

## **KATASTROPHEN HERAUSFORDERUNGEN UND CHANCEN**

She found the switch and clicked off the lamp again. "Good-night, young prince." A matronly nurse arrived, alerted to the patient's return to consciousness by the telemetry device associated with the heart monitor..He hit Celestina with the big question, the huge question, just as she paused in her babbling to suck in a deep breath, the better to spout even more nonsense, whereupon this panicky inhalation caught in her breast, caught so stubbornly that she was certain she would need the attention of paramedics to start breathing again, but then Wally popped open the box, revealing a lovely engagement ring, the sight of which made the trapped breath explode from her, and then she was breathing fine, although snuffling and crying and just generally a mess. "I love you, Wally." "All right," Celestina said, "yes, of course." She could see no harm in humoring Phimie. "Angel. Angel White. Now, you calm down, you relax, don't stress yourself." On the day that Vanadium attended the graveside service for Seraphim and subsequently stopped at Naomi's grave to needle Cain, he had suspected that Phimie didn't die in a traffic accident, as claimed, but he hadn't for a moment thought that the wife killer was in any way connected. Now, finding this gallery brochure in the nightstand drawer seemed to be one more bit of circumstantial proof of Cain's guilt. "I don't have to graduate in the spring of next year. I can take fewer classes, graduate the spring after. That's no big deal." A sedan had come to a stop in the graveled driveway, over to the right of the house, almost out of view. As Junior watched, the headlights were doused. The engine shut off. The driver's door opened. A man got out of the car, a shadowy figure in the fearsome yellow moonlight. The dinner guest..Some information she'd withheld from him: that the cancer might already have spread, that he might still die even after his eyes were removed-and that if it hadn't yet spread, it might soon do so.. "July 14, 1960, in Guatemala City, Guatemala, a fire in a mental hospital-two hundred twenty-five dead." "I can talk to you," he said to Salk. "You'll understand. She was hero, the only one I ever knew till I met you. I've read about them all my life, in pulp magazines and paperbacks. But Perri ... she was the real thing. She didn't save tens of thousands-hundreds of thousands of children like you've done, didn't change the world as you've changed it, but she faced every day without complaint, and she lived for others. Not through them. For them. People called her to share their problem, and she listened and cared, and they called her with their good news because she took such joy in it. They asked for her advice, and though she was inexperienced, really, so short of experience in so many ways, she always knew what to say, Dr. Salk. Always the right thing. She had great heart and natural wisdom, and she cared so much." Junior didn't want an apology. The offer of a free lunch-or an entire week of lunches-didn't charm a smile from him. He had no interest in taking home a free apple pie..She couldn't explain her anxiety to him, because he believed in the supremacy of laws, in the justice that might be delivered in this life, in a comparatively simple reality, and he would not comprehend the gloriously, frighteningly, reassuringly, strangely, and deeply complex reality Agnes occasionally perceived-usually peripherally, sometimes intellectually, but often with her heart. This was a world in which effect could come before cause, in which what seemed to be coincidence was, in fact, merely the visible part of a far larger pattern that couldn't be seen whole..As if vengeful spirits weren't trouble enough, he had for three years been struggling unwittingly against the terrible power of the minister's curse, black Baptist voodoo that made his life miserable. He knew now why he had been plagued by violent nervous emesis, by epic diarrhea, by hideously disfiguring hives. The failure to find a heart mate, the humiliation with Renee Vivi, the two nasty cases of gonorrhea, the disastrous meditative catatonia, the inability to learn French and German, his loneliness, his emptiness, his thwarted attempts to find and kill the bastard boy born of Phimie's womb: All these things and more, much more, were the hateful consequences of the vicious, vindictive voodoo of that hypocritical Christian. As a highly self-improved, fully evolved, committed man who was comfortable with his raw instincts, Junior should be sailing through life on calm seas, under perpetually sunny skies, with his sails always full of wind, but instead he was constantly cruelly battered and storm-tossed through an unrelenting night, not because of any shortcomings of mind or heart, or character, but because of black magic..Phimie's stubbornly high blood pressure, the presence of protein in her urine, and other symptoms indicated her preeclampsia wasn't a recent development; she was at increased risk of eclampsia. Her hypertension was gradually coming under control-but only by resort to more aggressive drug therapy than the physician preferred to use..Until Nolly, Kathleen's life had been as short on romance as a saltless saltine is short on flavor. Her childhood and even her adolescence were so colorless that she'd settled on dentistry as a career because it seemed, by comparison to what she knew, to be an exotic and exciting profession. She'd dated a few men, but all were boring and none was kind. Ballroom-dancing lessons-and ultimately competitions-promised the romance that dentistry and dating hadn't provided, but even dancing was somewhat a disappointment until her instructor introduced Kathleen to this balding, bull-necked, lumpy, utterly wonderful Romeo..Eventually, he settled on a mental image of a bowling pin as his "seed." This was a smooth, elegantly shaped object that invited languorous contemplation, but it did not tease his libido..Near midnight, she returned to her apartment. Lights out, in bed, staring at the ceiling, she was unable to sleep..He tucked his left arm tight against his side and threw himself against the door. The obstructing furniture was heavy, but it moved an inch. If it would give one inch, it would give two, so it wasn't immovable, and he was already as good as in there..Murder itself was easy, but the aftermath was more draining than he had anticipated. Although the ultimate liability settlement with the state was certain to leave him financially secure for life, the stress was so great that he wondered, in his darker moments, if the reward would prove to be worth the risk..Nolly adored her laugh, so musical and girlish. He would have made all sorts of a fool out of himself, anytime, just to hear it..The adoption records on Seraphim White's baby weren't sealed by law, because custody of the child was being retained by family..On this momentous day, however, drawing provided no solace. Frequently, her hands

shook, and she could not control the pencil..In his apartment once more, enjoying a cognac and a handful of pistachios as Monday changed to Tuesday, he decided that he should make 'preparations for the possibility that he might one day leave incriminating evidence in spite of his precautions. He ought to convert a portion of his assets into easily portable and anonymous wealth, like gold coins and diamonds. Establishing two or three alternate identities, with documentation, also would be wise..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..''From time to time now, you're going to be written about,' Helen warned. ''Be prepared for a peevish critic or two, furious about your optimism.''. ''It's not scary,' said Mary. ''I just step into another place for a little, and then back. It's just like going from one room to the next. I can't get stuck over there or anything.''. She looked at Barty. ''You know how it is, Dad.''.Both the red and the white wines were too cheap for Junior's taste' so he drank Dos Equis beer and got two kinds of high by inhaling enough secondhand pot smoke to cure the state of Virginia's entire annual production of hams. Among the two or three hundred partyers, some were tripping on some exhibited the particular excitability and talkativeness typical of cokeheads, but Junior succumbed to none of these temptations. Self-improvement and self control mattered to him; he didn't approve of this degree of self indulgence..Curious to know what Neddy had said, Junior quickly approached the same gallery staffer. ''Excuse me, but I've been looking for my friend ever so long in this mob, and then I saw him talking to you-the gentleman in the London Fog and the tux-and now I've lost him again. He didn't say if he was leaving, did he? He's my ride home.''.He knew that the only movement in those staring, sightless eyes was the restless reflection of the flashlight beam as he probed the trash with it. He knew he was being irrational, but nevertheless he was reluctant to turn his back on the corpse. Repeatedly in the midst of searching, he snapped his head up, whipping his attention to Neddy, certain that from the corner of his eye, he had seen the dead gaze following him..They didn't mind, and down they went in a controlled descent that was nevertheless too quick for Agnes..No. Ridiculous. Naomi wasn't slumped across him. He wasn't sharing his bed with a corpse. That was E.C. Comics stuff, something from a yellowed issue of Tales from the Crypt..He swore that he would throw away all memory of this incident, as well. In Caesar Zedd's best-selling How to Deny the Power of the Past, the author offers a series of techniques for expunging forever all recollection of those events that cause us psychological damage, pain, or even merely embarrassment. Junior went to bed with his precious copy of this book and a snifter of cognac filled almost to the brim..Downstairs, two shots cracked, and an instant after the second, an explosion shook the parsonage as though the long-promised Judgment were at hand. This was a real explosion, not the impact of another runaway Pontiac..''Well, you see, that's the funny thing about all the important choices we make. If we make a really big wrong choice, if we do the really awful wrong thing, we're given another chance to continue on the right path. So the very moment I stupidly stepped off the curb without looking, I created another world where I did look both ways and saw the rhinoceros coming. And so-''.The prickly-bur ghosts of two little children didn't concern him. At worst, they were spiritual gnats..Cypresses lined the entry drive to the cemetery. Tall and solemn, the trees kept guard, as though posted to prevent restless spirits from roaming out into the land of the living..''Ouch,' said Edom, and this earned him loving smiles from Maria, Agnes, and Barty..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 tide 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..When the police operator answered, Junior shrieked, ''I've been shot! Jesus! Shot! Help me, an ambulance, oooohhhh shit! Hurry!''.Everyone was silent. The day was morgue-still. The crows had fled the sky, but a single hawk gilded soundlessly, like justice with its prey in sight, high above the tower..The candlestick was gone. The pedestal on which it had stood now held a Griskin bronze so devastatingly brilliant that one quick look at it would give nightmares to nuns and assassins alike..''Living high. When I wasn't on the road, I had a fine house here in Bright Beach, not this rental shack I'm in now, but a nice little place with an ocean view. You can guess what went wrong.''.Better still, he was able to have the girl to the accompaniment of her father's voice, which was even kinkier than doing her in the parsonage. When Junior rang the bell, Seraphim had been in her room, listening to a tape of a sermon her father was composing. The good reverend usually dictated a first draft, which his daughter then transcribed. For three hours, Junior went at her mercilessly, to the rhythms of her father's voice. The reverend's "presence" was deliciously perverse and stimulating to his sense of erotic invention. When Junior was finished, there was nothing sexual that Seraphim could ever do with a man that she had not learned from him..When Agnes and Paul returned from a honeymoon in Carmel, they discovered that Edom had finally cleared out Jacob's apartment. He donated his twin's extensive files and books to a university library that was building a collection to satisfy a growing professorial and student interest in apocalyptic studies and paranoid philosophy..At the end of his fourth month, instead of in his seventh, he said "Mama," and clearly knew what it meant. He repeated it when he wanted to get her attention..Agnes was so weary, her eyes so sore and grainy, that even this soft radiance stung. She almost closed her eyes and gave herself to sleep again, that little brother of Death, which was now her only solace. What she saw in the lamplight, however, compelled her attention..Once in a while, however, he reverted to his roots, to the food that gave him comfort. Thus, the cheeseburger and its decadent accoutrements..Carrying the candlestick, he raced to the kitchen at the end of the short hall. The door stood open, but he had to enter the room to see Victoria slumped in one of the two chairs at the small dinette..He had taken refuge in meditation, because he'd been frustrated by his continuing failure in the Bartholomew hunt and disturbed by his apparently paranormal experiences with quarters and with phone calls from the dead. More deeply disturbed than he had realized or had been

able to admit..terrified, the thorns pricking so close to his eyes, green points combing his lashes. He's too weak to resist, disabled..When at last the caller spoke again, her voice sounded a kingdom away: "Will you tell Bartholomew ... ?".On the way home, he repeatedly checked the rearview mirror. No vehicle followed him.."I never spoke with God--Nor visited in Heaven--Yet certain am I of the spot--As if the Checks were given."..Martinis were ordered all around. None here observed a vow of absolute sobriety.."Not so bad, two thousand," Tom heard himself say idiotically. "I mean, compared to nearly four million."..Friday brought Scamp again, all of Scamp, all day, every way, wall-to-wall Scamp, so on Saturday he hadn't enough energy to do more than shower..Beveled, crackled, distorted, divided into petals and leaves, Deed's face beyond the lead-ad glass, as he leaned closer to try to peer inside, was the countenance of a dream demon swimming up out of a nightmare lake..For a while he thought the fear would end only when he perished from it, but eventually it faded, and in its place poured forth self-pity from a bottomless well. Self-pity, of course, is the ideal fuel for anger; which was why, pursuing the Buick through fog, climbing now toward Pacific Heights, Junior was in a murderous rage. By the time he reached Cain's bedroom, Tom Vanadium recognized that the austere decor of the apartment had probably been inspired by the minimalism that the wife killer had noted in the detective's own house in Spruce Hills. This was an uncanny discovery, troubling for reasons that Vanadium couldn't entirely define, but he remained convinced that his perception was correct.."Supposing he's senile, wouldn't he possibly think you were his long- lost brother or someone?".This momentous day. In every ending, new beginnings. But, thank God, no ending here.."Some places, it has to be like that." some places it has to be that your eyes are okay?".Although the piano was at some distance and the restaurant was a little noisy, Kathleen recognized the tune at once. She looked up from her veal, her eyes full of merriment.."August, 1931. Along the Huang He River in China. Three million seven hundred thousand people died in a great flood," Edom said.."You must be thinking of someone else," she said, pushing a wad of bills into his hand. "Me, I'm a jellyfish in high heels."..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..The two women stared at each other, and at last Celestina said, "Good Lord, what's happening here?".This time, however, the singing lasted longer than before, long enough for him to become suspicious of the heating ducts. These rooms had ten-foot ceilings, and the ducts opened high in the walls..Permissions Department, Harcourt, Inc., 6277 Sea Harbor Drive, Orlando, Florida 32887-6777. www.harcourt.com "Darkrose and Diamond" first appeared in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction..This Monday morning in Oregon was bleak, with the swollen, dark bellies of rain clouds swagging low over the cemetery, a dreary send-off for Naomi, even though rain was not yet falling..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..All he cared about was Red Planet, and what might happen after page 103. He had carried the book with him to the doctor's office, and on the way home in the car; he repeatedly opened it, squinting at the lines of type, trying to read around or through the "twisty" spots. "Jim and Frank and Willis, they're in deep trouble."..What good was she to anybody, what good could she ever hope to be, if she couldn't even save her little sister?.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..The diminutive mortician spoke a few comforting words instead of commenting on the dental history of the deceased, and when he put a consoling hand on Jacob's shoulder, Jacob cringed from his touch..Maria said nothing, working busily, but Agnes recognized that special silence in which difficult words were sought and laboriously stitched together..room, heavier and colder than the ice bags that were draped across Junior's midsection.."Oh, Wally, I am worried. I'm deeply worried. My mama is going to buy herself a first-class ticket to the fiery pit if she doesn't stop this prevaricatin'."..Nolly raised his martini glass in a toast. "To Kathleen Klerkle Wulfstan, dentist and associate detective.".."Why do you think he's spending his money for all this tricky stuff?" Kathleen wondered, not for the first time..They sat in silence, and the moment held such an extraordinary quality of expectation that Kathleen would not have been surprised if the vanished quarter had suddenly appeared in midair and dropped, winking brightly, to the center of Nolly's desk, there to spin with perpetual motion, until Vanadium chose to pluck it up..That night, in Barty's room, after Agnes had listened to his prayers and then had tucked him in for the night, she sat on the edge of his bed. "Honey, I was wondering.... Now that you've had more time to think, could you explain to me what happened?".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..She shivered, and Edom, thinking that she had caught a chill ripped off his suit jacket and draped it over her shoulders.."I think we could wind up as crazy as he is, if we tried long enough to puzzle out his twisted logic."..As before, the name tolled through him like the ominous note of the deepest bass bell in a cathedral carillon, struck on a cold midnight..They were as gracious as any people he had ever met, but they also seemed genuinely interested in his story. He wasn't surprised that.."And you give yourself far too little credit," Salk continued gently. "There's no doubt in my mind that Perri was a hero. But she was married to a hero, as well."..As his drying tears became stiff on his cheeks, Junior decided that he would most likely have to kill Vanadium to be rid of him and fully safe. No problem. And in spite of his exquisite sensitivity, he was convinced that wasting the detective would not trigger in him another bout of vomiting. If anything, he might pee his pants in sheer delight..Books were stacked high on a nearby table, favorite novels and volumes of verse, all of which Agnes had read before. With time so limited, she preferred the comfort of

the familiar to the possibility that new writers and new stories would fail to please. Paul read to her often, as did Angel. Tom Vanadium sat with her, too, as did Celestina and Grace. Standing over the body, he squeezed off the last three shots. Finished, he detested guns more than ever. 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. "No. Rowena dropped those names after the twins' first year. She and I were the only ones who ever used them. Our private little joke. Even the boys wouldn't have remembered." If Junior had not been such a rational man, schooled in logic and reason by the books of Caesar Zedd, he might have snapped there in the street, before the photograph of Seraphim, might have begun to shake and sob and babble until he wound up in a psychiatric ward. But although his trembling knees felt no more supportive than aspic, they didn't dissolve under him. He couldn't breathe for a minute, and his vision darkened at the periphery, and the noise of passing traffic suddenly sounded like the agonized shrieks of people tortured beyond endurance, but he held fast to his wits long enough to realize that the name under the photo, which served as the centerpiece of a poster, read Celestina White in four-inch letters, not Seraphim. Paul sat by himself, at the far end of the restaurant from them. He ordered orange juice and waffles. The bullet had been fired by a renegade cop who was every bit as lousy a marksman as he was a corrupt scumball. He'd been aiming for Nolly's crotch. Junior reached the window seat and stared down at her. "I don't believe that's true." Barty stood in the rain, surrounded by the rain, pummeled by the rain, with the rain. Saturated grass squished under his sneakers. The droplets, in their millions, didn't bend-slip-twist magically around his form, didn't hiss into steam a millimeter from his skin. Yet he remained as dry as baby Moses floating on the river in a mother-made ark of bulrushes. 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. They were in the eastern hills, a mile from Jolene and Bill Klefton's place, where ten days ago, Edom had delivered blueberry pie along with the grisly details of the Tokyo-Yokohama quake of 1923. 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. Whether making love or killing, he was never guided by bigotry. A private little joke with himself. But true. And when she finally looked directly at him, blinked at him, her lashes flicking off a spray of fine droplets, Agnes saw that Barty was dry. Not a single jewel of rain glimmered in his thick dark hair or on the baby-smooth planes of his face. His shirt and sweater were as dry as if they had just been taken off a hanger and from a dresser drawer. A few drops darkened the legs of the boy's khaki pants--but Agnes realized this was water that had dripped from her arm as she'd reached across him to adjust the vent. 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. As a recreational site, Quarry Lake could be judged only a partial success. During the mining operation, trees were cleared well back from the edge of the dig, so that much of the shore would be unshaded on a hot summer day. And along half the strand, signs were posted warning Ungraded Shore: Immediate Deep Water. In places, where lake met land, the bottom lay over a hundred feet below. Dr. Lipscomb inclined his head slightly toward the pianist, in the manner of a stem headmaster about to emphasize a lesson with a sharp twist of the offending boy's ear. "Miss White and the baby will have vacated these premises by the end of the week--unless you insist on bothering them with your chatter. For every minute you harass them, their departure will be extended one day." She slammed it shut before he could stop her, whether he had intended to stop her or not, and she engaged the deadbolt lock. In abject misery, Junior lay waiting to go under the knife, more eager to be cut than he would have thought possible only a few hours before. The mere promise of this surgery thrilled him more than all the sex that he'd ever enjoyed between the age of thirteen and the Thursday just past. Her voice as bright as her bed ensemble, spiritual sister to baby chicks everywhere, yellow Angel raised her head from the pillow and said, "Will you have a wedding?" The doors slid open, and they rolled Barty corridor to corridor, past the scrub sinks, to a waiting surgical nurse in green cap, mask, and gown. She alone effected his transfer into the positive pressure of the surgery. "It's all right," Tom assured her. To Angel, he said, "No, I'm not sad. And you know why?" She was astonished and moved. "I'm a hopeless throwback to the nineteenth century. How could you realize what's been on my mind?" When he judged that he was near the porch steps, he probed with his cane. Two paces later, the tip rapped the lowest step. "It's just that you never know what anyone's hand has been up to recently," Jacob explained. "That respectable banker down the street might have thirty dismembered women buried in his backyard. The nice church-going lady next door might be sleeping in the same bed with the rotting corpse of a lover who tried to jilt her, and for a hobby she makes jewelry from the finger bones of

preschool children she's tortured and murdered." .Allowing one month for the job might be optimistic. On the other hand, he'd had a long time to perfect a strategy..Many police agencies required an officer to carry a firearm even when off duty. If the Oregon State Police had no such rule, Vanadium most likely carried one anyway, because in his crazy-as-a-snake mind,.He doubted the Studebaker would ever be found, but successful men were, without exception, those who paid attention to detail..The investigator's suite-a minuscule waiting room and a small office-lacked a secretary but surely harbored all manner of vermin..Maria was hand-repairing some of Joey's clothes, which Agnes had meticulously damaged earlier in the day..Always, he was good with Barty, and on this occasion, he teased more than the usual number of smiles and giggles from the boy as he tried to get him to read the Snellen chart on the wall. Then he lowered the lights in the examination room to study his eyes with an ophthalmometer and an ophthalmoscope..Bartholomew was dead but didn't know it yet. Pistol in hand, cocoon in tatters, ready to spread his butterfly wings, Junior pushed the door to the apartment inward, saw a deserted living room, softly lighted and pleasantly furnished, and was about to step across the threshold when the street door opened and into the hall came Ichabod..With all twelve fragments destroyed, the curse should have been lifted from little Bartholomew: the threat of the unknown, violent enemy who was represented by the four knaves. Somewhere in the world, an evil man existed who would one day have killed Barty, but now his journey through life would take him elsewhere. Eleven saints had been given twelve shares of responsibility for lifting this curse..Ministering to Perri, Joshua had pulled back her blankets. The fabric of the pale yellow pajama pants couldn't disguise how terribly withered her legs were: two sticks..The paramedic snatched the oxygen feed from his patient's nose and quickly elevated his head, providing a purge towel to catch the thin ejecta..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..The paramedic pumped the inflation cuff of the sphygmomanometer, and Junior's blood pressure was most likely high enough to induce a stroke, driven skyward by the thought that Naomi's love had been a lie..Thrusting his finger toward the table with each repetition of the word, Barty happily insisted, "Pie, pie, pie, pie, pie, pie, pie, pie." Celestina White was the center of attention, always surrounded by champagne-swilling, canape--gobbling bourgeoisie who would have been shopping for paintings on velvet if they'd had less money.."Better hold on tight to her," Wally warned Celestina, braking to a halt at the intersection. "She'll float up and away, then we'll have to call the fire department to get her down."..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..Instead, her father asked, "Is this emotion talking, Celie, or is this brain as much as heart?".. "Yeah, but I've been thinking about that. If he feels some kind of responsibility ... then why did he ever represent Cain in the first place?".. "Would you like a little tea and a piece of crumb cake?" Grace asked as smoothly as if, in *The Big Book of Etiquette for Ministers' Wives*, this were the preferred response to the announcement of a startling career change..By Sunday evening, a combination of factors-deep commitment to the philosophy of Zedd, explosive testosterone levels, boredom, self-pity, and a desire to be a risk-taking man of action once more-motivated Junior to splash a little Hai Karate behind each ear and go courting. Shortly after sunset, with a single red rose and a bottle of Merlot, he set off for Victoria Bressler's place..guarantee against self-incrimination, a slap in the face of justice, a violation of the rights of man.

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