

BUDDHISM

Maria turned sideways in her chair and dealt from the top of the four-deck stack, onto the table in front of Barty..While they waited for the room-service waiter to arrive, Tom got from Paul a detailed report of Enoch Cain's attack on the parsonage. He had heard most of it from friends in the state-police homicide division, which was assisting the Spruce Hills authorities. But Paul's account was more vivid. The ferocity of the assault convinced Tom that whatever the killer's twisted motives might be, Celestina and her mother-and not least of all Angel-were in danger as long as Cain roamed free. Perhaps as long as he lived..Indeed, Junior suspected that they might be here at Vanadium's urging. The cop would be interested in determining how avaricious the mourning husband would prove to be when presented with the opportunity to turn his wife's cold flesh into cash..Victoria lived on the northeast edge of Spruce Hills, where streets petered into country lanes. Here the houses tended to be more rustic, built on larger and less formally landscaped lots than those closer to the center of town, and set back farther from the street..If he hadn't been such a rational, stable, no-nonsense person all of his life, Junior might have thought he was losing his mind..A matronly nurse arrived, alerted to the patient's return to consciousness by the telemetry device associated with the heart monitor..He wasn't afflicted with parenthood envy. A baby was the last thing he would ever want, aside from cancer. Children were nasty little beasts. A child would be an encumbrance, a burden, not a blessing..Never had the familiar red Bicycle design of the U.S. Playing Card Company looked ominous before, but it was fearsome now, as strange voodoo veve or satanic conjuration pattern..The slur faded from his voice in minutes, but he suspected that straining too long to sustain this borrowed vision could result in a stroke or worse..Certain that he was overreacting, Tom nevertheless left the kitchen as a cop, not a priest, would leave it: staying low, knife thrust in front of him, clearing the doorframe fast..The dining room again, but this time he remembered how he had gotten here: by way of the living room..The shakes returned, became more violent than previously--and then once more passed..He'd never had a chance to read this to Perri or to benefit from her opinion. Now, as he scanned the lines of his calligraphic handwriting, his words seemed foolish, inappropriate, confused..Still looming over her, he snatched the pad out of her hands and examined the sketch. "Where would you have seen this?".Maybe he went a little crazy then. He wouldn't deny a brief, transient madness.."-though this Tom now has a rhinoceros-smacked face, this other Tom, in his own world, has an ordinary face. Poor him, so ordinary..".Finally he switched on the light, and illuminated Neddy at ease, silent in death as never in life: lying on his back, head turned to the right, swollen tongue lolling obscenely..Sweaty, chilled, trembling, weak-kneed, watery-eyed with self-pity, Junior spread a plastic garbage bag on the driver's seat. He got in the Suburban, twisted the key in the ignition, and groaned as the engine vibrations threatened to undo him..And there are songs, old lays and ballads from small islands and from the quiet uplands of Havnor, that tell the story of those years..Heart racing, Tom produced another quarter from a pants pocket. For the benefit of the adults, he performed the proper preparation-a little patter and the ten-finger flimflam-because in magic as in jewelry, every diamond must have the proper setting if it's to glitter impressively..Such quiet filled the house that Agnes couldn't hear even the murmuring miseries of the past..Tom Vanadium, on the other hand, was certain that Cain, having prepared for the possibility that something would go wrong during his assault on Celestina, wouldn't be easy to locate or to apprehend. In Vanadium's view, the maniac either had a bolt-hole waiting in the city or was already out of the SFPD's jurisdiction..Requests for permission to make copies of any part of the work should be mailed to the following address: "Mommy, did you know, every day on Mars is thirty-seven minutes and twenty-seven seconds longer than ours?".Considering the protection that it would afford him in a world full of warmongers, Junior considered the loss of the toe, while tragic, to be a necessary disfigurement. To his doctors and nurses, he made jokes about dismemberment, and in general he put on a brave face, for which he knew he was much admired.. "This is going to be an enormous settlement," the attorney promised. "And there's more good news. County and state authorities have agreed to close the case on Naomi's death. It's now officially an accident..". "So do I, honey. Oh, Lord, so do I." She kissed his forehead. "Listen, kiddo, in spite of their stories and all their funny ways, your uncles are good men..".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..With Angel at breakfast, instead of just Uncle Jacob, at least Barty had someone to talk to, even if she did insist on speaking more often through her dolls than directly. Apparently, the dolls were on the table, propped up with bowls. The first, Miss Pixie Lee, had a high-pitched, squeaky voice. The second, Miss Velveeta Cheese, spoke in a three year-old's idea of what a throaty-voiced, sophisticated woman sounded like, although to Barty's ear, this was more suitable to a stuffed bear..Although Junior was free of the superstitions that Naomi, in her innocence and sentimentality, had embraced, he wept without pretense..Raising his revolver, Tom squeezed off two shots, but the gun didn't discharge..Yet, uncaught, the quarter would have dropped to the floor. Junior would have heard it ring off the tiles. Which he hadn't.. "Sure they do," said Wally as he unlocked the two deadbolts. "But you gotta be twenty-one years old to get a license for one..". This wasn't the same Enoch Cain whom Vanadium had known three years ago in Spruce Hills. That man had been utterly ruthless but not a wild, raging animal, coldly determined but never obsessive. That Cain had been too calculating and too self-controlled to have been swept into the emotional frenzy required to produce this blood graffiti and to act out the symbolic mutilation of Bartholomew with a knife..Maria was hand-repairing some of Joey's clothes, which Agnes had meticulously damaged earlier in the day..In reality, it had been a homely device, a mere box. In memory, it seemed ominous, charged with the evil portent of a nuclear bomb..He hadn't lied to his mother. She assumed that by some quantum magic, he had regained his sight permanently, and that this came with no cost. He merely allowed her

to go to her rest with the comforting misapprehension that her son had been freed from darkness..Her voice was flat and a little hard. Another man might have mistaken her tone for disapproval, for impatience, even for quiet anger..Too rattled to want lunch at the St. Francis Hotel or anywhere else, Junior returned to his apartment..They agreed that to the outside world, Barty must continue to appear to be a sightless man-or otherwise either be treated like a freak or be subjected, perhaps unwillingly, to experimentation. In the modern world, there was no tolerance for miracles. Only family could be told of this development..When at last he spoke, real grief, quiet but profound, softened his voice: "March first, three years ago, my wife and two sons-Danny and Harry, both seven, twins-were coming home from visiting her parents in New York. Shortly after takeoff ... their plane went down."..Nellie found the strength to rise, but having risen, she was unable to speak. Her mouth shaped words, but her voice deserted her..In time, his hand tightened feebly on hers. And a while after that hopeful sign, his eyelids fluttered, opened..The reverend said, "I'm sure you underestimate my parishioners, Celestina. They won't be scandalized. They'll open their hearts."..On the other hand, one needed to believe in something. Junior didn't clutter his mind with superstitious nonsense or allow himself to be constrained by the views of bourgeois society or by its smug concepts of right and wrong, good and evil. From Zedd, he'd learned that he was the sole master of his universe. Self-realization through self-esteem was his doctrine; total freedom and guiltless pleasure were the rewards of faithful adherence to his principles. What he believed in-the only thing he believed in-was Junior Cain, and in this he was a fiercely passionate believer, devout unto himself Consequently, as Caesar Zedd explained, when any man was clearheaded enough to cast off all the false..Sunday, Junior hid out from Scamp, using his Ansaphone to screen her calls, and worked with such astonishing focus on his needlepoint pillows that he forgot to go to bed that night. He fell asleep over his needles at ten o'clock Monday morning..hands as she had seen surgeons do in movies, and she could almost believe that she was still at home, in bed, in the fevered throes of a terrible dream..Having been an object of Thomas Vanadium's fixation, Junior felt fortunate to have survived. He shuddered..She cupped his face in both of her hands and was barely able to lift his head, for fear of what she would see..Copyright (c) 1997 by Ursula K. Le Guin..Moving out of the doorway, into the bedroom, he said, "What book would that be?"..Celestina smiled distractedly. Since arriving at the hotel an hour ago, she had been openly debating with herself whether to call her parents in Spruce Hills or to wait until later in the afternoon, when she might be able to report not just that she had a fianc?, and not only that she had a fianc? who'd been shot and nearly killed, but also that his condition had been upgraded from critical to serious. As she'd explained to Tom, in addition to worrying them with the news about Cain, she'd be stunning them with the announcement that she was going to marry a white man twice her age. "My folks don't have one ounce of prejudice between them, but they sure do have firm ideas about what's appropriate and what's not." This would ring the big bell at the top of the White Family Scale of the Inappropriate. Besides, they were preparing for the funeral of a parishioner, and from personal experience, Celestina knew their day would be full. Nevertheless, at ten minutes past eleven, after picking at her breakfast, she finally decided to call them..Off the hard surfaces of cabinets, refrigerator, and ovens, the twin reports crashed and rattled. The windowpanes briefly thrummed..Five days ago, reasoning that an unscrupulous attorney would know how to find an equally unscrupulous private detective, even across state borders, Junior had phoned Simon Magusson, in Spruce Hills, for a confidential recommendation. Apparently, there also existed a brotherhood of the terminally ugly, the members of which sent business to one another. Magusson-he of the large head, small ears, and protuberant eyes-had referred Junior to Nolly Wulfstan..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.".. "Pie, pie, pie, pie, pie, pie, pie, pie," Barty repeated in the same tone of self-satisfied delight that he used when announcing "Barty potty.".. "Because of a certain awareness you've had since childhood," Celestina said, recalling what he'd told her in San Francisco..Studying the brochure, Junior felt that the best response to this artist's work was to go directly into the bathroom, stick one finger down his throat, and purge himself. Considering his medical history, however, he couldn't afford to be such an expressive critic..He smiled. "Those of us who were priests first--yeah, we're all a broody bunch. Of the others--not many, but probably more than you think.".. "If he and Agnes were your age, I'd agree. But she's got ten years on you, and he's got twenty, and no previous generations were as wild as yours."..In the kitchen again, Junior spread the blanket on the floor, to one side of the blood. He rolled Vanadium onto the blanket, and drew the ends of it together, fashioning a sled with which to drag the detective out of the house..Scamp had fabulous legs, and her bralessness left no doubts about the lusciousness and authenticity of her chest, but after an hour of conversation about something or other, before suggesting that they leave together, Junior maneuvered her into a reasonably private corner and discreetly put a hand up her skirt, just to confirm that his gender suspicions were correct..Panic set in when he began to wonder if these intestinal spasms were going to prevent him from leaving Spruce Hills. In fact, what if they required hospitalization?..By now, all here assembled knew Celestina well enough that Tom's final example raised an affectionate laugh from the group..It's unsettling. For all our delight in the impermanent, the entrancing flicker of electronics, we also long for the unalterable..IN HOSPITALS, AS in farmhouses, breakfast comes soon after dawn, because both healing and growing are hard work, and long days of labor required to save the human species, which spends as mu& time earning its pain and hunger as it does trying to escape them.. "It's all right," Tom assured her. To Angel, he said, "No, I'm not sad. And you know why?"..In his car, currently a Mercedes, he made three trips between his apartment and the garage in which he'd stored the Ford van under the Pinchbeck name. He took precautions against being followed..She shook her head, and red bows fluttered. "No. 'Cause you didn't just move it around."..They were in the rain, the solid-glassy-pounding-roaring rain, every bit as much as Gene Kelly had been when he danced and sang and

capered along a storm-soaked city street in that movie, but whereas the actor had been saturated by the end of the number, these two children remained dry. Tom's eyes strained to resolve this paradox, even though he knew that all miracles defied resolution.. "Yes, Barty," Tom said. "I feel a depth to life, layers beyond layers. Sometimes it's ... scary. Mostly it inspires me. I can't see these other worlds, can't move between them. But with this quarter, I can prove that what I feel isn't my imagination." He extracted a quarter from a jacket pocket, holding it between thumb and forefinger for all but Barty to see. "Angel?". Raised by a father to whom any form of amusement was blasphemy, Agnes had never seen a magician perform until she was nineteen, when Joey Lampion, then her suitor, had taken her to a stage show. Rabbits plucked out of top hats, doves conjured from sudden plumes of smoke, assistants sawn in half and mended to walk again; every illusion that had been old even in Houdini's time was a jaw-dropping amazement to her that evening. Now she remembered a trick in which the magician had poured a pitcher of milk into a funnel fashioned from a few pages of a newspaper, causing the milk to vanish when the funnel, still dry, was unrolled to reveal ordinary newsprint. The thrill that had quivered through her that evening measured I on the Richter scale compared to the full 10-point sense of wonder quaking through her at the sight of Barty as dry as if he'd spent the afternoon perched fireside.. The young man raised his voice to be heard above the gobbling of the art turkeys. "No, sir. He just asked where the men's room was." too quiet and too patient to be the living-dead incarnation of a murdered wife. This was a predatory silence, an animal cunning, not a supernatural hush. This was the elegant stillness of a panther in the brush.. Sitting on the edge of the bed, taking his hand, she stared at his sweet little bow of a mouth, whereas before she would have met his eyes. "Tell me." If blood tests revealed that Junior wasn't the father, Vanadium would have a motive. It wouldn't be the right motive, because Junior truly hadn't known either that his wife was pregnant or that she was possibly screwing around with another man. But the detective would be able to sell it to a prosecutor, and the prosecutor would convince at least a few jurors.. "No. Just tricks. Turn a leaf to a gold piece. Seemingly." Freed for the moment from the need to be strong for her sleeping Angel or for Wally, Celestina turned to Tom Vanadium, saw in his gray eyes both the sorrow of the world and a hope to match her own, saw in his ruined face the promise of triumph over evil, leaned against him for support, and finally dared to cry.. Bartholomew didn't merely have something to do with babies. Bartholomew was a baby.. Three years ago, in St. Mary's Hospital, with Phimie's warning fresh in her mind, Celestina swore that she would be ready when the beast came, but here he came, and she was as not ready as possible. Time passes, the perception of a threat fades, life becomes busier, you work your butt off as a waitress, you graduate college, your little girl grows to be so vital, so vivid, so alive that you know she just has to live forever, and after all, you are the daughter of a minister, a believer in the power of compassion, in the Prince of Peace, confident that the meek shall inherit the earth, so in three long years, you don't buy a gun, nor do you take any training in self-defense, and somehow you forget that the meek who will one day inherit the earth are those who forego aggression but are not those so pathetically meek that they won't even defend themselves, because a failure to resist evil is a sin, and the willful refusal to defend your life is the mortal sin of passive suicide, and the failure to protect a little yellow M&M girl will surely buy you a ticket to Hell on the same express train on which the slave traders rode to their own eternal enslavement, on which the masters of Dachau and old Joe Stalin traveled from power to punishment, so here, now, as the beast throws himself against the door, as he shoves aside the barricade, with what precious little time you have left, fight. Junior shoved through the blocked door, into the bedroom, and the bitch hit him with a chair. A small, slat-back side chair with a tie-on seat cushion. She swung it like a baseball bat, and there must have been some Jackie Robinson blood in the White family line, because she had the power to knock a fastball from Brooklyn to the Bronx.. Junior stood at the window for a long time, not because he was pretending to rest, and not because any of the attending nurses was a looker. He was transfixed, and for awhile he didn't know why.. 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.. "Does my dad like Christmas?" Barty asked, sitting on the grave grass in front of the headstone.. 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.. For an instant, his attention had been distracted by Vanadium's presentation of his empty hands. Nevertheless, there was no way the cop could have snatched the coin out of the air.. Although she already knew that the answer could not be cheerily optimistic, Celestina wondered, "Is the baby likely to be . . . normal?". Everyone confronted Agnes with expressions of puzzlement and expectation, and she looked from one to another. Paul. Maria. Francesca. Bonita. Grace. Edom. Jacob. Finally Celestina.. Lipscomb said, "We're only two and a half blocks from the best Armenian restaurant in the city. I'll dash over there, bring back some chilled bubbly and an early dinner, if you'll allow me." Agnes remembered the blood, the awful red flood. Excruciating pain and such fearsome crimson torrents. She'd thought her baby had entered the world stillborn on a tide of its own blood and hers.. Glancing at her in the rearview mirror, the driver said, "Pretty exhilarating, huh? Your first big show?". He squirmed deep under the covers, clamped a plump pillow over his head to muffle the singing, and chanted, "Find the father, kill the son," until at last he fell exhausted into sleep.. They ordered martinis, and when Kathleen, perusing a menu, asked her husband what looked good for dinner, he suggested, "Oysters?". Therefore, after the nasty shooting, as the Bartholomew hunt continued, so did the good life.. "I knew," said Wally, braking for a red traffic light, "that you'd be thinking of Phimie now, and thinking of her would lead you to your father's words, because as short as her life might have been, Phimie was a Bartholomew. She left her mark." "If I had a wife, she wouldn't feel too lucky. I'm not of the persuasion that wants a wife, dear." "No, I don't see it," Chicane repeated. "There's no benefit to a meditation marathon. Twenty minutes is enough,

man. Half an hour at the most. You relied on your internal clock, didn't you?". As one of the two paramedics hurried to the ambulance van and scrambled into the driver's seat, Agnes suffered another contraction so severe that for a tremulous moment, at the peak of the agony, she almost lost consciousness. He was nearly forty years old, and a life spent fearing nature could not be turned easily into a romance with her. Some nights he still stared at the ceiling, unable to sleep, waiting for the Big One, and he avoided walks on the shore in respect of deadly tsunamis. From time to time, he visited his brother's grave and sat on the grass by the headstone, reciting aloud the gruesome details of deadly storms and catastrophic geological events, but he found that he had also absorbed from Jacob some of the statistics related to serial killers and to the disastrous failures of manmade structures and machines. These visits were pleasantly nostalgic. But he always came with roses, too, and brought news of Barty, Angel, and other members of the family. When Paul sold his house to move in with Agnes, Tom Vanadium settled into Jacob's former apartment, now a fully retired cop but not yet ready to return to a life of the cloth. He assumed the management chores of the family's expanding community work, and he oversaw the establishment of a tax-advantaged charitable foundation. Agnes provided a list of fine-sounding and self-effacing names for this organization, but a majority vote rejected all her suggestions and, in spite of her embarrassment, settled on Pie Lady Services. Worse, to make credible his anguish and to avoid suspicion, he would have to play the devastated widower for at least another couple weeks, perhaps for as long as a month. As a dedicated follower of the self-improvement advice of Dr. Caesar Zedd, Junior was impatient with those who were ruled by sentimentality and by the expectations of society, and now he was required to pretend to be one of them-and for an interminable period of time. Closing her eyes, Agnes whispered, "Bartholomew," in a reverent voice full of wonder, full of awe. As the bitch began her backswing, Junior grabbed the chair. He didn't try to tear it out of her hands, but used it to shove her as hard as he could. He was still her boy. As always, her boy. Bartholomew. Barty. Her sweetie. Her kiddo. His musical abilities were most likely an offshoot of his more extraordinary talent for math. He said that music was numbers, and what he seemed to mean was that he could all but instantly translate the notes of any song into a personal numerical code, retain it, and repeat the song by repeating the memorized sequence of code. When he read sheet music, he saw arrangements of numbers. And had Phimie, retrieved from death by the resuscitation procedures of the surgical team, repaid Nella's kindness with her own stunning message to Lipscomb? The door was falling shut. With no more sound than the day makes when it turns to night, the detective had gone. Although the small tin-and-plastic harmonica was more toy than genuine instrument, the boy blew and siphoned surprisingly complex music from it. As far as Apes could tell, he never hit a sour tone. Celestina told them about Nella Lombardi and about the message Phimie delivered to Dr. Lipscomb after being resuscitated. "Phimie was, . . . so special. There's something special about her baby, too." Slow deep breathing forgotten, gasping like a drowning swimmer, a sudden sweat dripping from his brow, Junior used one foot to prod the fallen man. 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. Wild exhilaration burst through him like pyrotechnics blazing in a night sky, reminiscent of the rush of excitement that followed his bold action on the fire tower. Happily, Junior had no emotional connection to Prosser, as he'd had to beloved Naomi; therefore, the purity of his. The gunshot was louder-and the pain initially less-than he expected. Timpani-boom, timpani-boom, the explosion echoed back and forth through the high-ceilinged apartment. A deeply troubled John Wayne while the delightful David Niven floated along overhead in a basket suspended from a huge, colorful hot-air balloon. 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. When she closed the front door and turned away from it, Agnes bumped her swollen belly into Joey. His eyebrows shot up, and he put his hands on her distended abdomen, as if she were more fragile than a robin's egg and more valuable than one by Faberge. Carrying the brochure, Vanadium returned to the bathroom and switched on the overhead light. He stared at the slashed wall, at the name red and ravaged. demons: hypodermoclysis ... intravenous oxytocin ... maintain perfect asepsis, and I mean perfect, at all times ... a few oral preparations of ergot as soon as it's safe to give her anything by mouth. After a while, when no plane crashed on top of him, Jacob got up, went into the kitchen, and mixed a batch of dough for Agnes's favorite treats. Chocolate-chip cookies with coconut and pecans. Walking rather than riding was now nothing more than a matter of habit. And by walking, he could delay his arrival at a house that had grown strange to him, a house in which every noise he made, since Monday, seemed to echo as if through vast caverns. Neither hesitantly nor recklessly, the boy set off across the lawn toward the porch steps. He maintained a far straighter line than Agnes would have been able to keep with her eyes closed. Tom believed that the girl had an intuitive understanding of the true complexity of the world, but she was only three, after all, and neither ready nor able to absorb the scientific theory that supported her intuition. With a prayer to the Holy Mother, Maria held one third of a knave of spades to the bright flame of the first candle. When it caught fire, she dropped the fragment into the votive glass, and as it was consumed, she said aloud, "For Peter," referring to the most prominent of the twelve apostles. Turning in circles, he tipped his head back, presenting his face to the streaming sky, laughing. In each savings account, he deposited five hundred dollars in cash. He tucked twenty thousand in crisp new bills into each safe-deposit box. Finally Vanadium said, "According to the lab report, the baby she was carrying was almost certainly yours." FOLLOWING A SECOND NIGHT at the Sleepie Tyme Inne, waking at dawn, Junior felt rested, refreshed-and in control of his bowels. To the window in the driver's door, Barty came with a repertoire of comic expressions, mugging at his mother, sticking one finger up his nose and exaggeratedly boring with it as though exploring for nasal nuggets. "Not scary, Mommy!" Any reasonable person would agree that the line between legitimate and harassment was hair-thin. The boy fell and rolled even as he pitched the can, anticipating the shots that Cain fired, which cracked into the doorframe inches from Tom's knees. Neddy

occupied the entire spacious fourth floor of the house. The third and second floors were each divided into two apartments, the ground floor into four studio units, all of which he rented out.."-and the under girding of the observation platform itself is unstable. The whole thing could have fallen down with us on it!".Maria Elena Gonzalez--such an imposing figure in spite of her diminutive stature that even three names seemed insufficient to identify her--was still present. Although the crisis had passed, she wasn't ready to trust that nurses and doctors, by themselves, could provide Agnes with adequate care.

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