

WREATH AFGHAN

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. As Junior stood at Seraphim's grave, his breath smoked from him in the still night air, as though he were a dragon. The minister had finished. The service was over. No one came to Junior with condolences, because they would see him again shortly, at the Ford dealership buffet. The second and third rooms proved to be deserted, as well, and as muffled as the cushioned spaces of a funeral home, but an office was tucked discreetly at the back of the final chamber. As Junior crossed the third room, apparently monitored by closed-circuit security cameras, a man glided out of the office to greet him. He was a patriotic guy, and he preferred American rock to the British brand. He had nothing against the English, no prejudices against people of any nationality. Nevertheless, he believed that the American Top 40 ought to feature American music exclusively. The quiet passion in Vanadium's voice was genuine, expressed with reason but not fervor, not in the least sentimental or unctuous-which made it more disturbing. "Vibrations in one string set up soft, sympathetic vibrations in all the other strings, through the entire body of the instrument." After a surgeon had lanced fifty-four boils and cut the cores from the thirty-one most intractable (shaving the patient's head to get at the twelve that were festering on his scalp), and after three days of hospitalization to guard against staphylococcus infection, and after he had been turned back into the world as bald as Daddy Warbucks and with the promise of permanent scarring, Junior visited the Reno library to catch up with current events. As Junior paced the hotel room, his fear made way for anger. All he wanted was peace, a chance to grow as a person, an opportunity to improve himself. And now this. The unfairness, the injustice, galled him. He seethed with a sense of persecution. Lipscomb shifted his gaze from the street below to the source of the rain. "Phimie was not gone long, perhaps a minute-a minute and ten seconds at most-and when she was with us again, it was clear from her condition that the cardiac arrest was most likely secondary to a massive cerebral incident. She was disoriented, paralysis on the right side ... with the distortion of the facial muscles that you saw. Her speech was slurred at first, but then something strange happened. . . ." "Oil and natural-gas pipelines will fracture, explode. A sea of fire will wash cities, killing hundreds of thousands more." And speak the tongues of man and drake. "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." This humble house wasn't where you expected to hear an elaborate custom doorbell-or even any doorbell at all, since knuckles on wood were the cheapest announcement of a visitor. Glass in the door next to Agnes cracked, dissolved. Pebbly blacktop like a dragon flank of glistening scales hissed past the broken window, inches from her face. For the next few days, they would eat all their meals in the suite. Most likely, Cain had left San Francisco. And even if the killer hadn't fled, this was a big city, where a chance encounter with him was unlikely. Yet having, assumed the role of guardian, Tom Vanadium had a zero tolerance for risk, because the inimitable Mr. Cain had proved himself to be a master of the unlikely. Frankness and tough talk pleased her, because too many people dealt with her as though her spirit were as frail as her limbs. She laughed with delight-but still refused him. Edom and Jacob flanked the gurney, each gripping one of Barty's feet through the sheet that covered them, escorting him with the same stony determination that you saw on the faces of the Secret Service agents who bracketed the President of the United States..because even to cry in pain will invite more vicious discipline than the pummeling he's already endured. His father. After the paralytic bladder seizures had passed and Junior had drained Lake Mead, Chicane recommended plenty of caffeine and sugar to guard against an unlikely but not impossible spontaneous return to a trance state. "Anyway, after pumping alpha waves for as long as you just did, you shouldn't actually need to sleep anytime soon." Everyone thought the moptops were the coolest thing ever--ever but to Junior, their music was just all right. He wasn't stirred to sing along, and he didn't find their stuff particularly danceable. What he saw next in the brochure wasn't the link that he sought, but it alarmed him so much that the three-fold pamphlet rattled in his hands. The reception for Celestina's show had been this evening, had ended more than three hours ago. Lord, help me here. Give me this one, just this one, and I'll follow thereafter where I'm led. I'll always thereafter be your instrument, but please, please, GIVE ME THIS CRAZY EVIL SON OF A BITCH!. His severed toe lay across the room, on the white tile floor. It stuck up stiffly, nail gleaming, as if the floor were snow and the toe were the only exposed extremity of a body buried in a drift..might be grumpy and would certainly be torpid, bleary-eyed, and uncommunicative. Angel awake was always fully awake, soaking up color texture-mood, marveling in the baroque detail of Creation, and generally lending support to the apperception--test prediction that she might be an art prodigy. When the attorney finally came on the line, he sounded put-upon, as though Junior were the equivalent of a troublesome toe that he would like to shoot off. As Junior blew his nose and blotted his eyes, Vanadium said, "I believe YOU actually loved her in some strange way." A matronly nurse arrived, alerted to the patient's return to consciousness by the telemetry device associated with the heart monitor. Junior's attorney-Simon Magusson--insisted upon full disclosure of maintenance records and advisories relating to the fire tower and to other forest-service structures for which the state and the county had sole or joint custodial responsibility. If a wrongful--death suit was filed, this information would have to be divulged anyway during normal disclosure procedures prior to trial, and since maintenance logs and advisories were of public record, Hisscus and Knacker and Nork agreed to provide what was requested. On a morning in July, Junior was visiting the public library, poring through the stacks in search of exotic volumes on the occult, when the phantom voice rose nearby. Here, the singing sounded softer than in his apartment, little more than a murmur, and also threadier. As though the fog were a paralytic gas, Junior stood unmoving in the middle of the sidewalk. He really didn't want to climb into that Dumpster. In a minute or two, one of the cops

returned, crouching close as the medics worked. "There's no intruder." She wanted to tell him not to say these queer things, not to talk this way, yet she couldn't speak those words. When Barty asked her why, as inevitably he would, she'd have to say she was worried that something might be terribly wrong with him, but she couldn't express this fear to her boy, not ever. He was the lintel of her heart, the keystone of her soul, and if he failed because of her lack of confidence in him, she herself would collapse into ruin. Indeed, he would get through the rest of 1965 without resorting to another homicide. The nonfatal shooting in September would be regrettable, quite messy, painful-but necessary, and calculated to do as little damage as possible. "I'm gifted to a small extent, and it's an unusual gift," he admitted. "Nothing world-shaking. More than anything, really, it's a special perception I've been given. Angel's gift seems to be different from mine but related. In fifty years, she's the first I've ever met who's somewhat like me. I'm still shaking inside from the shock of finding her. But please, let's save this for Bright Beach and a better evening. You go down there tomorrow with Paul, okay? I'll stay here to look after Wally. When he's able to travel, I'll bring him with me. I know you'll want him to hear what I have to say, too. Is it a deal?" Delighted to be dating someone who lived neck-deep in culture especially after two months with Tammy Bean, the money maiden. Junior was surprised that he didn't score with Frieda on the first date. He was usually irresistible even to women who weren't sluts. He was confused initially, frowning at the heart monitor and at the IV rack that loomed over him. When his eyes met Celestina's, his gaze clarified, and the smile that he found for her brought as much light into her heart as the diamond ring he had slipped onto her finger so few hours before. In his mind's eye, he saw the answering machine with uncanny clarity. That curious gadget. Sitting atop the scarred pine desk. Agnes was not fully aware of how she was lifted from the car, but she remembered looking back and seeing Joey's body huddled in the tangled shadows of the wreckage, remembered reaching toward him, desperate for the anchorage that he had always given her, and then she was on the gurney and moving. "Yes, I'm nicely rounding myself into an early grave," he said almost cheerfully. "And I must admit to enjoying it." Neither of them was aware that their personal drama, in all its clumsiness and glory, had focused the attention of everyone in the restaurant. The cheer that went up at Celestina's acceptance of his proposal caused her to start, knocking the ring from Wally's hand as he attempted to slip it on her finger. The ring bounced across the table, they both grabbed for it, Wally made the catch, and this time she was properly betrothed, to wild applause and laughter. In the kitchen, Barty sat at the table, and Paul's heart pinched at the sight of the boy in padded eyepatches. And though Barty was not shy, neither was he a show-off. He didn't seek praise for his accomplishments, and in fact, they were little known outside of his immediate family. His satisfaction came entirely from learning, exploring, growing. Through the remainder of his dinner, he was entirely future focused, the past put safely out of mind. Until Agnes leaned forward in her chair: knees together, clasped hands resting on her knees, forehead against her hands. Dropping on the conversation between Dr. Parkhurst and Vanadium, and later failing and respond to Vanadium's pointed accusations, his deception would inevitably be read as an admission of guilt in the murder. Edom and Jacob arrived, dinner was served, and while the food was wonderful, the conversation was better-even though the twins occasionally shared their vast knowledge of train wrecks and deadly volcanic eruptions. Paul didn't contribute much to the talk, because he preferred to bask in it. If he hadn't known any of these people, if he had walked into the room while they were in the middle of dinner, he would have thought they were family, because the warmth and the intimacy-and in the twins' case, the eccentricity-of the conversation were not what he expected of such newly made friends. There was no pretense, no falsity, and no avoidance of any awkward subject, which meant there were sometimes tears, because the death of Reverend White was such a fresh wound in the hearts of those who loved him. But in the healing ways of women that remained mysterious to Paul even as he watched them do. By now, all here assembled knew Celestina well enough that Tom's final example raised an affectionate laugh from the group. The Selective Service physician quickly declared Junior to be maimed and unfit. Quietly but with passion, Junior pleaded for a chance to prove his value to the armed forces, but the examiner was unmoved by patriotism, interested only in keeping the cattle line of other potential draftees moving past him at a steady pace. Rhythmic breathing. Slow and deep. Slow and deep. Per Zedd, the route to tranquility is through the lungs. "I think we could wind up as crazy as he is, if we tried long enough to puzzle out his twisted logic." Applying enough pain, he could have gotten cooperation even from Vanadium. The detective had said he'd heard Junior fearfully repeat Bartholomew in his sleep, which Junior believed to be true, because the name did resonate with him; however, he wasn't sure he believed the cop's claim to be ignorant of the identity of this nemesis. Maria said, "It is ... the only thing ... I can do for him now, for you. I be nobody, not find reason to celebrate every development in life, including the cruelest catastrophe, by discovering the bright side to even the darkest hour. The lunatic lawman was not at any of the tables. Junior was sure of that, because indulging his appreciation for lovely women, he had roamed the room repeatedly with his gaze. Bartholomew didn't merely have something to do with babies. Bartholomew was a baby. He lay still, waiting for silence to return, so he could hear whether the great gong had drawn people into the alley. He knew the sermon, of course. The example of Bartholomew. The theme of chain-reaction in human lives. The observation that a small kindness can inspire greater and ever-greater kindnesses of which we never learn, in lives distant both in time and space. When he reported for a physical and a reassessment of his draft classification, on Wednesday, December 15, he left the insert in his hitching shoe; however, he limped like old Walter Brennan, the actor, hitching around the ranch in *The Real McCoys*. Instead, he imagined Vanadium's blunt fingers moving over the intravenous apparatus with surprising delicacy, reading the function of the equipment as a blind man would read Braille with swift, sure, gliding fingertips. He imagined the detective finding the injection port in the main drip line, pinching it between thumb and forefinger. Saw him produce a hypodermic needle as a magician would pluck a silk scarf from the ether. Nothing in the syringe except deadly air. The needle sliding into the port

...Magusson's idea of a laugh. "And they didn't even bother to post a warning. In fact, that sign was still up, inviting hikers to enjoy the view from the observation deck." "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. "It's easy to see you as a cop," Kathleen said. All the whacks, pops, and worm buckets just trip off your tongue, so to speak. But it takes some effort to remember you're a priest, too." "September 13, 1928. Lake Okeechobee, Florida. Two thousand people died in a flood." 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. Jacob had spent most of two days baking Barty's favorite pies, cakes, and cookies, and he'd prepared a meal as well. Maria's girls were at her sister's place this evening, so she stayed for dinner. Edom poured wine for everyone but Barty, root beer for the guest of honor, and while this couldn't be called a celebration, Agnes's spirits were lifted by a sense of normality, of hope, of family. So quick, this violence, over even as it began. Because he had no interest in aftermath, however, Junior suffered no disappointment at the briefness of the thrill. The past was past, and as he closed the front door and stepped around the body, he focused on the future. "Why do they let a man like that keep his badge?" Junior asked. "He's outrageous, wholly unprofessional." Fathoms of silence flooded the line. Still, she listened. He sensed her there, though as if at a great depth. In fact, though he strained hard to recall their conversations, he could dredge up nothing that Seraphim had said during therapy, as if he'd been stone-deaf in those days. The only things he retained were sensual impressions: the beauty of her face, the texture of her skin, the firmness of her flesh under his ministering hands. Rearview mirror was not hung with one of those tacky decorative deodorizers. The seats, regularly treated with leather soap, were softer and more supple than they had been when the car had shipped out. Hound told his master that they had the hexer in a safe place, and Losen said, "Who was he working for?" When Renee, sweetly oblivious of her looming doom, claimed to have inherited a sizable industrial-valve fortune, Junior thought she might be inventing the wealth or at least exaggerating to make herself more desirable. But when he accompanied her back to her place, he discovered a level of luxury that proved she wasn't a shop girl with fantasies. At last he said, "And there he is, hands in front of his face, quarters bouncing off him, these kids and this old lady scrambling around him to snare some change." Angel pointed to a Mercedes parked about forty feet behind the Buick, just as its headlights went off. Yet for all his love of reading and of music, events suggested that for mathematics he had a still greater aptitude. He backed toward the hall door, watching as the fire spread. After lingering until certain that the house would soon be a seething pyre, he finally sprinted along the hall to the front door. The subtle distortions in his vision, which caused lines of type to twist, didn't appear to trouble Barty much otherwise. He moved as quickly and as surely as ever, with his special grace. "But let's pretend it's me, okay? So here I am, stepping off the curb without looking both ways." Kathleen hadn't noticed Tom replace his glass on the table, over the quarter. When he lifted it to drain the last of the martini, two dimes and a nickel glittered on the tablecloth, where previously the quarter had been. "Why do you think he's spending his money for all this tricky stuff?" Kathleen wondered, not for the first time. At best, Vanadium might decide Junior had come here to learn what other funeral his nemesis had attended—which was, in fact, the true motivation. But this made it clear that Junior feared him and was striving to stay one step ahead of him. Innocent men didn't go to such length. As far as the fruitcake cop was concerned, Junior might as well have painted I killed Naomi on his forehead. Junior hadn't paid attention to everyone who visited the pianist though surely he'd have noticed a certain stump in a cheap suit. She didn't hide the diagnosis from the family, but she delayed telling them the prognosis, which was bleak. Already, her bones were tender, packed full of mutated immature white cells that hindered the production of normal white cells, red cells, and platelets. Move, move, like a runaway train, leaving the dead nuns—or at least one dead musician—far behind. "Thursday it is," he said, clearly delighted to be receiving only a third of the fair-market rental from his apartment. In addition to delivering a honey-raisin pear pie, Agnes had come to offer Obadiah Sepharad a year's work—not performing magic, but talking about it. Vanadium clearly spent a lot of time in the kitchen; it was the only room in the house that felt comfortable and lived-in. Lots of culinary gadgets, appliances. Pots and pans hanging from a ceiling rack. A basket of onions, another of potatoes. A grouping of bottles with colorful labels proved to be a collection of olive oils. Thunder less distant now. Around her—the crackle of police radios, the clang of tools being readied, the skirl of a stiffening wind. Dizzying, these sounds. She couldn't shut her ears against them, and when she closed her eyes, she felt as though she were spinning. "And in a lot of somewheres," said Barty, "things are worse for us than here. Some somewheres, you died, too, when I was born, so I never met you, either." 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. Missing windshield. Considering that the space was pinched by the crumpled roof, however, and in light of Agnes's pregnancy and imminent second-stage labor, the severe contortions involved in this extraction would be too dangerous. 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. "Tame him or bury him," said Losen, and turned to more important matters. In Room 724, standing alone at her sister's bedside, watching the girl sleep, Celestina told herself that she was coping well. She could handle this unnerving development without calling in either of her parents. In fact, although weak and aching, Junior felt mentally refreshed and wonderfully alert. "Fifty died in London, in '57, when two trains crashed. And a hundred twelve were crushed, torn, mangled, in '52, also England." Of the things you couldn't have seen coming, I'm the worst ... I'm the worst ... I'm the worst.... In his blindness, Barty listened to her reports and, through her, saw more than he could have seen if never he had lost his eyes. "Yes. More about that later, just let me make it clear that an interest in physics doesn't make me a physicist. Even if I were, I couldn't explain quantum mechanics in an hour or a year. Some say quantum theory is so weird that no one can fully understand all its implications. Some things proven in quantum experiments seem to

defy common sense, and I'll lay out a few for you, just to give you the flavor. First, on the subatomic level, effect sometimes comes before cause. In other words, an event can happen before the reason for it ever occurs. Equally odd ... in an experiment with a human observer, subatomic particles behave differently from the way they behave when the experiment is unobserved while in progress and the results are examined only after the fact-which might suggest that human will, even subconsciously expressed, shapes reality." To his room then, where they sat side by side in bed, a plate of chocolate-chip cookies between them. Through the evening, they stepped off this earth and out of all its troubles, into a world of adventure, where friendship and loyalty and courage and honor could deal with any malignancy..Tuesday, January 9, having cashed out a number of investments during the past ten days, Junior made a wire transfer of one and a half million dollars to the Gammoner account in the Grand Cayman bank..Now the message ... Something about a hospital. Someone dying. A cerebral hemorrhage..THE MORNING THAT it happened was bright and blue in March, two months after Barty took Angel for a dry walk in wet weather, seven weeks after Celestina married Wally, and five weeks after the happy newlyweds completed their purchase of the Galloway house next door to the Lampion place. Selma Galloway, retired from a professorship years earlier, had subsequently retired further, taking advantage of the equity in her long-owned home to buy a little condo on the beach in nearby Carlsbad..Here, now, the dinner guest, entering the kitchen. He carried the wineglass and the rose in his left hand. The Merlot was tucked under his arm. In his right hand was a small, brightly wrapped gift box..Behind them, two shots roared, and Paul knew that the reverend was no longer of this world..Instinct, even reason, told him that some connection existed between this person, this Bartholomew, and Celestina. The name had terrified Cain in a bad dream, the very night of the day that he'd killed Naomi, and Vanadium therefore had incorporated it into his psychological-warfare strategy without knowing its significance to his suspect. As strongly as he sensed the connection, he couldn't find the link. He lacked some crucial bit of information..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..You have the teeth to do it, Junior thought, but he restrained himself from saying it. "This can't be a dead end."Neighbors might not be home. And by the time he knocked, asked to use the phone, dialed ... Too great a waste of time..Yes, he suspected that he would require a great deal of rest to prepare himself for this vixen. Even in her loose white uniform and stodgy rubber-soled shoes, she was an incomparably erotic figure. She would be a lioness in bed..Jacob feared what men could do with clubs, knives, guns, bombs, with their bare hands, but he was most preoccupied by the unintended death that humanity brought upon itself with its devices, machines, and structures meant to improve the quality of life..Among those present before the caravan returned were a few who should have known better than to allow this madness. Tom Vanadium, Edom, Maria. They stared up at the boy, tense and solemn, and Agnes could only suppose that they, too, had arrived after the fact, with the boy already beyond easy recall..As he'd been instructed, Vanadium felt along the return edge of the carved limestone casing to the right of the window until he located a quarter-inch-diameter steel pin that protruded an inch. The pin was grooved to facilitate a grip. An insistent, steady pull was required, but as promised, the thumb-turn latch on the inside disengaged..Ever since he'd searched Vanadium's house, over fourteen months ago, Junior had enjoyed learning about other people by touring their homes in their absence. Because he was unwilling to risk arrest for breaking and entering, these explorations were rare, other than in the homes of women whom he'd dated long enough to justify swapping keys. Happily, in this golden age of trust and easy relationships, as little as a week of hot sex could lead to key-level commitment..He still had a sour taste in his mouth, although it was not as disgusting as it had been. All the odors were wonderfully clean and bracing--antiseptics, floor wax, freshly laundered bedsheets-without a whiff of..When Agnes was surprised to discover that Barty's name had been inspired by the reverend's famous sermon, Paul was startled. He had heard "This Momentous Day" on its first broadcast, and learning that it would be rerun three weeks later by popular demand, he'd urged Joey to listen. Joey had heard it on Sunday, the second of January, 1965-just four days before the birth of his son..Or as her father often said, happily mocking his own rhetorical eloquence: "Brighten the corner where you are, and you will light the world."A spirit-shredding bleakness clawed at her, but she couldn't permit it to leave her in tatters. If she traded hope for despair, as her brothers had done, Bartholomew would be finished before he'd begun. She owed him optimism, lessons in the joy of life..The previously flat, monotonous voice had in it now a subtle but undeniable new roundness of tone: "And every human being, every living thing, is a string on that instrument."."Yes, you did, and it's exactly what experience has no doubt taught you to think. But I'm forty-seven and you're twenty-".She woke weeping from the dreams, and she wanted no witnesses. She wasn't embarrassed by her tears. She just didn't want to share them with anyone but Barty..The pendulous bellies of the rain-swollen clouds were no darker than when he had first come to the cemetery, yet they appeared more ominous now than earlier..When he woke, he was in a hospital bed, his upper body slightly elevated. The only illumination was provided by a single window: an ashen light too dreary to be called a glow, trimmed into drab ribbons by the..The presence of the brochure disturbed Vanadium also because he assumed that after being dead-ended by Nolly, Cain had subsequently discovered that Celestina had taken custody of the baby to raise it as her own. For some reason, the nine-toed wonder originally believed the child was a boy, but if he'd tracked down Celestina, he now knew the truth..It's unsettling. For all our delight in the impermanent, the entrancing flicker of electronics, we also long for the unalterable..".No. It's, stopped. The thing now is to prevent a recurrence of the emesis, which could trigger more bleeding. He's getting antinausea medication and replacement electrolytes intravenously, and we've applied ice bags to his midsection to reduce the chance of further abdominal-muscle spasms and to help control inflammation."."Simon's a good man. Now that he pretty much knows Cain pushed the wife, he doesn't feel better about representing him just because the payoff was big. And in the current case, he's not Cain's lawyer, so there's no conflict of

interest, no ethics problem, so he's got a chance to set things right a little." She was also a cat lover, working with the Kitten Konservatory to save abandoned felines from death in the city pound. She was the charity's investment manager. Within ten months, Tammy grew twenty thousand in Konservatory funds into a quarter million by speculating in the stock of a South African firm that hit it big selling germ-warfare technology to North Korea, Pakistan, India, and the Republic of Tanzania, whose chief export was sisal..Slow deep breaths. Per Zedd, slow deep breaths. Any state of anxiety, regardless of how powerful, could be ameliorated or even dissipated. With a paper towel, Junior wiped the revolver. He dropped it on the floor beside the riddled nurse.. "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." 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 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..Over many proud generations and at least to the extent of second cousins, no one on either side of Celestina's family had skin of this light color. They were without exception medium to dark mahogany, many shades darker than this infant..On he went, up he went, trunk to limb, limb to branch, branch to limb, to limb, to trunk. Hand over hand up the vertical parts, gripping with his knees, then standing and walking like a tightrope artist along limbs horizontal to the ground, swinging over empty air and stepping from one woody walkway to another, ever upward toward the highest bower, dwindling as though he were growing younger during the ascent, becoming a smaller and smaller boy. Forty feet, fifty feet, already far higher than the house, striving toward the green citadel at the summit..WHEN AT LAST Paul Damascus reached the parsonage late Friday afternoon, January 12, he arrived on foot, as he arrived everywhere these days..Soon he realized this was a mistaken assumption, because when the instructor began trying to unknot him from his lotus position, a defensive numbness deserted Junior, and he became aware of pain. Excruciating..Behind them, the door rebounded forcefully from a rubber-tipped stopper and closed with a thud. The lock wasn't engaged, however, and they might be interrupted momentarily.. "Tom, a couple minutes ago," Agnes said, "Celestina mentioned your. . . 'certain awareness.' Which is what exactly?" She got up from the chair, went to the window, and raised the venetian blind rather than look out between its slats.. "I'm no hero," Paul insisted. "I just got your mom out of there in the process of saving myself." "Well, Uncle Jacob doesn't understand kids. Anyway, this is pretty good stuff." In the face of his kindness, however, she couldn't refuse his request. She nodded..Paul Damascus had gotten numerous invitations to dinner. No one thought that he should be alone on this difficult night..In the front seat, Edom and Jacob murmured agreement with the narrator's sentiments. Monday night, Edom and Jacob booked adjoining units in a motel near the hospital. They called Barty's room to give Agnes the phone number and to report that they had inspected eighteen establishments before finding one that seemed comparatively safe..Near midnight, she returned to her apartment. Lights out, in bed, staring at the ceiling, she was unable to sleep.

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