

## **AUF DEM MISSISSIPPI VOL 1 LEHR UND WANDERJAHRE**

Backing off, trying to feel his way to the foyer and front door, afraid that if he stumbled over a chair, she'd descend upon him like a screaming hawk upon a mouse, Junior denied her accusation. "You're crazy. How could I know? Look at you! How could I possibly know?" Paul realized that the kitchen had fallen silent, that the women had turned to the two children and now stood as motionless as figures in a waxworks tableau. Regrettably, his radiant smile only emphasized, by contrast, the dire shortcomings of the face from which it beamed. Lumpish, pocked, wart-stippled, darkened by a permanent beard shadow with a bluish cast, this countenance was beyond the powers of redemption possessed by the best plastic surgeons in the world, which was no doubt why Nolly applied his resources strictly to dental work. Nonetheless, the rapist's curse. Healthy, but healthy at the expense of Phimie. The muscles of his legs grew as hard as any of the landscapes that he trod. Granite thighs; calves like marble, roped with veins. On the nightstand waited a glass of water on a coaster and a pharmacy bottle containing several capsules of a potent painkiller. Clearly, she had learned nothing from her reading. No sincere and thoughtful student of Zedd would be as sorely lacking in self-control as Frieda Bliss. Dragonfly. That saving smile once more returned lost harmony to the scarred and broken face. "Not me. From my perspective, psychology is just one more of those easy sources of false meaning-like sex, money, and drugs. But I will admit to knowing a thing or two about evil." "Science. Quantum mechanics. Which is a theory ... of physics. But by theory, I don't mean just wild speculation. Quantum mechanics works. It underlies the invention of television. Before the end of this century, perhaps even by the '80s, quantum-based technology will give us powerful and cheap computers in our homes, computers as small as briefcases, as small as a wallet, a wristwatch, that can do more and far faster data processing than any of the giant lumbering computers we know today. Computers as tiny as a postage stamp. We'll have wireless telephones you can carry anywhere. Eventually, it will be possible to construct single-molecule computers of enormous power, and then technology-in fact, all human society-will change almost beyond comprehension, and for the better." 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. Eleven years later, a few months after marrying Agnes, Joey mysteriously invited Edom to accompany him on "a little drive," and took his bewildered brother-in-law to a nursery. They returned home with fifty pound bags of special mulch, jars of plant food, and an array of new tools. Together, they stripped the sod from the side yard, turned the soil, and prepared the ground for the rich variety of hybrid starter plants that were delivered the following week. Vanadium owned so few clothes that the two bags had sufficient capacity to accommodate half the contents of the closet and dresser. In his right hand again, the real gun, loaded with ten hollow-point rounds, felt charged with supernatural power: to Bartholomew as a crucifix to Dracula, as holy water to a demon, as kryptonite to Superman. With one tiny hand, Barty reached up for his mother. She gave him her forefinger, to which the sugar-bag boy clung tenaciously. "Yes, I was." She didn't tell him that her fear had not been allayed by his assurances or by his second walk in the rain. Because the upper part of the hospital bed was somewhat raised, he didn't have to lift his head from the pillow to study the corner where the phantom waited. He peered beyond the IV rack, past the foot of the bed. 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. "I'm afraid you're wrong." When Tom opened his left hand, the palm lay as bare as that of a blind beggar in a country of thieves. Meanwhile, his right hand had tightened into a fist again. "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." Imagination like all living things lives now, and it lives with, from, on true change. Like all we do and have, it can be co-opted and degraded; but it survives commercial and didactic exploitation. The land outlasts the empires. The conquerors may leave desert where there was forest and meadow, but the rain will fall, the rivers will run to the sea. The unstable, mutable, untruthful realms of Once-upon-a-time are as much a part of human history and thought as the nations in our kaleidoscopic atlases, and some are more enduring. Not that he failed to perform well. As always, he was a bull, a stallion, an insatiable satyr. None of his lovers complained; none had the energy for complaint when he'd finished with them. With a nervous twitch of his avian head and a wary frown, the watcher broke eye contact and slipped into the chattering crowd, lost as quickly as a slender sandpiper skittering among a herd of plump seagulls. Between the one-line description of the baklava and the menu's more effusive words about the walnut mamouls, the suspense became too much, the doubt too insidious, at which point Celestina looked up and said, with more girlish angst in her voice than she had planned "Maybe this isn't the place, maybe it isn't the time, or maybe it's the time but not the place, or the place but not the time, or maybe the time and the place are right but the weather's wrong, I don't know--Oh,.She hadn't sung since the early-morning hours of October 18, and no other paranormal event had occurred since then. The waiting between manifestations scraped at Junior's nerves worse than the manifestations themselves. Evidently, last evening, prior to keeping a dinner date with Victoria, when the taunting detective had illegally entered Junior's house and placed another quarter on the nightstand, he had seen the directory open on the kitchen table. Deducing the meaning of the red check marks, he inserted this card and closed the book: another small assault in the psychological warfare that he'd been waging. While Jacob ate, he browsed through a new coffee-table book on dam disasters. He talked more to himself than to Barty and Angel, as he spot-read the text and looked at pictures. "Oh, my," he would say in sonorous tones. Or sadly, sadly: "Oh, the horror of it." Or with indignation: "Criminal. Criminal that it was built so poorly." Sometimes he clucked his tongue in his cheek or sighed or

groaned in commiseration.. "Who?" she shouted, though they were perched side by side on a black-leather love seat.. 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." In the hall that served the two ground-floor apartments, they encountered Rena Moller, the elderly woman who lived in the unit across from theirs. She was polishing the dark wood of her front door with lemon oil, a sure sign that her son and his family were coming to dinner.. Then her breath caught repeatedly in her breast as her throat tightened against the influx of air. One particularly difficult inhalation dissolved into a sob, and she wept.. Junior raised his voice even further: "In those old movies, the Little Rascals." She moved beside him. "For one minute, after her heart stopped the first time, she wasn't here in St. Mary's, was she? Her body, yes, that was still here, but not Phimie." Evidently, either Frank Sinatra was an enthusiasm that Victoria and the detective shared, or the nurse purchased some of the crooner's records expressly for their dinner engagement.. Although the ace of hearts had only positive meanings, and although, according to Maria, multiple appearances, especially in sequence, meant increasingly positive things, a series of chills nevertheless riffled through Agnes's spine, as if her vertebrae were fingers shuffling.. Also in the drawer was a pistol that he kept for home defense. He stared at it, trying to decide whether to go downstairs and make a sandwich or kill himself.. This morning, only his love for his sister, Agnes, gave him the courage to drive and to become the pie man.. After arranging to have the gallery deliver his acquisition, Junior stopped in a nearby diner for lunch. The place specialized in superb heartland food: meat loaf, fried chicken, macaroni and cheese.. Once in a while, however, he reverted to his roots, to the food that gave him comfort. Thus, the cheeseburger and its decadent accoutrements.. 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. Barty sat at the kitchen table, reading *Between Planets*. From time to time, Agnes discovered him watching her at work or studying Maria's face and her dexterous hands.. She hung her head, covered her face with her chilled hands, and wondered how her mother could sustain faith in God when such terrible things could happen to someone as innocent as Phimie.. Kneeling at her side, Junior placed the decorative pillow over her lovely face and pressed down firmly while Frank Sinatra finished "Hello, Young Lovers," and sang perhaps half of "All or Nothing at All." Victoria never regained consciousness, never had a chance to struggle.. "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." "It was. But maybe that's not the whole story. Anyway, we know the usual poses these guys strike, the attitudes they think are deceptive and clever. Most of them are so obvious, they might as well just stick their willy in a light socket and save us a lot of trouble. This, however, is a new approach. Tends to make you want to believe in the poor guy." He also sought a supplier of high-quality counterfeit ID. This proved easier than he anticipated.. To be useful, anger must be channeled, as Zedd explains with unusually poetic prose in *The Beauty of Rage: Channel Your Anger and Be a Winner* Junior's current predicament would only get worse if he had to telephone Roto-Rooter to extract a musician from the plumbing.. Everyone thought the mop-tops 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.. In his mind's eye, he saw the answering machine with uncanny clarity. That curious gadget. Sitting atop the scarred pine desk.. Junior had expected these singular creatures, and he needed them to be as monstrous as they had always been in the past. Nonetheless, he shrank back against his pillows in dismay when they exploded into the hospital room. Their faces were as fierce as those of painted cannibals coming off a fast. They gestured emphatically, spitting expletives along with tiny bits of lunch dislodged from their teeth by the force of their condemnations.. The Rolex. Because most of the trash in the huge bin was bagged, finding the watch would be easier than Junior had feared.. "After Elfarran and Morred perished and the Isle of Solea sank beneath the sea, the Council of the Wise governed for the child Serriadh until he took the throne. His reign was bright but brief. The kings who followed him in Enlad were seven, and their realm increased in peace and wealth. Then the dragons came to raid among the western lands, and wizards went out in vain against them. King Akambar moved the court from Berila in Enlad to the City of Havnor, whence he sent out his fleet against invaders from the Kargad Lands and drove them back into the East. But still they sent raiding ships even as far as the Inmost Sea. Of the fourteen Kings of Havnor the last was Maharion, who made peace both with the dragons and the Kargs, but at great cost. And after the Ring of the Runes was broken, and Erreth-Akbe died with the great dragon, and Maharion the Brave was killed by treachery, it seemed that no good thing happened in the Archipelago.. Anyway, if Seraphim were still alive, she would be only nineteen now, too young to have graduated from Academy of Art College.. In the name of Zedd, slow deep breaths. Focus not on the past, not on the present, but only on the future. What has happened is of no importance. All that matters is what will happen next.. In the refrigerator, he found a stick of butter in a container with clear plastic lid. He took the container to the cutting board beside the sink, to the left of the cooktop, and opened it.. Maria fished another chip from the sweating carafe, rejected it, and scooped out a larger piece. She hesitated, staring at it for a moment, and then spooned it between Agnes's lips. "Water can be broken if it will be first made into ice." THE RAIN THAT HAD threatened to wash out the morning funeral finally rinsed the afternoon, but by nightfall the Oregon sky was clean and dry. From horizon to horizon spread an infinity of icy stars, and

at the center of them hung a bright sickle moon as silver as steel..Celestina succumbed to a fit of giggles. Before she could control them, she used up two Kleenex to blow her nose and to blot the laughter from her eyes.."You'd never cheat me. I know you. We'd have Christmas twice a year and parties for half birthdays."Some acts were distasteful, too, such as searching the lunatic lawman for his car keys and his badge..Softened by a Shantung shade, the lamplight was golden on his small smooth face, but sapphire and emerald in his eyes..To the phone, the police. No dial tone. Pointless to rattle the disconnect switch. The line had been cut..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.He planned, as soon as they took him out of his cell, to use the old Changers spell of self-transformation and so escape. Surely his life was in danger, and it would be all right to use the spell? Only he couldn't decide what to turn himself into-a bird, or a wisp of smoke, what would be safest? But while he was thinking about it, Losen's men, used to wizard's tricks, drugged his food and he ceased to think of anything at all. They dumped him into a mule-cart like a sack of oats. When he showed signs of reviving during the journey, one of them bashed him on the head, remarking that he wanted to make sure he got his rest..But both the Church and quantum physics contend there is no such thing. Coincidence is the result of mysterious design and meaning--or it's strange order underlying the appearance of chaos. Take your pick. Or, if you choose, feel free to believe that they're one and the same..He would have liked to take Industrial Woman, as well, but she weighed a quarter ton. He couldn't manage her alone, and he dared not hire a day worker, not even an illegal alien, to assist him, and thereby compromise the Pinchbeck van and identity.."Look at it this way, Aggie. All the pies, all the things you do-that's betting on life. And now you've just been given the great blessing of being able to place larger bets."."But the breed is nervous, dear. With a nervous breed, you just never know, do you?.Junior kept both forged driver's licenses in his wallet, in addition to the one that featured his real name. He stowed everything else in Pinchbeck's and Gammoner's safe-deposit boxes, along with the emergency cash.."Why should I be afraid of a stumbling blind boy?" asked Junior again. But this time the words issued from him in a different tone of voice, because suddenly he sensed something knowing in this boy's attitude, if not in his manufactured eyes, a quality similar to what the girl exhibited.."Having spent most of the last twenty years in this apartment, not being the one who has a car, how would I meet a Negro magician?".Against the sight of Franklin Chan's pity, which implied the hopelessness of Barty's condition, Agnes closed her eyes. But she opened them at once, because this chosen darkness reminded her that unwanted darkness might be Barty's fate..Soon paramedics followed the police, who spread out through the apartment, and Junior relinquished his grip on the dishtowel..The coin stopped turning across his knuckles and, as though with volition of its own, it slipped into the tight curve of his curled forefinger. With a snap of his thumb, he flipped the quarter into the air..The girl was creepy, no doubt about it, and Junior felt now precisely as he had felt on the night of Celestina's exhibition at the Greenbaum Gallery, when he had come out of the alleyway after disposing of Neddy Gnathic in the Dumpster and had checked his watch only to discover his bare wrist. He was missing something here, too, but it wasn't merely a Rolex, wasn't a thing at all, but an insight, a profound truth.."Even in an infinite number of worlds," Wally objected, "there's no place I was that stupid."..Dining room. Two place settings at one end of the table. Wineglasses. Two ornate pewter candlesticks, candies not yet lit..When she discovered she was pregnant, Phimie dealt with this new trauma as other naive fifteen-year-olds had done before her: She sought to avoid the scorn and the reproach that she imagined would be heaped upon her for having failed to reveal the rape at the time it occurred. With no serious thought to long-term consequences, focused solely on the looming moment, in a state of denial, she made plans to conceal her condition as long as possible..Being ruthlessly honest with himself, as always, he acknowledged that killing Tammy would not solve his problem. She might have told friends and colleagues about the Rolex, just as she had surely shared with her girlfriends the juiciest details about Junior's unequalled lovemaking. During the two months that he and the cat woman dated, others had heard her call him Eenie. He couldn't kill Tammy and all her friends and colleagues, at least not on a timely enough schedule to thwart the police..Shaking the ravaged khakis at him, she said, "Then what made such a mess of these?.As the afternoon waned toward a portentous dusk and toward the gallery reception for Celestina White, Junior prepared his knives and guns..Instead of sitting behind his desk, he settled into the second of two patient chairs, beside her. This, too, indicated bad news..Confused, Panglo held out his right hand, but Jacob said, "Sorry, no offense, but I don't shake with anyone."..That was all right, for she had done the same for Otter's elder sister, and so his parents sent him to her in the evenings. But she taught Otter more than the song of the Creation. She knew his gift. She and some men and women like her, people of no fame and some of questionable reputation, had all in some degree that gift; and they shared, in secret, what lore and craft they had. "A gift untaught is a ship unguided," they said to Otter, and they taught him all they knew. It wasn't much, but there were some beginnings of the great arts in it; and though he felt uneasy at deceiving his parents, he couldn't resist this knowledge, and the kindness and praise of his poor teachers. "It will do you no harm if you never use it for harm," they told him, and that was easy for him to promise them..Thrilled to have inspired this awe in her, he closed the book. "Remember what we talked about a long time ago? You asked me how come, if I could walk where the rain wasn't. . .".support as he had only pretended to need it previously. He felt as if he had become the mere shell of a man and that the right note would shatter him as a properly piercing tone can shatter crystal..Abruptly, Junior Cain turned away from the tower, from the body of his lost love, dropped to his knees, and vomited. Vomited more explosively than he had ever done in the depths of the worst sickness of his life. Bitter, thick, grossly out of proportion to the simple lunch that he had eaten, up came a dreadfully reeking vomitus. He was untroubled by nausea, but his abdominal muscles contracted painfully, so tightly that he thought he would be cinched in two, and up came more, and still more, spasm after spasm, until he spewed a thin gruel green with bile, which surely had to be the last of it, but was not, for here was more bile, so acidic that his gums

burned from contact with it--Oh God, please no--still more. His entire body heaving. Choking as he aspirated a piece of something vile. He squeezed his watering eyes shut against the sight of the flood, but he could not block out the stench.. "Is it as bad as that?" Celestina wondered plaintively, though she knew the answer. "I love San Francisco. The city inspires my work. I've built a life here. Is it really as bad as that?" .Either operating on first-aid knowledge of his own or responding to an instruction from the medic, the cop slipped a foam pillow under Agnes's head..The social worker's office once more. Rain tapping lightly at the window where Dr. Lipscomb had stared intently into the fog as he tried to avoid confronting the life-changing revelation that Phimie, speaking with the special knowledge of the once-dead, had shown him..No sign of Vanadium. Some of the taller monuments offered hiding places on both sides of the cemetery road, as did the thicker trunks of the larger trees..Junior didn't find anything to explain her paranoia--though, to his surprise, he discovered six books by Caesar Zedd in her small library. The pages were dog-eared; the text was heavily underlined.. "I'm no hero," Paul insisted. "I just got your mom out of there in the process of saving myself." .Anyway, the thing that scared her was not the monstrous father of this child. The fearsome thing was the decision that she had made a few minutes ago, in the unused hospital room on the seventh floor..Clearly, the musician recognized him, which seemed unlikely, even extraordinary, considering that they'd never spoken to each other, and considering that Junior must be only one of thousands of customers who had passed through that lounge in the past three years.. "I'm sure you would be, yes, but I'm afraid I don't have the patience to teach, I'm a performer, not an instructor. I suppose I could give you the name of a good teacher." .Sliding Victoria's chair away from the table, he turned her to face him. He adjusted her body so that her head was tipped back and her arms were hanging slack at her sides..He was about to lift the body out of the chair when he heard the car in the driveway. He might not have caught the sound of the engine so distinctly and so early if the stereo had not been in the process of changing albums.. "Your father denies the rape ever occurred, apparently out of what I'd call a misguided willingness to trust in divine justice." . "No. The information I gave you came from the coroner's office, which issued the death certificate. But even if I got into St. Mary's records, there wouldn't be a hint of where Catholic Family Services placed this baby." .The reverend made the first toast, speaking so softly that his tremulous words seemed to bloom in Celestina's mind and heart rather than to fall upon her ears. "To gentle Phimie, who is with God." .IN NEED OF OIL, the hand crank squeaked, but the tall halves of the casement window parted and opened outward into the alleyway..He spat on his right thumb, scrubbed the thumb against one of the dried drips on the floor, rubbed thumb and forefinger together, and brought the freshened spoor to his nose. He smelled blood..Eventually Agnes came to suspect that for all the pleasure the boy took in math and for all his aptitude with numbers, his greatest gift and his deepest passion lay elsewhere. He was finding his way toward a destiny both more astonishing and stranger than the lives of any of the many prodigies about whom she'd read..Swift and yellow, Angel flew to her mother, grabbing at one of the bunched drapes as if she might hide behind it..Although Junior felt honor-bound to give Victoria first shot at him, he certainly didn't owe her monogamy. Eventually, when he had shaken off suspicion as finally as he had shaken off Naomi, he would be in the mood for a dessert buffet, romantically speaking, and one éclair would not satisfy..Although he didn't believe in destiny, in fate, in anything more than himself and his own ability to shape his future, Junior couldn't deny how extraordinary it was that this woman should cross his path at this precise moment in his life, when he was frustrated to the point of cerebral hemorrhage by his inability to find Bartholomew, confused and nervous about the phantom singer and other apparently supernatural events in his life, and generally in a funk unlike any he had ever known before. Here was a link to Seraphim and, through Seraphim, to Bartholomew..The station wagon rolled out, the Volkswagen bus followed it, and Wally brought up the rear. "Wagons, ho!" he announced. The morning that it happened, Barty ate breakfast in the Lampion kitchen with Angel, Uncle Jacob, and two brainless friends..On mechanic, he again glanced meaningfully at Edom, who felt a response was expected. When he opened his mouth, he could think of nothing to say, except that at Sanriku, Japan, on June 15, 1896, a 110 foot-high wave, triggered by an undersea quake, killed 27,100 people, most while they were in prayer at a Shinto festival. Even to Edom, this seemed to be an inappropriate comment, so he said nothing. .By the time he ordered cr?me brulee for dessert, he was able to laugh at himself. Had he expected to see a ghost enjoying a cocktail and free cashews at the bar?.She fussed over him, took his temperature, and spooned two chips of ice into his parched mouth. Leaving, she gave Celestina a meaningful look and tapped her wristwatch..She was four years older than Phimie. They hadn't i;mn a great deal of each other during the past three years, since Celestina had come to San Francisco. Although distance and time, the press of her studies, and the busyness of daily life had not made her forget that she loved Phimie, she had forgotten the purity and the power of love. Rediscovering it now, she was shaken so badly that she had to pull a chair to the side of the bed and sit down..For just one hour, which was not too taxing, he walked in the idea of a world where he had healthy eyes, and shared the vision of other Barty's in other places, so he would be able to see his bride as she walked down the aisle and as, beside him, she took their vows with him, and as she held out her hand to receive the ring..Short and slender, Dr. Chan was as self-effacing as a Buddhist monk, as confident and as gracious as a mandarin emperor. His manner was serene, and his effect was tranquility..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..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. "I'll come by at eight o'clock for breakfast," Wally suggested. "We have to set a date." He knocked the pepper shaker on its side, and then with a groan put it upright once more. The rain was colder than it had been earlier, almost as icy as sleet. Or perhaps she was far hotter than before and felt the chill more keenly on her fevered skin. Each droplet seemed to hiss against her face, to sizzle against her hands, with which she tightly gripped her swollen abdomen as if she could deny Death the baby that it had come to collect. "You must've slipped this one in my pocket when you first came in here," Nolly deduced. For the first time since walking to La Jolla to meet Jonas Salk, Paul planned a journey with a specific purpose. 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 went in a pretense of blindness, gripping Angel's arm, but he missed nothing, and etched every detail in his memory, against the need of them in the coming dark. Finished, she gave him a mirror, so he could admire his new bicuspid cap. After five years of dentistry, paced so as not to tax Nolly's tolerance, Kathleen had done well what nature had done poorly, giving him a perfect bite and a supernatural smile. This final cap was the last of the reconstruction. And although Simon would have denied it, would even have joked that a conscience was a liability for an attorney, he possessed a moral compass. When he traveled too far along the wrong trail, that magnetized needle in his soul led him back from the land of the lost. On both sides of the property, the neighbors can't see, but some know, have always known, and have less interest. So much argued against the idea that they could succeed as a couple. In this age when race supposedly didn't matter anymore, it sometimes seemed to matter more year by year. Age mattered, too, and at fifty, he was twenty-six years older than she was, old enough to be her father, as surely her father would quietly but pointedly--and repeatedly!--observe. He was highly educated, with multiple medical degrees, and she had gone to art school. Maybe he went a little crazy then. He wouldn't deny a brief, transient madness. There was an otter in our brook. He assumed that she hadn't phoned the police to make a formal report. No need to go out of her way to slander Junior when Thomas Vanadium had been prowling the hospital at all hours of the day and night, ready to lend an ear to any falsehood about him, as long as it made him appear to be a sleazeball and a wife killer. For a while, she couldn't get enough air. Felt suffocated. She drew great, raw, shuddering breaths, and thought that she would never be able to quiet herself but quiet came. "What's below us?" Hound pointed to the floor, paved with rough slate flags. Shivering, Junior slammed the trunk lid and warily surveyed the lonely landscape. Black pines spread bristled arms through the charry night, and the moon cast down a jaundiced light that seemed to obscure more than it illuminated.

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