

WENDEPUNKT IN MEINEM LEBEN

A flicker of complacency showed in Otters tired, battered young face. "No," he said. "I don't think anybody can." "Oh, my Lord," Chicane groaned as he and Sparky half carried Junior into the bathroom. "She was a hero, just like you. I wanted you ... I wanted you to see her and to know her name. Perri Damascus. That was her name." Sitting on a stool at the counter, he ordered a cheeseburger, coleslaw, french fries, and a cherry Coke. "What are you strongest in?" "Joey was, after all, an insurance broker," Vinnie reminded her. "He was going to look out for his family." She said, "Honey, what I'm wondering is ... could you walk where you don't have bad eyes, like you walked where the rain wasn't ... and leave the tumors in that other place? Could you walk where you have good eyes and come back with them?"

of color had to search for mentoring, especially in 1922, when twenty year-old Obadiah dreamed of being the next Houdini. By November 1967, the Father Brown detective stories, written for mystery-loving adults by G. K. Chesterton, thrilled Barty. This series of books would retain a special place in his heart for the rest of his life—as would Robert Heinlein's *The Star Beast*, which was among his Christmas gifts that year. The voice had come not from the armchair in the corner, but from immediately beside the bed. Dessert was on the house. The waiter brought the four best items on the menu, to spare them the need to make two small decisions after having made such a big one. "My little girl," she said, and belatedly she realized that this might not be a policeman, after all, but someone trying to determine if she and Angel were alone in the apartment. 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. The walk-in closet, which Vanadium next explored, contained fewer clothes than he expected. Only half the rod space was being used. A lot of empty hangers rang softly, eerily against one another as he conducted a casual examination of Cain's wardrobe. The air was cool but not yet cold. A faint breeze smelled of the sea beyond the hill. almost recoiled in disgust. She held the newborn so that its mother could look into. Celestina turned in her seat to look back at Wally and Angel, who were waving. "I guess I am." The previous April, the lads from Liverpool had claimed all five of the top five. Real Americans, like the Beach Boys and the Four Seasons, were forced to settle for lower numbers. It made you wonder who had really won the Revolutionary War. After his conversation with Magusson, however, Junior realized this fear was irrational. If the detective had miraculously escaped the cold waters of the lake, he would have been in need of emergency medical treatment. He would have staggered or crawled to the county highway in search of help, unaware that Junior had framed him for Victoria's murder, too badly wounded to care about anything but getting medical attention. "Even in an infinite number of worlds," Wally objected, "there's no place I was that stupid." scraps of night that have lingered long after dawn dart agitatedly in and out of the tree, from branch to branch. "That would be wrong. A diary's private." He supposed that to a detective nothing was sacred, but he was nonetheless a little shocked that Vanadium needed to ask that question. In the first two weeks, when she wasn't on pie caravans, Agnes received guests in numbers that taxed her. But there were so many people she wanted to see one last time. She fought hard, giving the disease all the what-for that she could, and she held fast to hope, but she received the visitors nonetheless, just in case. The doors slid open, and they rolled Barty corridor to corridor, past the scrub sinks, to a waiting surgical nurse in green cap, mask, and gown. She alone effected his transfer into the positive pressure of the surgery. In the crisis, the rack holding her oxygen bottle had been rolled to the bed. The breathing mask lay on the pillow beside her. "The piece that's intrigued me," Junior revealed, "is the one that's rather like a c-c-candlestick. It's quite different from the others." 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. Junior drove them a little crazy by pretending not to understand their intent as they circled the issue like novice snake handlers warily looking for a safe grip on a coiled cobra. Frequently, these days, she found herself explaining aspects of life to Barty that she hadn't expected to discuss for years to come. She wondered how she could make him understand this: Life can be so sweet, so full, that sometimes happiness is nearly as intense as anguish, and the pressure of it in the heart swells close to pain. 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. "Mom always says that pigs will surely fly one day if ever Daddy chooses to convince them that they've got wings." "Well, the lab could detect abnormally high salt levels, but that wouldn't matter in court. He could say he ate a lot of salty foods." "I don't have to graduate in the spring of next year. I can take fewer classes, graduate the spring after. That's no big deal." When she didn't at once accept his generosity, he said, "All my life, I've lived just to get through the day. First survival. Then achievement, acquisition. Houses, investments, antiques ... There's nothing wrong with any of that. But it didn't fill the emptiness. Maybe one day I'll return to medicine. But that's a hectic existence, and right now I want peace, calm, time to reflect. Whatever I do from here on . . . I want my life to have a degree of purpose it's never had before. Can you understand that?" One hand on the railing, he ascended the first three steps slowly. Pausing on each, he slid his foot forward and back on the carpet, runner to judge the depth of the tread relative to his small foot. He ran the toe of his right shoe up and down the riser between each tread, gauging the height. He turned the knob. The door eased inward, but he pushed it open only a fraction of an inch. The man's voice echoed hollowly in Junior's ears, as if coming from the far end of a tunnel. Or from the terminus of a death-row hallway, on

the long walk between the last meal and the execution chamber..Blue fire flashed across the top of the range and followed drips down the baked-enamel front to the floor. Blue flared to yellow, and the yellow darkened when the blaze found the cadaver..When the two vertical panes of the casement window were still less than seven inches apart, they stuttered. The mechanism produced a dismal grinding rasp that sounded like a guttural pronunciation of the problem itself, c-c-c-corrosion, and seized up..FOR AMERICANS OF Chinese descent-and San Francisco has a large Chinese population-1965 was the Year of the Snake. For Junior Cain, it was the Year of the Gun, though it didn't start out that way.. "Oh, it doesn't mean you're nervous in that sense. Nervous in this case means psychologically induced. Grief, Enoch. brief and shock and horror-they can have profound physical effects." It's been a joy to me to go back to Earthsea and find it still there, entirely familiar, and yet changed and still changing. What I thought was going to happen isn't what's happening, people aren't who-or what-I thought they were, and I lose my way on islands I thought I knew by heart.. "Oh, it certainly is! It certainly is enough! But ... I don't regret much, you know. But I do regret not being here to see why you and Angel have been brought together. I know it'll be something lovely, Barty. Something so fine." "And there's more," said Vinnie Lincoln, as round as Santa Claus and cherry-cheeked with pleasure at being able to bear these gifts. "The policy contained a double-indemnity clause in the event of death by accident. The complete tax-free payout is one and a half million." Foreword.Three minutes by car, maybe two without stop signs. He could just about run it as fast as drive it. He had a bit of a gut on him. He wasn't the man he used to be. Ironically, however, after the coma and the rehab, he wasn't as heavy as he had been before Cain sunk him in Quarry Lake.. "Last time I looked, Miss Galloway lived to the south of us. Retired. Never married. No children." This baffled Junior. To the best of his recollection, during the weeks that Seraphim had come to him for physical therapy, she had never mentioned an older sister or any sister at all..Another machine beside the first, stocked with copies of a sexually explicit publication for gays, fired a quarter that hit Junior's forehead. The next snapped against the bridge of his nose..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..San Francisco's pre-Christmas cheer had deserted it. The glow and glitter of the season had given way to a mood as dark and ominous as The Cancer Lurks Unseen, Version 1..Junior in the fog. Trying oh-so-hard to live in the future, where the winners live. But being relentlessly sucked back into the useless past by memory..This declaration was received seriously by Edom and Jacob, as if the devil often strolled the streets of Bright Beach and from time had been known to snatch little babies from their mothers' and eat them with mustard..From these ominous spatters, several fibers bristled, having stuck to the pewter when the drizzle was still wet. They appeared to be human hairs..Jacob made more fire sounds as he stripped the clear cellophane off a second new deck of playing cards, then off a third and a fourth..Captivated by catastrophe, so lost in his book that he might as well have stepped magically inside of it and closed the covers after himself, Uncle Jacob didn't answer..Besides, being a future-focused guy who believed that the past was a burden best shed, he never made an effort to nurture memories. Sentimental wallowing in nostalgia had none of the appeal for him that it had for most people..Her lead gaze was still surprisingly clear. How remarkable that the impact hadn't caused a starburst hemorrhage in either of her exquisite, lavender-blue eyes. No blood, just surprise..Pity warmed the physician's ascetic face. "You loved your wife very much, didn't you?". Sometimes, while shaving or combing his hair, as he was looking in the bathroom or foyer mirror, Junior thought that he glimpsed a presence, dark and vaporous, less substantial than smoke, standing or moving behind him. At other times, this entity seemed to be within the mirror. He couldn't focus on it, study it, because the moment he became aware of the presence, it was gone..He hesitated, because until the limited explanations he'd made to Celestina in San Francisco, he had never discussed his special perception with anyone except two priest counselors in the seminary. At first he felt uneasy, talking of these matters to strangers-as if he were making a confession to laity who held no authority to provide absolution but as he spoke to this hushed and intense gathering, his doubts fell away, and revelation seemed as natural as talk of the weather..She thought all that, but she closed her eyes and said: "I'll be okay. Give me a second here, all right?". Footsteps in the hall drew their attention to the open door, where the surgeon appeared in his loose cotton greens.. "Stop it, stop it! " Agnes, only ten years old, slender and shaking, but wild with righteousness, until now held in thrall by her own fear, by the memory of all the beatings that she herself has taken. She screams at their father and strikes him with a book she's brought from the house. The Bible. She strikes their father with the Bible, from which he's read to them every night of their lives. He drops the roses, tears the holy book out of Agnes's hands, and pitches it across the yard. He rakes up a handful of the scattered roses, intending to make his son resume this dinner of sin, but here comes Agnes once more, the Bible recovered, brandishing it at him, and now she says what all of them know to be true but what none of them has ever dared say, what even Agnes herself will never again dare to say after this day, not while the old man lives, but she dares to say it now, holding the Bible toward him, so he can see the gold-embossed cross upon the imitation-leather cover. "Murderer," Agnes says. "Murderer " And Edom knows that they're all as good as dead now, that their father will slaughter them right here, right this minute, in his rage. "Murderer," she says accusingly, behind the shield of the Bible, and she doesn't mean that he is killing Edom, but that he killed their mother, that they heard him in the night, three years before, heard the short but awful struggle, and know that what happened was no accident. Roses fall from his skinned and pierced hands, a flurry of petals yellow and petals red. He rises and takes a step toward Agnes, his dripping fists crimson with his blood and with Edom's. Agnes doesn't back away, but thrusts the book toward him, and scintillant sunlight caresses the cross. Instead of tearing the book out of her hands again, their father stalks away, into the house, surely to return with club or cleaver ... yet they will see no more of him this day. Then Agnes-with tweezers for the thorns, with a basin full of warm water and a washcloth, with iodine and Neosporin and bandages-kneels

beside him in the yard. Jacob, too, comes forth from the dark crawlspace under the porch, having watched in terror from behind the latticework skirt. He is shaking, crying, flushed with embarrassment because he didn't intervene, although he was wise to hide, for the disciplinary beating of one twin usually leads to the pointless beating of the other. Agnes gradually settles Jacob by involving him in the treatment of his brother's wounds, and to Edom she says, often thereafter, "I love your roses, Edom. I love your roses. God loves your roses, Edom." Overhead, agitated wings quiet to a soft flutter, and the shrieking crows grow silent. The air pools as still and heavy as the water in a hidden lagoon within a secret glade, in the perfect garden of the unfallen.....DOWN SHE WENT, abruptly and hard, with a clatter and thud, her natural grace deserting her in the fall, though she regained it in her posture of collapse..Intending to keep the front of the gallery under surveillance from behind the wheel of his Mercedes, Junior checked the time as he walked toward the car. His wrist was bare, his Rolex missing..Instead of immediately killing anyone, Junior returned to his apartment on the afternoon of December 29, and went to bed, fully clothed. To calm down. To think about focus..Twilight, nearly gone and purple in the west, inspired a bright violet line along the crest of an incoming bank of bay fog, as though the mist were shot through with a luminous vein of neon, transforming the entire sparkling city into a stylish cabaret just now opening for business. The night, soft as a woman come to dance, carried a steely blade of cold in its black-silk skirts..Embarrassment flushed her when she realized that the paramedic had cut away the pants of her jogging suit. She was naked from the waist down..Up flew his hands, as white as doves, flapping as though trying to escape from the sleeves of his raincoat, as if he were a magician rather than a musician..-nor cruel, nor hateful, nor envious, nor mean," Phimie recited, "for all these are sicknesses of this fallen world-".Shaking his head, his coffee cup rattling against the saucer, Edom said, "Uh, no, sir, no, I don't think we've ever met till now."..Something was due to happen in this peculiar, extended, almost casual haunting under which he had suffered for more than two years, since finding the quarter in his cheeseburger. While all around him in the streets, people bustled in good cheer, Junior slouched along in a sour mood, temporarily having forgotten to look for the bright side..She was lost in his eyes: She wanted to pass through his eyes as Alice had passed through the looking glass, follow the beautiful radiance that was fading now, go with him through the door that had been opened for him and accompany him out of this rain-swept day into grace..IN HIS FORD VAN filled with needlepoint and Sklent and Zedd, Junior Cain-Pinchbeck to the world-left the Bay Area by a back door. He took State Highway 24 to Walnut Creek, which might or might not have walnuts, but which offered a mountain and a state park named for the devil: Mount Diablo. State Highway 4 to Antioch brought him to a crossing of the river delta west of Bethel Island. Bethel, for those who had taken good advanced courses in vocabulary improvement, meant "sacred place."..When she still didn't meet his stare, he seized her by the chin and tipped her head back..The sudden change of subject, from the airliner crash to Phimie, confused Celestina..The short walk across the room, to the hero's table, looked more daunting to Paul than the trek he'd just completed. He was nobody, a small-town pharmacist who missed more work each month, who relied increasingly on his worried employees to cover for him, and who would lose his business if he didn't get a grip on himself. He had never done a great deed, never saved a life. He had no right to impose upon this man, and now he knew he hadn't the nerve to do so, either..Flanked by Dumpsters and trash cans, through steam rising out of grates in the pavement, past parked delivery trucks, here came the dead cop. Running..The owner's attitude softened somewhat with Junior's reference to the quarter, and softened even further when together they returned to the counter to see the proof in the cheese. He went from righteous anger to abject apology..From her reading, she knew that amniotic fluid should be clear. A few traces of blood in it should not necessarily be alarming, but here were more than traces. Here were thick red-black streams..Along the hall, every step measured, he stayed near the wall farthest from the staircase..He also concluded arrangements to open an account for Gammoner in a Grand Cayman Island bank and one for Pinchbeck in Switzerland..Dear Lord, how she loved her sugarpie, her little M&M. Three years had passed in what seemed like a month, and although there had been stress and struggle, too few hours in every day, less time for her art than she would have liked, and little or no time for herself, she wouldn't have traded being blindsided by motherhood for any amount of wealth, not for anything in the world ... except to have Phimie back. Angel was the moon, the sun, the stars, and all the comets streaking through infinite galaxies: an ever-shining light..mouth was turned down in half a frown. From the corner of her lips oozed a stream..Judging by the sounds Vanadium made, Junior figured that the cop had settled once more into the armchair..He snatched the woman's car keys off the pavement, slid behind the wheel of the Pontiac, and drove off to find a pharmacy, the only stop that he intended to make until he reached Spruce Hills..Celestina finally zipped shut the satchel. "You better watch out for the big bad wolf."..Now that efforts were being made to control the preeclampsia, Dr. Daines had scheduled a series of tests for the following day. He expected to recommend a cesarean section as soon as Phimie's e's blood pressure was reduced and stabilized, but he didn't want to risk this surgery before determining what complications might have resulted from her restricted diet and the compression of her abdomen..Celestina sensed an easy camaraderie between these two men, but also tension that was perhaps related to the reference to an illegal search..Finally: "A trial lawyer, whether specializing in criminal or civil matters, is like an actor, Mr. Cain. He must believe deeply in his role, in the truth of his portrayal, if he's to be convincing. I always believe in the innocence of my clients in order to achieve the best possible settlement for them."..Seeing her, Joey leaped up front his armchair again. He managed to hold on to his book this time, but he stumbled into the footstool and nearly lost his balance..As hard of head as she was hard of heart, Victoria had not sustained serious brain damage, only a concussion..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..She worried

that her anxiety would prove contagious, that when her fear infected her boy, he would be less able to fight whatever hateful thing had taken seed in his right eye..The moon shimmered, and the stars blurred-but only briefly, for her devotion to this boy was a fiery furnace that tempered the steel of her spine and brought a drying heat to her eyes. Without Franklin Chan's full approval but with his complete understanding, Agnes took Barty home. On Monday, they would return to Hoag Hospital, where Barty would receive surgery on Tuesday.. "I've got hundreds of files on cases like that," said Jacob, "and much worse. If you're interested, I'll get you copies of some." Pain again, but not a mere contraction. Such an excruciation, unendurable. The hobnailed wheels ground through her once more, as though she were being broken on a medieval torture device..Junior blinked and dared not speak, because he didn't know any Bartholomew, and now he was certain the cop was weaving an elaborate web of deceit, setting a trap. Why would he have spoken a name that meant nothing to him?.Jacob's mentor had been a man named Obadiah Sepharad. They had met when Jacob was eighteen, during a period when he'd been committed to a psychiatric ward for a short time, his eccentricity having been briefly mistaken for something worse..This was better than taking slow deep breaths. Periodically, on the way to Vanadium's house, Junior spat out a string of insults, punctuated by obscenities..As nimble as a geriatric cat, crying out with pain, Junior nevertheless sprang onto the deep windowsill and shoved against the twin panes of the window. They were already partly open-but they were also stuck. Crouched on the deep sill, pushing against the parted casement panes of the tall French window, using not just muscle but the entire weight of his body, leaning into them, the maniac tried to force his way out of the bedroom..Griskin, a former convict, had served eleven years for second-degree murder before the lobbying efforts of a coalition of artists and writers had won his parole. He possessed a huge talent. No one before Griskin had ever managed to express this degree of violence an rage in the medium of bronze, and Junior had long kept the artist's work on his short list of desired acquisitions.. "Well, you ought to be," Grace said, taking her pies out to the Suburban that Wally had bought solely for this enterprise..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..sky grew sullen in the early twilight, and the city once more arrayed itself in the red gesso and gold leaf that had indirectly illuminated Celestina's apartment ceiling the previous night.. "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..Instinctively, he knew he should not give massages to Negroes. He sensed that somehow he would be physically or morally polluted by this contact.. "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..Perhaps his sister intuited what Edom was about to say, because she didn't let him get started..She snatched the handset away from Angel, told Bellini, "He's here," threw the phone on the bed, told Angel, "Stay close to me," ran to the windows, and jerked the drapes out of the way.. "Naomi, are you in there?" Junior whispered again, peering into the windows of the girl's soul..As he turned the corner onto Jasmine Way, he felt his heart lift in expectation of the sight of his home. It wasn't a grand residence--a typical Main Street, USA, house-but it was more splendid to Paul than Paris, London, and Rome combined, cities that he would never see and would never regret failing to see..The opening paragraph still lingered in his memory, because he had crafted it with great care: Greetings on this momentous day. I'm writing to you about an exceptional woman, Agnes Lampion, whose life you have touched without knowing, and whose story may interest you..Now, here on this sunny ridge in Oregon, miles from any train and farther still from any nuns, Junior applied this artistic insight to his own situation, overcame his squeamishness, and regained some momentum of his own. He approached his fallen wife, stood over her, and stared down into her fixed eyes as he said, "Naomi!". "Oh, sure, I know," Mary said. "But when it's a bad place, you feel it before you go in. So you just go around to the next place that isn't bad. No big deal."..As Barty stepped across the threshold into the upstairs hall, Miss Pixie Lee said, "You're sweet, Barty..Fortifying herself with more coffee, Jolene said, "Edom, you were going to tell us how Joey's coping with fatherhood."..She could have gone at him with the chair once more, but it was falling apart. Instead, she abandoned furniture for the promise of a firearm, dropped to her knees, and snatched the discarded pistol magazine off the floor..In a rocking chair, holding her tiny son in her arms, Agnes cried quietly. Often, Barty slept through her weeping. Awakened, he smiled or squinched his face into a puzzled frown..A sense of fellowship in extraordinary times drew everyone closer, to hug, to touch, to share the wonder. For a long moment, even in the symphony of the storm, in spite of all the plink-tink-hiss-plop-rattle that arose from every rain-beaten work of man and nature, they seemed to stand here in a hush as deep as Tom had ever heard..The Finder..He had considered tracking down Celestina-and the bastard boy--prior to her exhibition. The alumni office of her college might be one route to her. And further inquiries in the city's fine-arts community would no doubt eventually provide him with her address..Junior knew that she must be teasing him. Her sense of play was delicious. Such devilry in her scintillant blue eyes, such sauciness..mother's understanding of the world and of her own existence. Unlike most other toddlers, Barty was entirely comfortable with change. From bottle to drinking glass, from crib to open bed, from favorite foods to untried flavors, he delighted in the new. Although Agnes usually remained near at hand, Barty was as pleased to be put temporarily in the care of Maria Gonzalez as in the care of Edom, and he smiled as brightly for his dour uncle Jacob as for anyone..The blinds were raised, the windows bare. Usually, she liked the smoky, reddish-gold glow of the city at night, but this once it made her uneasy..The reverend couldn't easily escape church obligations on such short notice, but Grace wanted to be with her daughters. Phimie, however, pleaded that only Celestina accompany her..Drawn one after the other, two knaves of spades didn't signify two deadly enemies, but meant that the enemy already predicted by the first would be unusually powerful, exceptionally dangerous..Consequently, he scheduled more time every day with the phone books. He had obtained directories for all nine counties

that, with the city itself, comprised the Bay Area..Maria arranged five place settings instead of four. The fifth--complete with silverware, waterglass, and wineglass--was at the head of the table, in memoriam of Joey..As Tom Vanadium studied the stained and ravaged wall again, a cold and quivery uneasiness settled insectivally onto his scalp and down the back of his neck, quickly bored into his blood, and nested in his bones. He had the terrible feeling that he was not dealing with a known quantity anymore, not with the twisted man he'd thought he understood, but with a new and even more monstrous Enoch Cain. Carrying the tote bag full of Angel's dolls and coloring books, Wally crossed the sidewalk ahead of Celestina and climbed the front steps..Instead of answering the question, meaning to imply that he believed Junior already knew the facts, Thomas Vanadium said, "I was able to get a warrant to search your house." Junior thought this must be a trick. No hard evidence existed to indicate that Naomi had died at the hands of another rather than by accident..Casey and Tutti, her sister Skipper, and dreamboat Ken--and soon the girls had Barty enthusiastically involved in a make-believe world far different from the one in which Heinlein's teenage lead owned an extraordinary alien pet with eight legs, the temperament of a kitten, and an appetite for everything from grizzly bears to Buicks..He spent the afternoon with her and stayed for dinner. He ate at her bedside, feeding both himself and her, balancing the progress of his meal with hers, so they finished together. He'd never fed her before, yet he wasn't awkward with her, or she with him, and later what he remembered of dinner was the conversation, not the logistics..Too much had happened in those rooms. They were stained dark with family history, and in the night, when either Edom or Jacob slept under that gabled roof, the past came alive again in dreams..spades. Friday night, she had ripped the cards in thirds and had been carrying the twelve pieces with her since then, waiting for this quiet Sunday evening..Raising one hand, wiggling the fingers, he said, "Toes, toes, toes, toes, toes." Just as the man turned away, Junior got a glimpse of what he wore under a London Fog raincoat. Between the lapels of the coat: a white shirt with a wing collar, a black bow tie, the suggestion of black-satin lapels like those on a tuxedo jacket..Already, the girl had taken Barty's hand. The two kids descended from the porch into the rain. They didn't circle the oak, but stopped at the foot of the steps and turned to face the house..His inner turmoil boiled ever more fiercely, and the external evidence of it grew more obvious. In the cool air of the fading afternoon, he perspired as profusely as a man already being strapped into an electric chair; it streamed, gushed. He shook, shook, and he was half convinced that he could hear his bones rattling together like the shells of hard-boiled eggs in a rolling cook pot..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..Paul said, "I wanted you ... I don't know ... I just wanted you to see her. I wanted to say ... to say. . .". Ursula K. Le Guin

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