

## THE POETS GIFT ILLUSTRATED BY ONE OF HER PAINTERS

Celestina screamed-"Here! In here!"--as she slapped the magazine into the butt of the pistol.. "More than remorse," the magician said. "Shame. I come from good people. I wasn't raised to be a cheat. Sometimes, trying to figure how I went wrong, I think it wasn't the need for money that ruined me. At least not that alone, not even that primarily. It was pride in my skill with the cards, frustrated pride because I wasn't getting enough nightclub work to show off as much as I wanted to.".Gorging on fudge cake and coffee to guard against a spontaneous lapse into meditative catatonia, Junior manfully admitted that he had been weak, that he had reacted to the unknown with fear and retreat instead of with bold confrontation. Because each of us can trust no one in this world but himself, self-deceit is dangerous. He liked himself better for this frank admission of weakness..WHEN A GLASS OF chilled apple juice at dawn stayed on his stomach, Junior Cain was allowed a second glass, though he was admonished He was also given three saltines.. "I got to admit," Nolly said, "I'm surprised these little pranks have rattled him so deeply.".Breath held, Celestina confirmed what she had suspected about the child since the quick glimpse she'd had in the surgery. Its skin was cafe au lait with a warming touch of caramel..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..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..Without excellence, of course, there would be no civilization, no progress, no joy; and Agnes was surprised that this sharp bur of her father's philosophy had stuck deep in her subconscious, prickling and worrying her unnecessarily. She'd thought that she was entirely clean of his influence..Certain the caller was the police operator, Junior screamed as though in agony, wondering if his cries sounded genuine, since he'd had no opportunity to rehearse. Then, in spite of the painkiller, his cries suddenly were genuine..By air from San Francisco south to Orange County Airport, then farther south along the coast by rental car, one week in the wake of Paul Damascus and his three charges, following directions provided by Paul, Tom Vanadium brought Wally Lipscomb to the Lampion house..No hesitation preceded Grace's response. "That's very generous of you, Paul. And I, for one, accept. Is this the house where you lived with your Perri?".Maybe the bright side was that the musician hadn't either wet his pants or taken a dump while in his death throes. Sometimes, during a comparatively slow death like strangulation, the victim lost control of all bodily functions. He'd read it in a novel, something from the Book-of-the-Month Club and therefore both life-enriching and reliable. Probably not Eudora Welty. Maybe Norman Mailer. Anyway, the men's room didn't smell as fresh as a flower shop, but it didn't reek, either.. "I'm saying, for all I know." She took her hand off his thigh. "What's all this about Celestina, anyway?".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.".In the present, long after the execution of Josef Krepp, half a block ahead, lay the Lipscomb house. Beyond it, the Lampion place..He let go of the girl's chin, and at once she scrunched into the corner of the window seat, as far away from him as she could get. The knowing look in her eye wasn't that of an ordinary child, not that of a child at all. Not his imagination, either. Terror, yes, but also defiance, and this knowing expression, as though she could see right through him, knew things about him that she had no way of knowing..Still pretending sleep, Junior delighted in the realization that the detective himself had dragged a red herring across the trail and was now busily following this distracting scent..During this same period, having subscribed to the opera, Junior attended a performance of Wagner's The Ring of the Nibelung..The longer he crouched, head cocked, breathing silently through his open mouth, the more convinced Junior became that he had heard a man approaching. Indeed, the terrible conviction grew that someone was standing immediately in front of the dumpster, head cocked, also breathing through his open mouth, listening for Junior even as Junior listened for him..Dinner arrived, and Tom persuaded Celestina and Grace to come to the table for Angel's sake, even if they had no appetite. After so much chaos and confusion, the child needed stability and routine wherever they could be provided. Nothing brought a sense of order and normality to a disordered and distressing day more surely than the gathering of family and friends around a dinner table..Or perhaps the sorrow was less sadness than yearning. He had to move on, but he was loath to begin this strange journey without her..After a while, he dared to crack his eyelids. Pressing against his eyes was a blackness as smooth and as unrelenting as any known by a blind man. Not even a ghost of light haunted the night beyond the window, and the slats of the venetian blind were as hidden from view as the meatless ribs under Death's voluminous black robe..Licky took him down into the mines to show him the gangues, the kinds of earth the ore was likely to occur in. A few miners were working at the end of a long level..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.".He heard her explain that the title of the exhibition had been inspired by one of her father's sermons, which aired on a nationally syndicated weekly radio program more than three years ago. This wasn't a religious program, per se, but rather one concerned with a search for meaning in life; it usually broadcast interviews with contemporary philosophers as well as speeches by them, but from time to time featured a clergyman. Her father's sermon received the greatest response from listeners of anything aired on the program in twenty years, and three weeks later, it was rerun by popular demand.. "I was never Cary Grant, to begin with," said Vanadium, still ceaselessly rolling the quarter across his fingers, "so I had no big emotional investment in my appearance.

Cosmetic surgery would have added another year of recuperation time, probably much longer, and I was anxious to get after Cain. Seemed to me this mug of mine might be just the thing to scare him into an incriminating mistake, even a confession."From her Volkswagen bus in the middle of the line, Maria joined them. "In case we get separated, Agnes, I don't have an itinerary."The three of them, gathered around her in the quick, held fast to her, as if Death couldn't take what they refused to release.."I'll always know your face," he promised. "Even if you have to go away and you're gone a hundred years, I'll remember what you looked like, how you felt."He decided that he must never again kill so impetuously. Never. In fact, he vowed never again to kill at all, except in self-defense. Soon he would be rich-with much to lose if he was caught. Homicide was a marvelous adventure; sadly, however, it was an entertainment that he could no longer afford..Rena laughed. "Oh, but true! And not just a garden. I'm a field of flowers!" She let go of her skirt, which shimmered like cascades of falling petals. "So tonight will be a famous night, Celestina."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 puttered 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.."The exquisite kind," he replied, glad that he had read so many books on the art of seduction and therefore knew precisely the right thing to say..As Tom reached Celestina, she said, "Shots." She said, "Gunshots." She held the receiver in one hand and pulled at her hair with the other, as if with the administration of a little pain, she might wake up from this nightmare. She said, "He's in Oregon."As early as this evening, here at her son's bedside, Agnes began dimly to sense that certain of these amusing conversations with Barty might not be as fanciful as they seemed, that he was expressing in a childlike way some truth that she had assumed was fantasy..Instead of answering the question, meaning to imply that he believed Junior already knew the facts, Thomas Vanadium said, "I was able to get a warrant to search your house." Junior thought this must be a trick. No hard evidence existed to indicate that Naomi had died at the hands of another rather than by accident..Wet cobblestones and tattered blacktop. Hurry, hurry. Past the lighted casement window in the gallery men's room..This colored person's grave, however, was uphill of Naomi's. Over time, as the body decomposed up there, its juices would mix with the soil. When rain saturated the ground, subsurface drainage would carry those juices steadily downslope, until they seeped into Naomi's grave 'let mingled with her remains. This seemed highly inappropriate to Junior.."Our little girl's going to walk backward her whole life if you drive in reverse all the way to the hospital."Unobtrusively, Junior followed the musician across the large front room, but by an indirect arc, using the babbling bourgeoisie for cover..Startled, the pianist turned to face him-and backed off a step, as though his personal space had been too deeply invaded. "Oh, well, thank you, that's kind. I love my work, you know, it's so much fun it hardly qualifies as work at all. I've been playing the piano since I was six, and I was never one of those children who whined about having to take lessons. I simply couldn't get enough."By the time they reached the seventh painting, alcohol and rich French cuisine and Jack Lientery's powerful art combined to devastate Frieda. She shuddered, leaned with one hand on a canvas, hung her head, and committed an act of bad PR..No mystery here. No reason to leap to the ceiling and cling upside down like a frightened cartoon cat..In all their years, neither twin had ever set foot beyond the limits of Bright Beach. They both appeared nervous but determined..IMPLODE To burst inward under pressure. Like the hull of a submarine at too great a depth..Dragonfly.In November, Edom asked Maria Gonzalez to dinner and a movie. Although he was only six years older than Maria, both agreed that this was a date between friends, not really a boy-girl thing..The stumpy ghost departed the sliding stairs at the second floor and walked off into women's sportswear..This was better than taking slow deep breaths. Periodically, on the way to Vanadium's house, Junior spat out a string of insults, punctuated by obscenities..Then he curled up in one of the big armchairs in the living room and began the book again. This was the first time he had ever reread a novel-and he finished it at midnight..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..Strangely, as sometimes happened in this room, his missing toe itched. There was no point in removing his shoe and sock to scratch the stump, because that would provide no relief. Curiously, the itch was in the phantom toe itself, where it could never be scratched..In the distance, the clang of a trolley-car bell. Hard and clear in spite of the muffling fog..Junior phoned a twenty-four-hour-a-day locksmith and paid premium post midnight rates to have the double deadbolts re-keyed.."Getting her into her shoes and coat sooner than Monday required a bribe," Wally said..Knickknacks and mementos were not to be found anywhere in the house. And until now Junior had seen nothing hanging on the barren walls except a calendar in the kitchen..He must begin by learning as much as possible about ghosts, hauntings, and the vengeance of the dead. During the remainder of 1966, only two apparently paranormal events occurred in Junior Cain's life, the first on Wednesday, October 5..After a silent moment of surprise, Nork or Knacker, or

Hisscus, said, "Your sentiment is understandable, Mr. Cain, but it's customary in these matters--". So runs the water away, away, reminding himself that nature was merely a dumb machine, utterly devoid of mystery, and that the unknown would always prove familiar if you dared to lift its veil, Junior discovered he could move. Each of his feet seemed to weigh as much as one of Wroth Griskin's cast bronzes, but he crossed the sidewalk and went into Galerie Coquin. During the course of this momentous day, he had employed Zedd learned techniques to channel his hot anger into a red-hot rage. Now, without any conscious effort on his part, rage grew into molten-white fury. The lawyer's eyes appeared as round as his face. "Aggie, please don't tell me you've started to share Jacob's ... enthusiasms? ". "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." The Benediction service had concluded, and the worshipers had departed. Gone, too, were the priest and the altar boys. On Joey's side, there was no family to provide help. His mother had died of leukemia when he was four. His dad, fond of beer and brawling--like father not like son--was killed in a bar fight five years later. Without close relatives willing to take him in, Joey went to an orphanage. At nine he wasn't prime adoption material--babies were what was wanted--and he'd been raised in the institution. The night was in flight, however, and he had a lot to do before it swooped straight into morning. He hurried the length of the diner, pushing past waitresses, checking out all three of the possibilities, but of course, none of them was the dead detective--or anyone else Junior had ever seen before. He was looking for--what?--a ghost, but vengeful ghosts didn't sit down to a meat-loaf lunch in the middle of a hauntin. "It's there even when you read to me now. The sad feeling, I mean. It changes the story, makes it not as good, because I can't pretend I don't hear how sad you are." A man with beautiful celadon eyes, his face beaded with jewels of rain, reached through the cut-away door and removed the blanket from Agnes. "Come with me," Paul Damascus said at once. "To Bright Beach. It is far away from San Francisco, and he'd never think of looking for you there. Why would he? You've no connection to the place. I've got a house with enough room. You're welcome. And you wouldn't be among strangers." She remained fixated on the card that she had just dealt, and for a while she didn't speak, as though the eyes of the paper knave held her in thrall. Finally she said, "Monster. Human monster." Celestina stared curiously at Tom Vanadium. She had witnessed the effect of vanishment, though she hadn't actually seen the coin disappear in midair. Yet she seemed to sense either that something more than sleight of hand had just transpired or that the trick had a meaning she'd missed. At the grave, they arrived with red and white roses. Agnes carried the red, and Barty brought the white. do further testing, of course, but not until he's been stabilized at least twelve hours. Personally, I don't think we'll find any physical cause. Most likely, this was psychological--acute nervous emesis, caused by severe anxiety, the shock of losing his wife, seeing her die. They lived too far from the nearest railroad tracks. He could not rationally expect a derailed train to crash through the garage. Escorting her home didn't require either a car or a long walk, because she lived upstairs in the hotel where he'd had dinner. The top three floors of the building featured enormous owner-occupied apartments. With his empty sockets draped by unsupported lids, Barty rode home wearing padded eye patches under sunglasses, his cane propped against the seat at his side, as though he were costumed for a role in a play filled with a Dickensian amount of childhood suffering. Solitude, however, was his preference. He found the sympathy of friends unbearable, a constant reminder that Perri was gone. Agnes got out of bed, switched on the lamp, and tucked Barty in once more. "Say your silent prayers." He followed the dead man through the window, into the alley, managing not to step on him. Now here was a thing, worse than the thought of a quarter in the closed hand: Neddy's eyes seemed to follow Junior as he rooted among the trash bags. Even though he now knew what a hateful person the nurse was, he remained strongly attracted to her. He was not the kind of man, however, who would take advantage of an unconscious woman. "Fear?" Kathleen asked, more interested in Vanadium's words than in his prestidigitation. "You said you're offering fear to Cain ... as if that was something he would want." By now he recognized that the man approaching from the other graveside service was neither a Negro nor a stranger. Detective Thomas Vanadium was annoying enough to be an honorary Hackachak. 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. Maria stopped praying with her knuckle rosary and resorted to a long swallow of wine. In a stolen black Dodge Charger 440 Magnum, Junior Cain shot out of Spruce Hills on as straight a trajectory to Eugene as the winding roads of southern Oregon would allow, staying off Interstate 5, where the policing was more aggressive. He wasn't a marksman, anyway. He couldn't handle anything more than close-up work. "My God," Junior said, pretending that his befuddlement had faded and that his mind had just now clarified, "you think Naomi was murdered, don't you?" She worried that they would argue with her, and though she knew that she was committed to her decision, she was afraid to have that commitment tested just yet. The glimmering bay and the shimmering amber candlelight provided the perfect atmosphere for the song that arose now from the piano in the bar. There was a valuable lesson to be learned from the encounter with Renee Vivi: Many things in this life are not what they first appear to be. To Junior, however, the lesson was not worth learning if he had to live with the vivid memory of his humiliation. He swept the immediate area with the flashlight, and shadows spun with shadows, waltzing spirits in the ballroom of the night. He'd acted boldly, recklessly, without scoping the territory to be sure Prosser was alone. The accountant lived by himself, but a visitor might be present. "Tom, a couple minutes ago," Agnes said, "Celestina mentioned your. . . 'certain awareness.' Which is what exactly?" The aging, fugitive Nazi had been replaced at the front desk by a woman with messily chopped blond hair, a brutish face, and arms that would dissuade Charles Atlas from challenging her. She changed a five-dollar bill into coins for the vending machines and snarled at him only once in strangely accented English. He pushed on the door, but still it resisted, and he surprised himself by letting out a bellow of frustration that expressed quite the opposite of self-control, though no one listening could have the slightest doubt about his

determination to commit and command..In spite of the ravages of illness and age, beauty remained in the old woman's face. Her bone structure was superb. In youth, she must have been stunning..He went upstairs to change out of his dark blue suit and badly scuffed black shoes..Thrilled to have inspired this awe in her, he closed the book. "Remember what we talked about a long time ago? You asked me how come, if I could walk where the rain wasn't. . .".As outgoing as his twin uncles were introverted, Barty didn't withdraw from the festivities. Agnes never needed to remind him that family and guests took precedence over even the most fascinating characters in fiction, and the boy's delight in the company of others pleased his mother and made her proud..Barty, she explained, would be rich in many ways. Financially rich, but also rich in talent, in spirit, intellect. Rich in courage, honor. With a wealth of common sense, good judgment, and luck..Happy weekend. His attitude amazed her, and his strength in the face of darkness gave her courage..Agnes delighted in their conversations. Barty was far ahead of the language learning curve for his age, but he was still a child, and his observations were filled with innocence and charm. "You mean your cold is like in your nose but not in your feet?".NOT IN A MOOD to garden, but wearing the proper gloves, Junior clicked on the foyer light, the hall light, the kitchen light, and stepped around the clubbed-smothered-shot nurse, to the range, where he switched on the right oven, in which an unfinished pot roast was cooling, and the left oven, in which the dinner plates waited to be warmed. He cranked up a flame again under the pot of water that had been boiling earlier-and glanced hungrily at the uncooked pasta that Victoria had weighed and set aside,.For the first time since walking to La Jolla to meet Jonas Salk, Paul planned a journey with a specific purpose..But the boy played no tricks against his father. He took his beatings in silence and learned to hide his gift..With a nervous twitch of his avian head and a wary frown, the watcher broke eye contact and slipped into the chattering crowd, lost as quickly as a slender sandpiper skittering among a herd of plump seagulls..He wiped the steering wheel and every surface that he might have touched during the drive from Victoria's to the detective's place, where he'd acquired the gardening gloves that he still wore. He got out of the car and, with the door open, wiped the exterior handle..He had nothing against Negroes. He didn't wish them ill. He wasn't prejudiced. Live and let live. He believed that as long as they stayed with their own kind and abided by the rules of a polite society, like everyone else, they had a right to live in peace..That's unusual, too, and I wish the etiology of this disease, which is exceedingly well understood, gave us reason to hope based on the transience of the symptoms ... but it doesn't.".The silence on the line was not merely that of a caller holding her tongue. It was abyssal and perfect, as no silence on a telephone ever can be, without the faintest hiss or crackle of static, no hint of breathing or..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.".He fiddled with the cylinder until it swung open. Five chambers, a gleaming cartridge in each..Celestina jammed the shaft of the crank into the casing socket. Wouldn't fit. Her hands were shaking. Steel fins on the shaft of the crank had to be lined up just-so with slots in the socket. She fumbled, fumbled..Junior spoke the three words aloud and felt a strange resonance between them and his dim memories of Reverend White's voice on that long-ago night. Yet the link, if any actually existed, remained elusive..Extending his hand, watching the pianist closely, Junior said, "My name's Richard Gammoner.".Needlepoint provided no sanctuary. Junior's hands trembled just badly enough to make accurate stitchery impossible..Robert Heinlein saved her. Over hot dogs and chips, she read to Barty from Red Planet, beginning at the top of page 104. He had previously shared enough of the story with Agnes so that she felt connected to the narrative, and soon she was sufficiently involved with the tale that she was better able to conceal her anguish..Hound had taken him, had stood and seen his people beaten senseless, had not stopped the beating. Yet he spoke as a friend. Why? said Otter's look. Hound answered it.. "Mommy, watch!" He turned in the deluge with his arms held out from his sides. "Not scary!". "At the back of the second gallery, on the left, there's a corridor. The rest rooms are at the end of it, beyond the offices.".Junior knew that he must remain vigilant. Vigilant and focused until January 12 had come and gone. Eight days to go..Looking from one to another of his companions, Tom said, "When I think of everything that had to happen to bring us here tonight, the tragedies as well as the happy turns of fortune, when I think of the many ways things might have been, with all of us scattered and some of us never having met, I know we belong here, for we've arrived against all odds." His gaze traveled back to Agnes, and he gave her the answer that he knew she hoped to hear. "This boy and this girl were born to meet, for reasons only time will reveal, and all of us ... we're the instruments of some strange destiny.".Because, since childhood, Jacob had been drawn to stories and images of doom, to catastrophe on both the personal and the planetary scale-from theater fires to all-out nuclear war-he had a flamboyant imagination second to none and a colorful if peculiar intellectual life. For him, therefore, the most difficult part of learning card manipulation had been coping with the tedium of practice, but for years he had applied himself diligently, motivated by his love and admiration for his sister, Agnes..Even without the dangling cigarette and without the cynical sneer, Nolly had an air of toughness worthy of Sam Spade, largely because the face that nature had given him was a splendid disguise for the sentimental sweetie who lived behind it. With his bull neck, with his strong hands, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up to expose his lovely hairy forearms, he made a properly intimidating impression: as if Humphrey Bogart, Sydney Greenstreet, and Peter Lorre had been put in a blender and then poured into one suit..When Seraphim's bastard baby was dead, evidence of paternity would die with it-and any claim for child support. Even Vanadium's stubborn, selfish, greedy, grubbing, vicious, psychotic, evil spirit would have to recognize that all hope of bringing Junior down was lost, and it would at last either dissipate in frustration or be reincarnated..At last, as the sun slowly set, he arrived at the highest of the high redoubts, beyond which the branches were too young and too weak to support him farther. Against a sky red enough to delight the most sullen sailors, he rose and stood in a final crook of limbs, pressing his left hand against a balancing branch, right hand planted cockily on his hip, lord of his domain, having kicked off the trammels of darkness and fashioned from them a ladder.. "We don't believe it does, do we, Daddy?"

We don't believe blood tells. We believe we're born to hope, under a mantle of mercy, don't we?" Choking fumes, blinding soot. A licking heat told him that slithering fire had followed the smoke up the stairs and now coiled perilously close in the murk. "You don't get the heebie-jeebies," Max said. "You give 'em. Tell me what's wrong." Admitting to the likelihood that he would never again devote himself seriously to his business, Paul sold it to Jim Kessel, long his good right hand and fellow pharmacist. After a bit Otter nodded left, away from the grey stone tower. They walked on towards a long, treeless valley, past grass-grown dumps and tailings. As though he were home to a species of termites that preferred the taste of men to that of wood, Vanadium felt a squirming in his marrow. He ardently wished that he hadn't killed her with such merciful swiftness. If he'd tortured her first, he would now have the memory of her suffering from which to take consolation. Increasingly, he used meditation to relieve stress. He was so skilled at concentrative meditation without seed-blanking his mind that half an hour of it was as refreshing as a night's sleep. Vanadium nodded. "And I'd like to hear about Cain's reactions in more detail. I've read your reports, of course, and they've been thorough, but necessarily condensed. There'll be lots of subtleties that only reveal themselves in conversation. Often, the apparently insignificant details are the most important to me when I'm devising strategy." Reading the dates on the headstone, he saw that the minister's daughter had died on the seventh of January, the day after Naomi had fallen from the fire tower. If ever asked, Junior would have no trouble accounting for his whereabouts on that day. Eleven days had passed since Wally stopped three bullets. He still had a little residual weakness in his arms, grew tired more easily than before he'd wound up on the wrong end of a pistol, complained of stiffness in his muscles, and used a cane to keep his full weight off his wounded leg. The rest of the medical care he required, as well as physical rehabilitation, could be had in Bright Beach as well as in San Francisco. By March, he should be back to normal, assuming that the definition of normal included massive scars and an internal hollow space where once his spleen had been. "You should be with your children," Agnes worried. Maria looked up. "My babies are sitted with my sister." His waitress was a cutie. She flirted with him, and he knew he could have her if he wanted. Eventually, Junior remembered the quarter. He reached into the right pocket of the thin cotton bathrobe, but the coin wasn't there, as it should have been. The left pocket also was empty. "No, I didn't see him," Junior reminded the attorney. "I just assumed, when this harassment started here-" the grass, silent because he is barely conscious, too badly beaten to protest or to plead for mercy, but also. The stress that he currently felt wasn't the same that he so often relieved with women. This was an energizing tension, a not-unpleasant tightening of the nerves, a delicious anticipation that he wanted to experience to its fullest-until the gallery reception for Celestina, on the evening that her show opened, January 12. This tension could not be released by intercourse, but only by the killing of Bartholomew, and when that long-sought moment arrived, Junior expected the relief he experienced would far exceed mere orgasm. In reaction to a terrible sense of weightlessness, Agnes's two-fisted grip on the steering wheel grew so tight her hands ached. She held on with all her strength, as if at real risk of floating out of the car and up toward the source of the raveling skeins of rain. calm. He tried to imagine what Victoria's breasts would look like, freed from all restraint.

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