

MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES VOLUME XII 1897

Tales from Earthsea/Ursula K. Le Guin.-1st ed. p. cm. Contents: The finder-Darkrose and Diamond-The bones of the earth-Victoria lay faceup on the floor. The nurse was no longer as lovely as she had been, and perhaps because of early rigor mortis, her grace, which had initially been evident even in death, had now deserted her.."All right, the scary one." "I SOMETIMES EVEN EAT SPIDERS WITH MY CAVIAR." "Now who's being gross?" The morning that it happened, Edom woke early from a nightmare about the roses..So Otter worked along with them with a clear head and an angry heart. They were in a trap. What's the use of a gift of power, he thought, if not to get out of a trap?.Wally Lipscomb parked in his garage, switched off the engine, and started to get out of the Buick before he saw that Celestina had left her purse in the car..With a nimbleness and an alacrity that a lemur would have admired, the girl ascended to the first crotch..Angel, as if in God's own hands, stared with round-eyed wonder at the physician..The house was hers, free and clear of mortgages. There were two savings accounts to which Joey had diligently made deposits weekly through nine years of marriage..Junior had walked along the big show windows, studying the two White paintings displayed to passersby, appalled by their beauty, when suddenly the door had opened and a gallery employee had invited him to come in. No printed invitation needed, no cool test to pass, no bouncers keeping the gate. Such easy accessibility served as proof, if you needed it, that this was not real art..Taking her silence for assent, Tom continued: "Your father is gone from here, gone forever, but he still lives in other worlds. This isn't a statement of faith alone. If Albert Einstein were still alive and standing here, he'd tell you that it's true. Your father is with you in many places, and so is Phimie. In many places, she didn't die in childbirth. In some worlds, she was never raped, her life never blighted. But there's an irony in that, isn't there? Because in those worlds, Angel doesn't exist-yet Angel is a miracle and a blessing." He looked up from the city to the woman. "So when you're lying in bed tonight, kept awake by grief, don't think just about what you've lost with your father and Phimie. Think about what you have in this world that you've never known in some others-Angel. Whether God's a Catholic, a Baptist, a Jew, a Muslim, or a quantum mechanic, He gives us compensation for our pain, compensation right here in this world, not just in those parallel to it and not just in some afterlife. Always compensation for the pain ... if we recognize it when we see it."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..evening. She brought her daughters, seven-year-old Bonita and six year-old Francesca, who came with their newest Barbie dolls-Color Magic Barbie, the Barbie Beautiful Blues Gift Set, Barbie's friends.He chased after none of these lovelies beyond a few dates, and none of them pursued him when he was done with them, although surely they were distressed if not bereft at losing him..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.".'A energy fighting over jurisdiction. We cooperate. The sheriff can de not to put a lot of his limited resources into this, and no one will blame him. He can call it an accident and close the case, and he won't.The room was bright enough for him to confirm that he was alone. The interior of the box in which Naomi now resided could be no more silent than this house.."I don't like the old crazy doctor," she said, still drawing. "I wish it was about bunnies on vacation-or maybe a toad learns to drive a car and has adventures"..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..Those spike-sharp eyes, - tenpenny gray, nailed Junior to the bed, pinning him for scrutiny..Edom's twin, Jacob, who had never held a job, lived in the second apartment. He'd been there since graduating from high school.."Quick, very quick," he warned, helping Grace through the fire framed window and onto the roof of the porch..For more than two weeks, Agnes's heart had been a clangorous place, filled with the rattle and bang of hard emotions, but now a sort of quiet had come upon it, a peace that, if it held, might one day allow joy again..He loved Naomi, of course, and never could deny her. Although he had been especially sweet to her that night, if he had known that they would have less than a year together before fate tore her from him, he might have been even sweeter..From the bathroom, Junior gathered an electric razor and toiletries. He added these to the suitcases..Her special son, walking where the rain wasn't, had made all things seem possible.."I think we could wind up as crazy as he is, if we tried long enough to puzzle out his twisted logic."..Aware of the dangers of dehydration, he drank a bottle of water and put two half-gallon containers of Gatorade in the Suburban.."We want the scary one, 'specially if it has spiders, Pixie Lee said squeakily but defiantly..Her eyes, lustrous pools, brimmed with the need to know, but she respected the deal. "I only half understood all that, and I don't even know which half, but in some strange way, it feels true. Thank you. I will think about it tonight, when I can't sleep." She stepped close and kissed him on the cheek. "Who are you, Tom Vanadium?".Two more uniformed officers had entered the kitchen, fresh from their search of the apartment. They were amused..Although he considered tearing up the letter and throwing it away he knew that his perceptions were clouded by grief and that what he'd written might seem fine if he reviewed it in a less dark state of mind. He returned the letter to the envelope and put it in the drawer of his nightstand..Celestina turned in her seat to look back at Wally and Angel, who were waving. "I guess I am."..Somehow, Agnes knew that in his younger days, Obadiah had been a stage magician. Artlessly, she drew him out on the subject..Junior discovered more tears than could have been found in ten thousand onions. His wife and his unborn baby. He had been willing to sacrifice his beloved Naomi, but maybe he would have found the cost too high if he had known that he was also sacrificing his first-conceived child. This was too much. He was bereft.."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?" With a smudge of flour on one cheek, wiping her hands on a red-and-white checkered dishtowel, Agnes answered the door, saw the car in the driveway, and said, "Paul! You're not walking?" Among themselves, the authorities spoke more often than not in murmurs. Or perhaps Junior was too distracted to hear them clearly..Junior spoke the three words aloud and felt a strange resonance between them and his dim memories of Reverend White's voice on that long-ago night. Yet the link, if any actually existed, remained elusive..cocktail lounge to be her personal pickup spot. Naturally, people who worked the lounge knew her, were friendly with her. They would remember any man who accompanied the heiress to her penthouse.. "Maybe he's a character I saw in a movie or read in a novel. I'm a member of the Book-of-the-Month Club. I'm always reading one thing or another. I don't remember a character named B-Bartholomew, but maybe I read the book years ago." As the bitch began her backswing, Junior grabbed the chair. He didn't try to tear it out of her hands, but used it to shove her as hard as he could..This was not the time to ponder the nature of the relationship between the treacherous Miss Bressler and Vanadium. Junior had a bloody trail to cover, and precious time was ticking away..The maniac kicked once more, but because of the bracing dresser, the door wouldn't budge, so he kicked harder, again without success..Because she'd enjoyed some limited use of her right arm, it was less wasted than her left, although not normal. Paul pulled down that sleeve of her pajamas..The night was hushed but for the barking of a dog in the great distance. Hollow, far softer than the ghostly singing that had recently haunted Junior, the rough voice of this hound nevertheless stirred him, spoke to an essential aspect of his heart..Instinctively, he knew he should not give massages to Negroes. He sensed that somehow he would be physically or morally polluted by this contact..Tom between curiosity and emotional exhaustion, Celestina held his gaze, thinking, and finally she said, "Deal." Onward he came, past the left front fender, gleefully hopping up and down, as if on a pogo stick, still waving..IN HOSPITALS, AS in farmhouses, breakfast comes soon after dawn, because both healing and growing are hard work, and long days of labor required to save the human species, which spends as much time earning its pain and hunger as it does trying to escape them..In the foyer, Hanna Rey and Nellie Oatis sat side by side on the stairs. Hanna, the housekeeper, was gray-haired and plump. Nellie, was Perri's daytime- companion, could have passed for Hanna's sister.. "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..Channeling his beautiful rage, Junior hefted the corpse onto the windowsill, and shoved it headfirst into the alley. The fog received it with what sounded almost like a swallowing noise..Indeed, Junior suspected that they might be here at Vanadium's urging. The cop would be interested in determining how avaricious the mourning husband would prove to be when presented with the opportunity to turn his wife's cold flesh into cash..Wally Lipscomb's face, as long and narrow as ever, seemed not at all like the dour visage of an undertaker, as once it had, but rather like the rubbery mug of one of those circus clowns who can make you laugh as easily by striking an exaggeratedly sad frown as by putting on a goofy grin. She saw a warmth of spirit where once she had seen spiritual indifference, vulnerability where once she had seen an armored heart, great expectations where once she had seen withered hope; she saw kindness and gentleness where they had always been but now in more generous measure than before. She loved this long, narrow, homely, wonderful face, and she loved the man who wore it.. "Don't worry," Celestina told him, "after what we've seen this past week, we're still with you." "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..Stopping at the door without opening it, Vanadium turned to stare at Junior, but said nothing..The universe was vast and Barty small, yet the boy's immortal soul made him as important as galaxies, as important as anything in Creation. This Agnes believed. She couldn't tolerate life without the conviction that it had meaning and design, though sometimes she felt that she was a sparrow whose fall had gone unnoticed. Barty sat on the edge of the doctor's desk, legs dangling, holding Red Planet, his place marked by an inserted finger..Yet for all his love of reading and of music, events suggested that for mathematics he had a still greater aptitude..64 just a little bit ago," the girl said. "I was sitting on the porch, having a Popsicle, and I just figured it out." In the spring and summer of '66, he flew to Memphis, Tennessee, stayed a few days, and walked 288 miles to St. Louis. From St. Louis he hiked west 253 miles to Kansas City, Missouri, and then southwest to Wichita. From Wichita to Oklahoma City. From Oklahoma City east to Fort Smith, Arkansas, from whence he rode home to Bright Beach on a series of Greyhound buses..In spring, summer, and fall, they brightened the grave with the roses that Edom grew in the side yard. In this less rose-friendly season, these Christmas bouquets had been purchased at a flower shop..The boy wasn't translucent, as his father's ghost had been on that drizzly January night almost three years ago. The same drowned light of this gray afternoon that revealed the gravestones and the dripping..By Sunday evening, a combination of factors-deep commitment to the philosophy of Zedd, explosive testosterone levels, boredom, self-pity, and a desire to be a risk-taking man of action once more-motivated Junior to splash a little Hai Karate behind each ear and go courting. Shortly after sunset, with a single red rose and a bottle of Merlot, he set off for Victoria Bressler's place..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..This sight that might inspire celebration among sailors was denied to Barty, who rode in the backseat with Agnes.

Neither could he see how the crimson sky studied its painted face in the mirror of the ocean, nor how a burning blush shimmered on the waves, nor how the veil of night slowly returned modesty to the heavens..The mortician and his assistant had nearly finished dismantling the frame of the winch. Soon a worker would close the hole..Agnes's sharp intake of breath caused Edom to look up from his nephew's name. Pale, she was, her eyes as haunted as old mansions..The corroded casement-operating mechanism began to give way, as did the hinges, and the window sagged outward.. "They're all the family I have," Junior said with what he hoped sounded like sorrow and long-suffering love..After a minute, he slipped his hand into his pocket. The quarter was still there..Yet that evening, when she'd accepted his proposal and asked if he wasn't frightened, he said, "Not anymore." "No, the more I think about it, the more it feels like this is just kids. Some kids goofing around, that's all. I- guess Vanadium got deeper under my skin than I realized, so when this came up, I couldn't think straight about it." "Why are you here?" "Where else I should be and for why? I watch you over." As the tears cleared from Agnes's eyes, she saw that Maria was sewing. A shopping bag stood to one side of the chair, and to the other side, open on the floor, a case contained spools of thread, needles, a pincushion, a pair of scissors, and other supplies of a seamstress's trade..Obadiah tossed the pack of cards to Edom, startling him. "Son, you'll have to help me. My fingers have no finesse anymore." If Junior had not been such a rational man, schooled in logic and reason by the books of Caesar Zedd, he might have snapped there in the street, before the photograph of Seraphim, might have begun to shake and sob and babble until he wound up in a psychiatric ward. But although his trembling knees felt no more supportive than aspic, they didn't dissolve under him. He couldn't breathe for a minute, and his vision darkened at the periphery, and the noise of passing traffic suddenly sounded like the agonized shrieks of people tortured beyond endurance, but he held fast to his wits long enough to realize that the name under the photo, which served as the centerpiece of a poster, read Celestina White in four-inch letters, not Seraphim..He vanished through some hole, some slit, some tear bigger than anything through which Tom flipped his quarters..He tried to lean back as he dropped, with the hope that he would fall under her, providing cushion if they met with sidewalk instead of lawn..Again he fired into the lock, squeezed the trigger a second time, and discovered that no rounds remained in the magazine. Extra cartridges were distributed in his pockets..Junior was starving, but he didn't trust his bowels enough to risk dinner in a restaurant. The affliction seemed to have passed, but it might recur when he had food in his system again..They had a few days for quiet celebration of this astonishing recovery of his sight, and in that time, she never tired of watching him read to her. He didn't think she even listened closely. It was the fact of him made whole that lifted her spirits so high as they were now, not any writer's words nor any story ever written..Before Celestina probed and perhaps touched upon a sore tooth of truth, Tom launched into the story of King Obadiah, Pharaoh of the Fantastic, who had taught him all he knew about sleight of hand..Her voice as bright as her bed ensemble, spiritual sister to baby chicks everywhere, yellow Angel raised her head from the pillow and said, "Will you have a wedding?" Yet through the summer of 1966, following this call, he acted like a man who was haunted. A sudden draft, even if warm, chilled him and caused him to turn in circles, seeking the source. In the middle of the night, the most innocent of sounds could scramble him from bed and send him on a search of the apartment, flinching from harmless shadows and twitching at looming invisibilities that he imagined he saw at the edges of his vision..He must begin by learning as much as possible about ghosts, hauntings, and the vengeance of the dead. During the remainder of 1966, only two apparently paranormal events occurred in Junior Cain's life, the first on Wednesday, October 5..Thick fog distorted all sense of time and place. At each end of the block, pearly hazes of light marked intersections with main streets but didn't illuminate this narrower passage in between. A few security lamps-bare bulbs under inverted-saucer shades or caged in wire--indicated the delivery entrances of some businesses, but the dense white shrouds veiled and diffused these, as well, until they were no brighter than gaslights..Barty grinned mischievously. "One of the places we visited today. Some big kids. They saw this scary movie, said they had to wash their shorts after." When the nurse was gone, alone with his mother as they waited for the orderly to bring a gurney, Barty said, "Come close." The cop weighed too much to be carried any distance, the blanket proved effective, the decision to drag him was wise, and the whole process was value neutral..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..Later, in early '66, out of his coma and recovering sufficiently to have visitors, Vanadium spent a most difficult hour with his old friend Harrison White. Out of respect for the memory of his lost daughter, and not at all out of concern for his image as a minister, the reverend had refused to acknowledge either that Seraphim had been pregnant or that she'd been raped-although Max Bellini had already confirmed the pregnancy and believed, based on cop's instinct, that it had been the consequence of rape. Harrison's attitude seemed to be that Phimie was gone, that nothing could be gained by opening this wound, and that even if there was a villain involved, the Christian thing was to forgive, if not forget, and to trust in divine justice..His first word after mama was papa, which she taught him while showing him pictures of Joey. His third word: pie..Kennedy, whose portraits hung side by side, the girl revealed to their mom and dad what had been done to her and also what, in her despair..The previous day, Jacob and Edom had driven back to Bright Beach, to prepare for Barty's arrival. Now they hurried down the back porch steps and across the lawn, as Maria followed the driveway past the house and parked near the detached garage at the rear of the deep property..From his early adolescence, Edom was drawn to gardening, taking special pleasure in the cultivation of hybrid roses. He'd been only sixteen when one of his blooms earned first place in a flower show. When his father learned about the competition, he regarded Edom's pursuit of the prize as a grievous sin of pride. The punishment left Edom bedridden for three days, and when he came downstairs at last, he discovered that his father had torn out all the rose bushes..He had already reviewed twenty-four thousand names, finding no Bartholomew, putting

red checks beside entries with the initial B instead of a first name. A slip of yellow paper marked his place..She was in Paul's arms again, as though by magic, and he ran as fire broke through the cedar-shake shingles and as the roof shuddered under them. Airborne through billowing smoke. Across flames that briefly caressed the soles of his shoes..At the farthest end of the loft from the stereo speakers, voices nevertheless had to be raised in even the most intimate exchanges. The artist who had created *In the Baby's Brain Lies the Parasite of Doom, Version 6*, however, possessed a voice as deep, sharp-edged, and penetrating as his talent..force open Edom's mouth. "Eat your sin, boy, eat your sin!" Edom resists eating his sin, but he's afraid for his eyes..AT ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL, where Wally had brought Angel into this world three years ago, he was now fighting for his life, for a chance to see the girl grow and to be the father she needed. He'd been taken to surgery already when Celestina and Angel arrived a few minutes behind the ambulance..Because the tower stood on a ridgeline that marked the divide between county and state property, most of the attending constabulary were county deputies, but two state troopers were present, as well..The spectral singer didn't exhibit her blood-and-bone sisters' reluctance to pursue her man..Striving to appear casual, but obviously unnerved, the pencil-thin man backed off again. "The paintings are lovely, wonderful, I'm enormously impressed. I'm a friend of the artist's, you know. She was a tenant of mine, I was her landlord during her early college years, in her salad days, a nice little studio apartment, before the baby. A lovely girl, I always knew she'd be a success, it was so apparent in even her earliest work. I just had to come tonight, even though a friend's covering two of my four sets. I couldn't miss this."..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..Concerned that Junior's crying jag would trigger spasms of the abdominal muscles and ultimately another attack of hemorrhagic vomiting, the nurse had with her a tranquilizer. She wanted him to use the apple juice to wash down the pill..Packed full of aftermath, the movie was too violent for Junior's taste. He had wanted to meet at a showing of *Doctor Dolittle* or *The Graduate*. But Google, as paranoid as a lab rat after half a lifetime of electroshock experiments, insisted on choosing the theater..He stepped to the front door, which was framed by curtained side lights. He drew one of the curtains aside and peered out..After an interminable silence, the detective said, "Do you know what believe about life, Enoch?"..Traditional logic argued that an infant, no more than two weeks old, could not be a serious threat to a grown man..Out of a sphinx face, Obadiah conjured a smile that lifted the point of his white goatee when he turned his head to look at Edom. "Ah ... so long ago," he murmured, as though speaking to himself. "So long ago ... but I remember now." He winked at Edom..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..In adversity lies great opportunity, as Caesar Zedd teaches, and always, of course, there is a bright side even when you aren't able immediately to see it..Bellini assured Celestina that they didn't expect Enoch Cain to be so brazen as to follow police vehicles and to renew his assault on her at St. Mary's. Nevertheless, he assigned a uniformed police officer to the hall outside of the waiting room that served friends and family of the patients in the intensive-care unit. And judging by that guard's high level of vigilance, Bellini had not entirely ruled out the possibility that Cain might show up here to finish what he started in Pacific Heights..Although she had slept well and though her hemorrhaging had been successfully arrested, Agnes was too weak to manage breakfast alone. A simple spoon was as heavy and as unwieldy as a shovel..Junior tipped his head back and gazed up toward the section of broken-out railing along the high observation deck..In this brighter light, he further examined the gallery brochure and discovered Celestina's photograph. She and her sister were not as alike as twins, but the resemblance was striking..Unobtrusively, Junior followed the musician across the large front room, but by an indirect arc, using the babbling bourgeoisie for cover..It was the best he could do in protest against the misuse of good work and a good ship. He was pleased with himself. When the ship was launched (and all seemed well with her, for her fault would not show up until she was out on the open sea) he could not keep from his teachers what he had done, the little circle of old men and midwives, the young hunchback who could speak with the dead, the blind girl who knew the names of things. He told them his trick, and the blind girl laughed, but the old people said, "Look out. Take care. Keep hidden."..Nolly, Kathleen, and Sparky had prepared him for *Industrial Woman*, but when the flashlight beam flared off her fork-and-fan-blade face, Vanadium twitched in fright. Without fully realizing what he was doing, he crossed himself..A speeding truck passed, stirring the fog, and the white broth churned past the car windows, a disorienting swirl..Now the hole was revealed. Damp earthen walls. In the shadow of the casket, the bottom of the grave was dark and hidden from view..Young boys, however, are not moved by scenery, especially not when their hearts are adventuring on Mars..He didn't even dare to pretend..wake up now, with a mutter and a yawn because the detective would know that he was faking, that he had been awake all along. And if he'd been feigning unconsciousness, eaves..Then Junior saw the blood on the right cuff of Vanadium's shirt. Blood dripping from his hand, too..Not many men wore hats these days. Since his teenage years, Nolly had favored a porkpie model. San Francisco was often chilly, and he began losing his hair when still young..Turning away from the window, Celestina grabbed the girl and pushed her toward the bed, whispering, "Down, under."..He didn't allow himself to ponder why Vanadium had come here or what relationship might have existed between the cop and Victoria. All that was for later consideration, after he had dealt with this unholy mess..Although the mummifying fog wound white mysteries around even the most ordinary objects and wrapped every citizen in anonymity, Vanadium preferred to approach the apartment building with utmost discretion. Whatever the length of his stay in this place, he would never arrive or depart through the front door or even through the basement level garage-until perhaps his last day..During the first months, the journeys were eight or ten miles: along

the shoreline north and south of Bright Beach, and inland to the desert beyond the hills. He left home and returned the same day..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.. "Even when I was a young boy," Tom continued, "the world felt a lot different to me from the way it looked to other people. I don't mean I was smarter. I've got maybe a little better than average IQ, but nothing I could brag about. Flunked geography twice and history once. No one would ever confuse me and Einstein. It's just, I felt ... such complexity and mystery that other people didn't appreciate, such layered beauty, layers upon layers like phyllo pastry, each new layer more amazing than the last. I can't explain it to you without sounding like a holy fool, but even as a boy, I wanted to serve the God who had created so much wonder, regardless of how strange and perhaps even beyond all understanding He might be." "Did he say I'd met him?" Jacob asked, squinting past Edom toward the bright sunlight at the open door..Fourth and last, he was surprised that Kickmule was a legitimate surname. This information wasn't of immediate importance to him, but if ever his Gammoner and Pinchbeck identities were compromised and he required false ID in a new name, he would call himself Eric Kickmule. Or possibly Wolfgang Kickmule. That sounded really tough. No one would mess with a man named Kickmule..In those days they had no fixed names for the various kinds and arts of magic, nor were the connections among those arts clear. There was-as the wise men of Roke would say later-no science in what they knew. But Hound knew pretty surely that his prisoner was concealing his talents.. "In addition to that policy," said Vinnie, "there's another. . .--he filled his lungs, hesitated, then exhaled the air and the sum with a tremor---'seven hundred fifty thousand. Three-quarters of a million dollars." Besides, he didn't want the police in San Francisco to know that he'd been suspected, by at least one of their kind, of having killed his wife in Oregon. What if one of the locals was curious enough to request a copy of the case file on Naomi's death, and what if in that file, Vanadium had made reference to Junior waking from a nightmare, fearfully repeating Bartholomew? And then what if Junior eventually located the right Bartholomew and eliminated the little bastard, and then what if the local cop who'd read the case file connected one Bartholomew to the other and started asking questions? Admittedly, that was a stretch. Nevertheless, he hoped to fade from the SFPD's awareness as soon as possible and live henceforth beyond their ken..By the time his ferocious in-laws had finished with him, Junior would have won the sympathy of Knacker, Hisscus, Nork, and everyone else who might have harbored doubts about his role in Naomi's demise. Perhaps even Thomas Vanadium would find his suspicion worn away..Grace declined food, but Tom ordered for her, anyway, selecting those things that by now he knew Celestina liked, guessing that the mother's taste had shaped the daughter's..The night that followed might as well have been a night in Hell, though a hell in which Satan provided an electrolytically balanced beverage.

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