

SOUS LE JOUG

The second time, armed with the previously calculated fact that each regular year contains 3,153,600 seconds, and that a leap year contains an additional 86,400, she vetted Barty's answer in only four minutes. Thereafter, she accepted his numbers without verification. "A ship without an anchor can never be at rest," he answered. "It's at the mercy of the sea." Still looming over her, he snatched the pad out of her hands and examined the sketch. "Where would you have seen this?" The word diarrhea was inadequate to describe this affliction. In spite of the books he'd read to improve his vocabulary, Junior could not think of any word sufficiently descriptive and powerful enough to convey his misery and the hideousness of his ordeal. Friday night, he slept more soundly than he'd slept since coming home from the pharmacy to discover Joshua Nunn and the paramedic in solemn silence at Perri's bedside. He didn't dream of trekking across a wasteland, neither salt flats nor snow-whipped plains of ice, and when he woke in the morning, he felt rested in body, mind, and soul. "I'd give anything if it hadn't happened," he said earnestly. And now a tortured note wrung wet emotion from his voice. "I only wish it had been me who died." He looked at the two cards following the four of clubs in the stack. Neither of these was a jack of spades, either, and both were what he anticipated. Even as the morning matured, the fog and the rain conspired to bar all but a faint gray daylight from St. Mary's. Shadows flourished. Finally Angel dropped and slithered, vanishing under the overhanging bedclothes with a final flurry of yellow socks. "As I explained, he might have thought I was you," Edom said, staring at the neatly ordered volumes on the nearby bookshelves. When the long table was laden and the wine poured, when everyone but Mary settled into chairs, Angel said, "My daughter tells me she wants to make a short presentation before I say grace. I don't know what it is, but she assures me it doesn't involve singing, dancing, or reading any of her poetry." I. Frowning, Angel studied the tasty strip of meat pinched between her fingers, reevaluating everything she thought she knew about the source of bacon. "He'll just think I'm an incompetent detective. If he comes around wanting his five hundred bucks back, I'll give it to him." But Havnor is also the Great Isle, a broad, rich land; and in the villages inland from the port, the farmlands of the slopes of Mount Onn, nothing ever changes much. There a song worth singing is likely to be sung again. There old men at the tavern talk of Morred as if they had known him when they too were young and heroes. There girls walking out to fetch the cows home tell stories of the women of the Hand, who are forgotten everywhere else in the world, even on Roke, but remembered among those silent, sunlit roads and fields and in the kitchens by the hearths where housewives work and talk. He couldn't easily refuse the assignment. Later that year, President Lyndon Johnson, with strong backing from both the Democratic and the Republican Parties, was expected to sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and currently it was dangerous for clearheaded believers in the primacy of self to express their healthy instincts, which might be mistakenly perceived as racial prejudice. He could be fired. He no longer had any reason to follow an exercise regimen. For twenty-three years, he'd needed to maintain good health in order to meet his responsibilities, but all the responsibilities that mattered to him had been lifted from his shoulders. Intending to keep the front of the gallery under surveillance from behind the wheel of his Mercedes, Junior checked the time as he walked toward the car. His wrist was bare, his Rolex missing. On Christmas Eve, 1996, the family gathered in the middle of the three houses for dinner. The living-room furniture had been moved aside to the walls, and three tables had been set end to end, the length of the room, to accommodate everyone. Being blind had few consolations, but Barty found that not being able to look at his uncles' files and books was one of them. In the past, he never really, in his heart, wanted to see those pictures of dead people roasted in theater fires and drowned bodies floating in flooded streets, but a few times he peeked. His mom would have been ashamed of him if she'd discovered his transgression. But the mystery of death had an undeniable creepy allure, and sometimes a good Father Brown detective story simply didn't satisfy his curiosity. He always regretted looking at those photos and reading the grim accounts of disaster, and now blindness spared him that regret. He swallowed one capsule and washed it down with water. He returned the pharmacy bottle to the nightstand. The beetle-green Pontiac waited in the driveway, with a shine that tempted nature to throw around some bad weather. Joey always kept a spotless car, and he probably wouldn't have had time to earn a living if he had resided in some shine-spoiling climate rather than in southern California. Ferocious pirates, ruthless secret agents, brain-eating aliens from distant galaxies, super criminals hell-bent on ruling the world, bloodthirsty vampires, face-gnawing werewolves, savage Gestapo thugs, mad scientists, satanic cultists, insane carnival freaks, hate-crazed Ku Klux Klansmen, knife-worshipping thrill killers, and emotionless robot soldiers from other planets had slashed, stabbed, burned, shot, gouged, torn, clubbed, crushed, stomped, hanged, bitten, eviscerated, beheaded, poisoned, drowned, radiated, blown up, mangled, mutilated, and tortured uncounted victims in the pulp magazines that Paul had been reading since childhood. Yet not one scene in those hundreds upon hundreds of issues of colorful tales withered a corner of his soul as did a glimpse of Barty's empty sockets. The sight wasn't in the least gory, nor even gruesome. Paul cringed and looked away only because this evidence of the boy's loss too pointedly made him think about the terrible vulnerability of the innocent in the freight-train path of nature, and threatened to tear off the fragile scab on the anguish that he still felt over Perri's death. terrified, the thorns pricking so close to his eyes, green points combing his lashes. He's too weak to resist, disabled. "Worlds," ventured Jacob, "in which that oil-tank truck never stopped on the railroad tracks in Bakersfield, back in '60. So the train never crashed into it and those seventeen people never died." Junior was vigilant. He took note of all those who approached the piano, whether they dropped money in the fishbowl or not. Halted by the unmistakable meaning of the expressions on these women's faces, Paul was grateful that Nellie was briefly stricken mute. He didn't believe he had the strength to receive the news that she had tried to deliver. In those days they had no fixed names for the various

kinds and arts of magic, nor were the connections among those arts clear. There was-as the wise men of Roke would say later-no science in what they knew. But Hound knew pretty surely that his prisoner was concealing his talents..The window didn't face the street. It overlooked a five-foot-wide passageway between this house and the next. The police might not spot him leaving..Symptoms of food poisoning usually appear within two hours of dining. The hideous intestinal spasms had rocked him at least six hours after he'd eaten. Besides, if the culprit were food poisoning, he would have vomited; but he hadn't felt any urge to spew..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..If not for Celestina's slutty little sister, Bartholomew would not exist. No threat. Junior's life would be different, better..The moon shimmered, and the stars blurred-but only briefly, for her devotion to this boy was a fiery furnace that tempered the steel of her spine and brought a drying heat to her eyes. Without Franklin Chan's full approval but with his complete understanding, Agnes took Barty home. On Monday, they would return to Hoag Hospital, where Barty would receive surgery on Tuesday..By the grace of Caesar Zedd and Remy Martin, Junior eventually slipped into undulant currents of sleep, and as he drifted away on those velvet tides, he took some solace from the thought that come what may, December 29 would be a better day than December 28.."Having spent most of the last twenty years in this apartment, not being the one who has a car, how would I meet a Negro magician?" He wanted, all right, but -intuition warned him that he ought to continue to be discreet for a while longer.."From childhood, I've had this ... awareness, this perception of an infinitely more complex reality than what my five basic senses reveal. A psychic claims to predict the future. I'm not a psychic. Whatever I am ... I'm able to feel a lot of the other possibilities inherent in any situation, to know they exist simultaneously with my reality, side by side, each world as real as mine. In my bones, in my blood-".Junior glimpsed Vanadium first in profile-and then, as the cop rode down and away, only the back of his head. He hadn't seen this man in almost three years, yet he was instantly certain that this was no coincidental look-alike. Here went the filthy-scabby-monkey spirit itself.."In cases like this, the malignancy is often more advanced in one eye than the other. If the size of the tumor requires it, we remove the eye containing the greatest malignancy, and we treat the remaining eye with radiation."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 hour later, when Barty decided he wanted a soda, he switched off the book and asked Angel if she would like something to drink..Ten months later, he finally wore her down. She accepted his proposal, and they set a date for the wedding..Scamp was a multitalented woman, with smoother skin than a depilated peach, with more delicious roundnesses than Junior could catalog, but she proved not to be the remedy for his tension. Only Bartholomew, found and destroyed, could give him peace..Some listings didn't include first names, only initials. Every time he came across the initial B, he put a red heck mark beside it with a fine point felt-tip pen..A sudden cold breeze blew down out of the moon, bearing a faint alien scent, and the black boughs of the trees billowed and rustled like witches' skirts..Just as Celestina snapped shut the latches on the suitcase and turned to the door, a nurse's aide entered, pushing a cart loaded with towels and bed linens..Polio, largely an affliction of younger children, had stricken her two weeks before her fifteenth birthday. Thirty years ago..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..Mary was at play here, and the sight of her, his first in seven years, almost brought Barty to his knees. She was the image of her mother, and he knew that this must be at least a little bit what Angel had looked like when, at three, she had initially arrived here in 1968, when she explored the kitchen on that first day and found the toaster under a sock..Concerned that Junior's crying jag would trigger spasms of the abdominal muscles and ultimately another attack of hemorrhagic vomiting, the nurse had with her a tranquilizer. She wanted him to use the apple juice to wash down the pill..The only bad moment in the evening came when the pianist played "Someone to Watch over Me." Holding the pistol, fully extending his right arm in execution style, the gunman approached the fallen minister.."It's not a specific brand you can't have, it's the whole idea of a candy bar."In case someone was waiting in the hallway, he flushed the john for authenticity, though binding foods and paregoric still gave him the sturdy bowels of any brave knight in battle..In retrospect, coming here wasn't a wise move. Evidently, the detective had been following him. Now, Vanadium would puzzle out a motive for this late-night graveyard tour.."Another year," Edom said, "and instead of me, Barty can drive the car for you."Here, four days past Christmas, after two days of torment, Agnes knew the worst, that her treasured son must go eyeless or die, must choose between blindness or cancer of the brain..The boy's silvery giggles rang as merrily as sleigh bells, his Christmas spirit undampened. "Not between, Mommy. Nobody could do that. I just ran where the rain wasn't."Without the pillow, she wouldn't have been able to lift her head to look toward the back of the ambulance..He picked up Angel, picked up Barty. "Hold on." He carried them out of the room, down the stairs, out of the house, to the yard under the great tree, where they would wait for the police, and where they would not see Jacob's body when the coroner removed it by way of the front door..The telephone rang, putting an end to their chat, but Agnes would remember the substance of it later that year, on the day before Christmas, when Barty took a walk in the rain and changed forever his..While Junior had been hospitalized, Vanadium had searched his lace, with or without a warrant. Turnabout was satisfying..Her awful sense of weightlessness became something much better: buoyancy, an exhilarating lightness of spirit. Fear remained with her-fear for Barty, fear of the future and of the strange complexity of Creation that she'd just glimpsed-but wonder and wild hope now tempered it..He was no longer hopeful that they could have a future together. After sampling the Junior Cain thrill machine, Celestina would want more, as women always did, but the time for a meaningful romance had now passed. For all the anguish he'd been

put through, however, he deserved the consolation of her sweet body at least once. A little compensation. Payback..He exploded off Renee with the velocity of high-powered rifle fire. Stunned, disgusted, humiliated, he backed away from the chaise lounge, spluttering, wiping at his mouth, cursing..As if he'd been presented with many previous photos under these circumstances, Jonas Salk accepted the picture. "Your daughter?".STILL WEARING HIS white pharmacy smock over a white shirt and black slacks, striding purposefully along the streets of Bright Beach, under a malignant-gray twilight sky worthy of a *Weird Tales* cover, with ominous accompanying rhythm provided by wind-clattered palm fronds overhead, Paul Damascus headed home for the day..When Victoria failed to answer the door, this man would not simply go away. He had been invited. He was expected. Lights were on in the house. The lack of a response to his knock would be taken as a sign that something was amiss..Suddenly Junior intuited the identity of the man in the chair. Beyond question, this was the plainclothes police officer with the birthmark..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..Playing with fire was fun when you didn't have to attempt to conceal the fact that it was arson.."I thought so," Angel said, dubiousity squinching her face. "Mrs. Orwall made me cheese..".As the heavysset nurse retreated with the baby, Phimie's grip on her sister's hand relaxed, but then grew firm once more as her gaze also became more intense. "Love ... you..".when red aces weft followed by disturbing jacks, Agnes had pretended to take her son's card-told fortune lightly, especially the frightful part of it. In fact, a coldness had twisted through her heart.."I can't..".She only half understood their frantic conversation, partly because the ability to concentrate was draining from her along with her lifeblood, but also because she was distracted by Joey. He was no longer in the wreck, but standing at the open rear door of the ambulance..Junior had almost fumbled his fork when he recognized the tune. His heart raced. His hands were suddenly clammy..For the first time since walking to La Jolla to meet Jonas Salk, Paul planned a journey with a specific purpose..As he was wheeled headfirst into the operating room, Barty raised off the gurney pillow. He fixed his gaze on his mother until the door swung shut between them..They were each down to one last sip of wine, studying dessert menus, when Celestina began to wonder if, in spite of all instincts and indications, she might be wrong about the state of Wally's heart. The signs seemed clear, and if his radiance wasn't love, then he must be dangerously radioactive-yet she might be wrong. She was a woman of some insight, quite sophisticated in many ways, with the raw-nerve perceptions of an artist; however, in matters of romance, she was an innocent, perhaps even more pitifully naive than she realized. As she perused the list of cakes and tarts and homemade ice creams, she allowed doubt to feed upon her, and as the thought grew that Wally might not love her that way, after all, she became desperate to know, to end the suspense, because if she didn't mean to him what he meant to her, then Daddy was just going to have to accept her conversion from Baptist to Catholic, because she and Angel would have to spend some serious heart-recovery time in a nunnery.."Well, it's true," he said, finally turning the key in the proper direction and firing up the engine..He left the party and stood in the street for a while, taking slow deep breaths, letting the brisk night air clean the pot smoke out of his lungs, slow deep breaths, suddenly sober in spite of the beer he'd drunk, slow deep breaths, as chilled as a slab of beef in a meat locker, but not because of the cold night..Junior closed his eyes at once and let his jaw sag, breathing through his mouth, feigning sleep..He stashed two suitcases full of clothes and toiletries-plus the contents of Pinchbeck's safe-deposit box-in the van, and then added those precious items that he'd be loath to lose if the hit on Bartholomew went wrong, forcing him to leave his Russian Hill life and flee arrest. The works of Caesar Zedd. Sklent's three brilliant paintings. The needlepoint pillows, to which he'd colorfully applied the wisdom of Zedd, constituted the bulk of this collection of bare essentials: 102 pillows in numerous shapes and sizes, which he had completed in just thirteen months of feverish stitchery~."All under here's worked out long since" Licky said. And Otter had begun to be aware of the strange country under his feet: empty shafts and rooms of dark air in the dark earth, a vertical labyrinth, the deepest pits filled with unmoving water. "Never was much silver, and the watermetal's long gone. Listen, young'un, do you even know what cinnabar is?".One problem: Nolly Wulfstan, Quasimodo without a hump, probably repaired to this convenient club after work, to down a few beers, because this was surely as close as he would ever get to a halfway attractive woman. The detective would think that he and Junior were here for the same reason-to gawk at nearly naked babes and store up enough images of bobbling breasts to get through the night-and he would not be able to comprehend that for Junior the attraction was the dance, the intellectual thrill of experiencing a new cultural phenomenon..Agnes winced. Already, another contraction. Mild but so soon after the last. She clasped her hands around her immense belly and took slow, deep breaths until the pain passed..Shifting the Suburban out of park, Wally said, "I didn't know Baptists indulged in wagering..".--and we're from different worlds, which I respect. I respect you and your wonderful family ... your centeredness, your certainty. I want to do this only because it's what I owe you..".Copyright (c) 1999 by Ursula K. Le Guin. "Dragonfly" first appeared in *Legends*..A blood test might prove that Junior was the father. Accusations might sooner or later be made against him by bitter and hate-filled members of her family, perhaps not even with the hope of sending him to prison, but solely for the purpose of getting their bands on a sizable pan of his fortune, in the form of child support..Month by month during Barty's first year, Agnes's belief in his exceptional intelligence was only confirmed by his development. By the end of the second month of life, most babies will smile in response to a smile, and they are able to smile spontaneously in the fourth month. Barty was smiling frequently in his second week. In the third month, many babies laugh out loud, but Barty's first laugh came in his sixth week..After a while, Franklin Chan asked, "Do you want me with you when you tell him?".With a shiver, Kathleen said, "We'd like to know more about why we did the things we did for you. Why the quarters? Why the song?".it totally destroyed four towns, as if they were hit by atom bombs, tore up parts of six more towns, destroyed fifteen thousand homes. That's just the homes. This thing was black, huge and black and hideous, with continuous lightning snapping

through it, and a roar, they said, like a hundred thunderstorms booming all at once." The hospital was eerily quiet, except for the occasional squeak of rubber-soled shoes on the vinyl floor of the corridor..buttery sunshine, and emerald-black where the shadows of limbs and leaves overlay it. Fat crows as black as.Tom received a fierce hug, too, and a sisterly kiss, and he was grateful for them. He had been a loner for too long, as a hunter of men pretty much had to be when on a long hard road of recuperation and then on a mission of vengeance, even if he called it a mission of justice. During the few days he'd spent guarding Celestina and Grace and Angel in the city, and subsequently during the week with Wally, Tom had felt that he was part of a family, even if it was just a family of friends, and he had been surprised to realize how much he needed that feeling..To be fair, with her exceptional beauty, she would have been the center of attention even in a gathering of real artists. Junior had little chance of getting at Seraphim's bastard boy without going through this woman and killing her as well; but if his luck held and he could eliminate Bartholomew without Celestina realizing who had done the deed, then he might yet have a chance to discover if she was as lubricious as her sister and if she was his heart mate..Junior had hoped not to be recognized by anyone at this affair. He regretted that he hadn't stuck to his original plan, maintaining surveillance of the gallery from his parked car..Harrison was a Baptist, Vanadium a Catholic, and although they approached the same faith from different angles, they weren't coming to it from different planets, which was the feeling Vanadium had been left with following their conversation. It was true that Enoch Cain could never be brought successfully to trial for the rape of Phimie, subsequent to her death and in the absence of her testimony. And it was also uncomfortably true that exploring the possibility that Cain was the rapist would tear open the wounds in the hearts of everyone in the White family, to no useful effect. Nevertheless, to rely on divine justice alone seemed naive, if not morally questionable..With the infant in her arms, the heavysset nurse pressed in beside Celestina, who.Focus. Get Ichabod all the way inside. Act now, think later. No, no, proper focus requires an understanding of the need to ize: scrutinize, analyze, and prioritize. Get the bitch, get the bitch! Slow deep breaths. Channel the beautiful rage. A fully evolved man is self-controlled and calm. Move, move, move!.Maria stopped praying with her knuckle rosary and resorted to a long swallow of wine..Angel cocked her head and studied his left hand, which he had closed while opening his right. She pointed. "It's there."..In his light backpack, he carried one change of clothes, spare socks, candy bars, bottled water. He planned his journeys to be in a town every nightfall, where he washed one set of clothes and donned the other..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..From his early adolescence, Edom was drawn to gardening, taking special pleasure in the cultivation of hybrid roses. He'd been only sixteen when one of his blooms earned first place in a flower show. When his father learned about the competition, he regarded Edom's pursuit of the prize as a grievous sin of pride. The punishment left Edom bedridden for three days, and when he came downstairs at last, he discovered that his father had torn out all the rose bushes..What if the stubborn, selfish, greedy, grubbing, vicious, psychotic, evil spirit of Thomas Vanadium, which had earlier pursued Junior through another alleyway in broad daylight, had followed him into this one in the more ghost-friendly hours of the night, and what if that spirit were standing just outside the Dumpster right now, and what if it closed the bifurcated lid and slipped a bolt through the latch rings, and what if Junior were trapped here with the thoroughly strangled corpse of Neddy Gnathic, and what if the flashlight failed when he tried to switch it on again, and then what if in the pitch-blackness he heard Neddy say, "Does anyone have a special request?".Vanadium couldn't know the whereabouts of the quarter. Besides, even when he'd swung the lunch tray over Junior's lap, the detective hadn't been close enough to pick the pocket of the robe..Junior felt unspeakably violated. This was outrageous: the inarguably personal, very private contents of his stomach, scooped into a plastic evidence bag, without his permission, without even his knowledge..Into Barty's darkness came light that he had not sought. He saw his smiling Mary on his lap as she lowered her hands from his temples, saw the faces of his family, the table set with Christmas decorations and many candles flickering..Quick introductions were made in the process of moving from the porch to the foyer, and Agnes said, "Come on back to the kitchen, I'm baking pies."..Junior was tempted to experiment with the controls. Maybe other messages were recorded on the machine. Listening to them would be delicious-even if every one of them turned out to be as meaningless to him as Max's--a little like browsing through a stranger's diary..The prickly-bur ghosts of two little children didn't concern him. At worst, they were spiritual gnats.. "Well, you ought to be," Grace said, taking her pies out to the Suburban that Wally had bought solely for this enterprise..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..Now, here, lying on a bed in the emergency room of a Sacramento hospital, on a Saturday afternoon only six weeks before the camellia festival, Junior suffered under the care of a resident physician who was so young as to raise the suspicion that he was merely playing doctor..Your deeds ... will return to you, magnified beyond imagining ... the spirit of Bartholomew ... will find you ... and mete out the terrible judgment that you deserve.."Not so unbelievable," said Jacob. "Forty-five thousand people every year die in automobiles. Cars aren't transportation. They're death machines. Tens of thousands are disfigured, maimed for life."..Yet in her heart, she wouldn't relinquish hope for a miracle. This was an amazing boy, a prodigy, a boy who could walk where the rain wasn't, already himself a miracle, and it seemed that anything might happen, that Dr. Chan might suddenly rush into the waiting room, surgical mask dangling from his neck, face aglow, with news of a spontaneous rejection of the cancer..She thought all that, but she closed her eyes and said: "I'll be okay. Give me a second here, all right?".The station wagon rolled out, the Volkswagen bus followed it, and Wally brought up the rear. "Wagons, ho!" he announced. The morning that it happened, Barty ate breakfast in the Lampion kitchen with Angel, Uncle Jacob, and two brainless friends..And like John Kennedy's death, Zedd's

passing was cloaked in mystery, inspiring widespread suspicion of conspiracy. Only a few believed that he had committed suicide, and Junior was certainly not one of those gullible fools. Caesar Zedd, author of *You Have a Right to Be Happy*, would never have blown his brains out with a shotgun, as the authorities preferred the public to believe..After a day of work, the pencil portrait of Nella Lombardi was finished. The second piece in the series-an extrapolation of her appearance at age sixty-was begun..A deep storm of silence, anti-thunder, the house fully drenched in a muffling rain of soundlessness.. "Blood tests should reveal whether the child's yours or not. That also might explain all this." "Oh? Do they rent their house out to pirates with little pirate children, clowns with little clown children?" Widening his eyes in calculated surprise, Junior said, "Are you a police officer?". WEDNESDAY, fully two days after delivering honey-raisin pear pies with Agnes, Edom worked up the nerve to visit Jacob..Earthquake weather. Southern Californians had many definitions of that term, but Edom knew he was right this time. Thunder would roll again soon, but it would arise from underfoot..Hope became easier to sustain when late 1966 and 1967 brought the biggest advance in women's fashions since the invention of the sewing needle: the miniskirt, and then the micromini. Already, Mary Quant-of all things, a British designer-had conquered England and Europe with her splendid creation; now she brought America out of the dark ages of psychopathic modesty..During the five years following Agnes's death, their family of many names thrived. Barty and Angel had brought them all together in this place fifteen years previously, but the destiny about which Toni had spoken on the back porch, that night in the rain, seemed to be in no hurry to manifest itself Barty could find no painless way to sustain secondhand sight, so he lived without the light. Angel had no reason to shove anyone else into the world of the big bugs, where she'd pushed Cain. The only miracles in their lives were the miracles of love and friendship, but the family remained convinced of eventual wonders, even as they got on with the day at hand..They were married in September of that year, much later than even Grace White's wager date. As Grace's guess had been closer than her daughter's, however, Celestina paid with a month of kitchen duty..At Thanksgiving dinner, again at the three tables set end to end, in the year of the triple zero, Mary Lampion, now fourteen years old, made an interesting announcement over the pumpkin pie. In her travels where none but she could go, after seven fascinating years of exploring a fraction of all the infinite worlds, she said she sensed beyond doubt that, as Barty's mother had told him on her deathbed, there is one special place beyond all the ways things are, one shining place.. "Stop it, stop it!" Agnes, only ten years old, slender and shaking, but wild with righteousness, until now held in thrall by her own fear, by the memory of all the beatings that she herself has taken. She screams at their father and strikes him with a book she's brought from the house. The Bible. She strikes their father with the Bible, from which he's read to them every night of their lives. He drops the roses, tears the holy book out of Agnes's hands, and pitches it across the yard. He rakes up a handful of the scattered roses, intending to make his son resume this dinner of sin, but here comes Agnes once more, the Bible recovered, brandishing it at him, and now she says what all of them know to be true but what none of them has ever dared say, what even Agnes herself will never again dare to say after this day, not while the old man lives, but she dares to say it now, holding the Bible toward him, so he can see the gold-embossed cross upon the imitation-leather cover. "Murderer," Agnes says. "Murderer." And Edom knows that they're all as good as dead now, that their father will slaughter them right here, right this minute, in his rage. "Murderer," she says accusingly, behind the shield of the Bible, and she doesn't mean that he is killing Edom, but that he killed their mother, that they heard him in the night, three years before, heard the short but awful struggle, and know that what happened was no accident. Roses fall from his skinned and pierced hands, a flurry of petals yellow and petals red. He rises and takes a step toward Agnes, his dripping fists crimson with his blood and with Edom's. Agnes doesn't back away, but thrusts the book toward him, and scintillant sunlight caresses the cross. Instead of tearing the book out of her hands again, their father stalks away, into the house, surely to return with club or cleaver ... yet they will see no more of him this day. Then Agnes-with tweezers for the thorns, with a basin full of warm water and a washcloth, with iodine and Neosporin and bandages-kneels beside him in the yard. Jacob, too, comes forth from the dark crawlspace under the porch, having watched in terror from behind the latticework skirt. He is shaking, crying, flushed with embarrassment because he didn't intervene, although he was wise to hide, for the disciplinary beating of one twin usually leads to the pointless beating of the other. Agnes gradually settles Jacob by involving him in the treatment of his brother's wounds, and to Edom she says, often thereafter, "I love your roses, Edom. I love your roses. God loves your roses, Edom." Overhead, agitated wings quiet to a soft flutter, and the shrieking crows grow silent. The air pools as still and heavy as the water in a hidden lagoon within a secret glade, in the perfect garden of the unfallen.....One apartment to the right, one to the left. Junior went to the right, to Apartment 1, where he'd seen the lights come on behind the curtained windows..Instead, he encountered an elderly woman getting out of a red Pontiac with a fox tail tied to the radio antenna. A quick glance around confirmed that they were unobserved, so he clubbed her on the back of the head with the butt of his 9-mm pistol..Surprisingly, dolls. Quite a few dolls. Apparently the bastard boy was effeminate, a quality he sure as hell hadn't inherited from his father..He gently drew the covers over his wife's ruined body, to her thin shoulders, but arranged her right arm on top of the blankets. He straightened and smoothed the folded-back flap of the top sheet.. "Fourteen. It's usually the family that's behind an expression of the calling at such a young age, but in my case, I had to argue my folks into it." Instead, trying not to let Barty see the depth of her concern, she told him to get his jacket from the front closet, and she got hers, and leaving the buttermilk-raisin pies unfinished, she drove him to the doctor's office, because he was her reason to breathe, the engine of her heart, her hope and joy, her everlasting bond to her lost husband. Dr. Joshua Nunn was only forty-eight, but he had appeared grandfatherly since Agnes had first gone to him as a patient after the death of her father, more than ten years ago. His hair turned pure white before he was thirty. Every day off, he either worked assiduously on his twenty-foot sportfisher, Hippocratic Boat, which he scraped and

painted and polished and repaired with his own hands, or pattered around Bright Bay in it, fishing as though the fate of his soul depended on the size of his catch; consequently, he spent so much time in the salt air and sun that his perpetually tan face was well-wizened at the corners of his eyes and as appealingly creased as that of the best of grandfathers. Joshua applied the same diligence to the preservation of a round belly and a second chin that he brought to the maintenance of his boat, and considering his wire-rimmed eyeglasses and bow tie and suspenders and the elbow patches on his jacket, he seemed to have intentionally sculpted his physical appearance to put his patients at ease, as surely as he had selected his wardrobe for the same purpose.

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