most life off the earth every few hundred thousand years or so. Friday night, mystified and troubled, he hadn't slept much, and each time that he dozed off, he had dreamed of being alone in a bosky woods, stalked by a sinister presence, unseen but undeniable. This predator crept in silence through the underbrush, indistinguishable from the lowering trees among which it glided, as fluid and as cold as moonlight, but darker than the night, gaining on him relentlessly. Each time that he sensed it springing toward him for the kill, Jacob woke, once with Barty's name on his lips, calling out to the boy as though in warning, and once with two words: the knave. . . . " . . . then how come you couldn't walk where your eyes were healthy and leave the tumors there," she remembered. Refusing to give the cop the satisfaction of a reply to the news of the unborn baby's paternity, Junior stared unwaveringly into the grave and said, "Whose funeral were you attending?". 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." He turned from the cowering girl and studied the boy, who stood a few steps inside the room, holding a can of soda in each hand. The artificial eyes were convincing, but they didn't possess the knowing look that so troubled him in the strange girl. Thereafter, Junior managed to drive four miles before he was forced to pull off the road at another service station, after which he felt that his ordeal might be over. But less than ten minutes later, he settled for more rustic facilities in a clump of bushes alongside the highway, where his cries of anguish frightened small animals into squeaking flight. This guy was spooky. Junior was beginning to think that the detective's unorthodox behavior wasn't a carefully crafted strategy, as it had first seemed, but that Vanadium was a little wacky. ice bags. I almost laughed at his tendency to morbidity and self-dramatization. The living dead had not come to get him: just some rubber ice bags. In the brief silence between cuts on the album, he heard the clink of the wineglass against the bottle of Merlot, as the visitor evidently gathered them from the floor. Now her mooring was Wally Lipscomb-obstetrician, pediatrician, landlord, and best friend--who arrived halfway through the reception. As she listened to Helen Greenbaum's sales report, Celestina held Wally's hand so tightly that had it been a plastic champagne flute, it would have cracked. Barty approached stair climbing as a mathematical problem, calculating the

precise movement of each leg and placement of each foot necessary to successfully negotiate the obstacle. He proceeded less slowly on the next three steps than he had on the first three, and thereafter he ascended with growing confidence, pumping his legs with machinelike precision..His previous plan to create a tableau-butter on the floor, open oven door-to portray Victoria's death as an accident was no longer adequate. A new strategy was required.. "As long as the case was open and you were the sole suspect," said the lawyer, "they couldn't negotiate an out-of-court settlement with you. But they were afraid that if eventually they couldn't prove you killed her, then they'd be in an even worse position when a wrongful death suit finally went before a jury." Highly impressed by the spot-on hyena scream with which Frieda had purged herself of the childhood emotional trauma inflicted by an authoritarian grandmother, Junior asked her to go out with him..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..AS GREASY WITH FEAR sweat as a pig on a slaughterhouse ramp, Junior woke from a nightmare that he could not remember. Something *is reaching for him-that's all he could recall, hands clutching at him out of the dark-and then he was awake, wheezing. Night still pressed at the glass beyond the venetian blind. The pharmacy lamp in the comer was aglow, but the chair that had been beside it was no longer there. It had been moved closer to Junior's bed..Junior had come to the gumshoe four days ago, with business that might have made a reputable investigator uncomfortable. He needed to discover whether Seraphim White had given birth at a San Francisco hospital earlier this month and where the baby might be found. Since he wasn't prepared to reveal any relationship to Seraphim, and since he resisted devising a cover story on the assumption that a competent private detective would at once see through it, his interest in this baby inevitably seemed sinister..Dishes dried and put away, Jacob retired to the living room and settled contentedly into an armchair, where he would probably become so enthralled with his new book of dam disasters that he would forget to make luncheon sandwiches until Barty and Angel rescued him from the flooded streets of some dimly unfortunate town.. "Blood tests should reveal whether the child's yours or not. That also might explain all this." Pulling herself up in the bed, peering at him suspiciously, she said, "You've gone and memorized old Emily." In the instant that Junior had shoved Naomi into the rotted railing, he had foreseen this visit from Rudy, Sheena, and Kaitlin. He'd known he could pretend to be offended at the state's offer to put a price on his loss, could feign revulsion, could resist convincingly--until gradually, after grueling days or weeks, he reluctantly allowed the indefatigable.As shaken as she had been at Phimie's side, she couldn't trust her memory. Perhaps she hadn't seen what she thought she'd seen..Although the ace of hearts had only positive meanings, and although, according to Maria, multiple appearances, especially in sequence, meant increasingly positive things, a series of chills nevertheless riffled through Agnes's spine, as if her vertebrae were fingers shuffling..During the day and then following a dinner break, the Hackachaks persisted. The hospital had never witnessed such a spectacle. Shifts changed, and new nurses came to attend to Junior in greater numbers than necessary, using any excuse to get a glimpse of the freak show..The past three years had given Wally much to celebrate, as well. After selling his medical practice and taking an eight-month hiatus from the sixty-hour work weeks he had endured for so long, he'd been giving twenty-four hours of free service to a pediatric clinic each week, providing care to the disadvantaged. He'd worked hard all his life, and saved diligently, and now he was able to focus solely on those activities that gave him the greatest gratification..The porch light wasn't on. No landscape lighting brightened the backyard. Barty was a gray shadow moving through darkness and through the darkling drizzle..Startled, Junior sat up straight, clutching the silencer-fitted pistol, but the cruiser didn't abruptly brake and pull to the curb in front of the Mercedes, as he expected.. "It's a lot," Angel insisted. "Wally gave me an Oreos, last time I saw him. You like Oreos?" They ordered martinis, and when Kathleen, perusing a menu, asked her husband what looked good for dinner, he suggested, "Oysters?" As Junior paced the hotel room, his fear made way for anger. All he wanted was peace, a chance to grow as a person, an opportunity to improve himself And now this. The unfairness, the injustice, galled him. He seethed with a sense of persecution..Celestina succumbed to a fit of giggles. Before she could control them, she used up two Kleenex to blow her nose and to blot the laughter from her eyes.. "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." "There's nothing here for you," she said, stepping back from the door in order to close it.. "You did just fine, Tom, just fine," Agnes said in a consoling tone that she might have used with a boy whose performance, at a piano recital, had been earnest but undistinguished. "We were all quite impressed." Late Monday afternoon, September 19, Junior returned wearily to his apartment, from another fruitless investigation of a Bartholomew, this one across the bay in Corte Madera. Exhausted by his unending quest, depressed by lack of success, he sought refuge in meditation..He needed to keep moving, conduct the search, find the watch, and get the hell out of here, but he couldn't stop staring at the musician. Something about the cadaver made him nervous--aside from the fact that it was dead and disgusting and, if he was caught with it, a one-way ticket to the gas chamber..He stopped straining to see through the black room to the corner armchair. He closed his eyes and tried to lull himself to sleep by summoning into his mind's eye a lovely but calculatedly monotonous scene of gentle waves breaking on a moonlit shore..Tom didn't know what to make of this bit of information, so he said, "That's a lot." While Junior had been hospitalized, Vanadium had searched his lace, with or without a warrant. Turnabout was satisfying..Why Cain, even if he was the father, should be interested in the little girl was a mystery to Tom Vanadium. This totally self-involved, spookily hollow man held nothing sacred; fatherhood would have no appeal for him, and he certainly wouldn't feel any obligation to the child that had resulted from his assault on Phimie.. "Once out of the coma and stabilized for a few weeks, I was transferred to a

hospital in Portland, where I had to undergo eleven surgeries." Halfway home, he heard sirens and saw the beacons of approaching emergency vehicles. He pulled the Suburban to the side of the road and watched as two fire trucks passed, followed by an ambulance. By Thursday, September 23, due to Junior's accident and surgery, the draft board—which had reinstated his I-A status after he'd lost the exemption that had come with his former job as a rehabilitation therapist—agreed to schedule a new physical examination in December. Barty looked at Angel, and Angel looked at Barty, and they dropped to their knees on the grass before their daughter. They were both grinning ... and then their grins stiffened a little. "You figure all this," Jolene asked, "because Mother Nature gives us a nice warm day in January?" Although the girl was unable to articulate why she preferred not to have her mother at her side, they all understood the tumult in her heart. She couldn't bear to subject her gentle and proper mother to the shame and embarrassment that she herself felt so keenly and that she imagined would grow intolerably worse in the hours or days ahead, until and even after the birth. "I've got one of those faces so ordinary you see it everywhere," said Edom, and decided to tell the story of the Tri-State Tornado of 1925. This is, of course, the purpose of art: to disturb you, to leave you uneasy with yourself and wary of the world, to undermine your sense of reality in order to make you reconsider all that you think you know. The finest art should shatter you emotionally, devastate you intellectually, leave you physically ill, and fill you with loathing for those cultural traditions that bind us and weigh us down and drown us in a sea of conformity. Junior had learned this much, already, from his art appreciation course. "Thirsty," Agnes rasped. Her voice was Sahara sand abrading ancient stone, the dry whisper of a pharaoh's mummy talking to itself in a vaulted sealed for three thousand years. "Oh, dear God," she whispered, and although she had always been a strong woman who stood on a rock of faith, who drew hope as well as air with every breath, she was as weak now as the unborn child in her womb, sick with fear. Fortunately, the chill fog didn't bum away from the Mercedes, considering that it facilitated the stalking of Celestina. The mist swaddled the white Buick in which she rode, increasing the chances that Junior might lose track of her, but it also cloaked the Mercedes and all but ensured that she and her friend wouldn't realize that the pair of headlights behind them were always those of the same vehicle. "Honey," she said, crouching to peer at him through the vertical slats of the playpen, "what're you doing?" These would no doubt be cloyingly sentimental paintings of the bastard boy, with impossibly large and limpid eyes, posed cutely with puppies and kittens, pictures better suited for cheap calendars than for gallery walls, and dangerous to the health of diabetics. "Tom, Wally, I'm sorry for the brusque introductions," Agnes Lampion apologized. "We'll have plenty of getting-to-know-each other time over dinner. But the people in this room have been waiting an entire week to hear from you, Tom. We can't wait a moment longer." Because the tower stood on a ridgeline that marked the divide between county and state property, most of the attending constabulary were county deputies, but two state troopers were present, as well. Returning from his tests, he'd gotten into bed without stripping off the thin, hospital-issue robe. He was still wearing it over his pajamas. Last night, in the superintendent's basement apartment, as they shared a bottle of wine, Sparky had told Vanadium numerous weird tales about Cain: The Night He Shot Off His Toe, The Day He Was Saved from a Meditative Trance and Paralytic Bladder, The Day the Psychotic Girlfriend Brought a Vietnamese Potbellied Pig to His Apartment When He Was Out and Fed It Laxatives and Penned It in His Bedroom ... Undiminished antiperistaltic waves coursed through his duodenum, stomach, and esophagus, and now he gasped desperately for air between each expulsion, without much success. Evidently, the hero was accustomed to encounters of this nature. He rose, pulled out the unused fourth chair. "Please sit with us." As the storm failed to dampen Joey, so the rotating red-and-white beacons on the surrounding police vehicles did not touch him. 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. Junior said nothing. He was still upset with Naomi for hiding the pregnancy from him, but he was delighted that the baby would have been his. Now Vanadium couldn't claim that Naomi's infidelity and the resultant bastard had been the motive for murder. For the first time since walking to La Jolla to meet Jonas Salk, Paul planned a journey with a specific purpose. A s[?]ance was what it appeared to be at first. Eight people were gathered around the dining-room table, which stood utterly bare. No food, no drinks, no centerpiece. They all exhibited that shiny-faced look of people nervously awaiting the revelations of a spirit medium: part trepidation, part soaring hope. Maria fished another chip from the sweating carafe, rejected it, and scooped out a larger piece. She hesitated, staring at it for a moment, and then spooned it between Agnes's lips. "Water can be broken if it will be first made into ice." "I'll never forget it," Dr. Salk promised. With his attention still on Perri's pictures, he said, "But I'm afraid you give me far too much credit. I'm no superman. I didn't do the work alone. So many dedicated people were involved." "Why? What was he going to get out of it?" In recounting the fortune-telling session, Agnes had not told the magician about the four jacks of spades, only about the aces of diamonds and hearts. She never wore her worries for anyone to see; and though she had made a joke of the appearance of the fourth knave on Friday, Edom knew that it had deeply troubled her. Otter shrugged. When Junior complained of severe thirst, Victoria explained that he was to have nothing by mouth until morning. He would be put on a liquid diet for breakfast and lunch. Soft foods might be allowable by dinnertime tomorrow. He was relieved that he hadn't moved his head or made a sound. He wanted to understand as much of the situation as possible before revealing that he was awake. The night was hushed but for the barking of a dog in the great distance. Hollow, far softer than the ghostly singing that had recently haunted Junior, the rough voice of this hound nevertheless stirred him, spoke to an essential aspect of his heart.

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