

CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION

Shortly before ten o'clock, Junior returned to the cemetery and left his Suburban where the Negro mourners had parked earlier in the day. His was the only vehicle on the service road. These past ten days had been the most difficult of her life, harder even than those following Joey's death. Back then, although she had lost a husband and a gentle lover and her best friend all at once, she'd had her undiminished faith, as well as her newborn son and all the promise of his future. She still had her precious boy, even though his future was to some extent blighted, and her faith remained with her, too, though diminished and offering less solace than before. "Don't get me started on cyclones!" Edom hurried through the house and out to the station wagon, to fetch the boxes of groceries. Sapphires and emeralds, dazzling gems set in clearest white, ebony pupils at the center. Beautiful mysteries, these eyes, but no different now than they had ever been, as far as she could tell. Carrying the brochure, Vanadium returned to the bathroom and switched on the overhead light. He stared at the slashed wall, at the name red and ravaged. This was one of many things about Agnes that amazed Edom. If he had dared to make a list of all the qualities that he admired in her, he would have sunk into despair at the consideration of how much better she had coped with adversity than either he or Jacob. Turning, turning, turning, the mysterious warning in his mind: The spirit of Bartholomew ... will find you ... and mete out the terrible judgment that you deserve. The restaurant wasn't fancy. A coffee shop. Aromatic bacon sizzling, eggs frying. The warm cinnamon smell of fresh pastries, the bracing scent of strong coffee. Clean, bright surroundings. As if he sensed her reluctance to return to Dr. Chan, Barty had kept her occupied with talk of the red planet as they approached the office building, had talked her off the street, along the driveway, and into a parking space, where finally she relinquished the fantasy of an endless road trip. At 5:45, long past the end of office hours, Dr. Chan's suite was quiet. Fortunately, at least the desk was cigarette-scarred, because it came with the office. It had been the property of a skip-tracer named Otto Zelm, who'd made a good living at the kind of work Nolly avoided out of boredom: tracking down deadbeats and repossessing their vehicles. On a stakeout, Zelm fell asleep in his car, while smoking, thereby triggering the payoff of both life- and casualty-insurance policies, and freeing the lease on this furnished space. Sitting at the desk, Celestina phoned her parents again. She shook uncontrollably, but her voice was steady. "You must be thinking of someone else," she said, pushing a wad of bills into his hand. "Me, I'm a jellyfish in high heels." Shaking off this peculiar case of the spooks, Barty proceeded toward the stairs. Just when he reached the newel post, he heard the faint creak of the marker floorboard behind him. He groaned. "That just doesn't cut it, Mom. If I gotta be blind, I think I should get to say peed off." As Junior blew his nose and blotted his eyes, Vanadium said, "I believe YOU actually loved her in some strange way." During this same period, having subscribed to the opera, Junior attended a performance of Wagner's The Ring of the Nibelung. LEFT HAND ON the banister, right hand with knife tucked close to his side and ready to thrust, Tom Vanadium climbed cautiously but quickly to the upper floor, glancing back twice to be sure that Cain didn't slip in behind him. "Not so unbelievable," said Jacob. "Forty-five thousand people every year die in automobiles. Cars aren't transportation. They're death machines. Tens of thousands are disfigured, maimed for life." This morning, Damascus had left the house early, before Vanadium came downstairs, which was perfect for Junior's purposes. While the maniac cop was finishing his shave and shower, Junior crept upstairs to check his room. He discovered the revolver in the second of the three places that he expected it to be, did his work, and returned the weapon to the nightstand drawer in precisely the position that he had found it. Narrowly avoiding an encounter with Vanadium in the hall, he retreated to the ground floor. After some fussing over the most effective placement, he left the quarter and the luggage—just as Vanadium, the human stump, clumped down the stairs. Junior experienced an unexpected delay when the detective spent half an hour making phone calls from the study, but then Vanadium went into the kitchen, allowing him to slip out of the house and complete his work. Agnes knew now why this prognostication had dismayed rather charmed her: If you dared to believe in the good fortune predicted he cards, then you were obliged to believe in the bad, as well. Olive complexion, no less smooth than the skin of a calamata. Eyes as lustrous as pools shimmering with a reflection of eternity and stars. Grace dropped the phone. Harrison let the frosting knife slip out of his fingers. The cop had picked up the .22 pistol, using a pencil through the trigger guard, to prevent the destruction of fingerprints. On Christmas Eve, 1996, the family gathered in the middle of the three houses for dinner. The living-room furniture had been moved aside to the walls, and three tables had been set end to end, the length of the room, to accommodate everyone. Although to Paul this was no more than childish chatter, Tom knew at once that the girl referred to his explanation for why he wasn't sad about his damaged face: the salt and pepper shakers representing two Toms, the hit-and-run rhinoceros, the different worlds all in one place. "Yes, Angel. That's something like what I was talking about." Fifteen feet separated them, with guests intervening. Yet this stranger's attention could have felt no more disturbingly intense to Junior if they had been alone in the room and but a foot apart. Having anticipated a problem of one kind or another, Junior withdrew a packet of crisp new hundred-dollar bills from an inside jacket pocket. The bank band still wrapped the stack, and on it was printed \$10,000. Paul's Mediterranean complexion didn't make a blush easy to detect, but Tom thought his face brightened until it was a shade or two closer to the color of his rust-red hair. His eyes, usually so direct, evaded Celestina. Room by room, closet by closet, Junior conducted a search for the detective. The cop was not here. On that busy night, with Vanadium's corpse in the Studebaker and Victoria's cadaver awaiting a fiery disposal at her house, Junior was too distracted to recognize the pertinence of the message. Now it tormented him from a dark nook in his subconscious. "Fifteen fifty-six?" Bill frowned. "Hell, the Chinese probably didn't even have mud back then." He didn't rely, either, on a sixth sense to detect obstacles or open spaces, which some blind people claimed to have. Sometimes instinct told

him that in his path was an object that ordinarily would not have been there; but as often as not, it went undetected, and unless he was using his cane, he tripped over it. The sixth sense was greatly overrated..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..with an encircling and suggestive lick, and then licked his lips, too, when the cold steel slipped free of them..The decision had already been made that Grace would move in with Celestina and then-following the wedding-with Celestina and Wally. In Spruce Hills, she had dear friends whom she would miss, but there was nothing else in Oregon to draw her back, other than the narrow plot beside Harrison, where she expected eventually to be buried. The parsonage fire had destroyed all her personal effects and every family treasure from Celestina's grade-school spelling-bee medals to the last precious photograph. She wanted only to be close to her one remaining daughter and her granddaughter, to be part of the new life that they would build with Wally Lipscomb..If their relationship had not been limited to a single evening of passion, if they had not been of two worlds, if she had not been underage and therefore jailbait, they might have had an open romance, and then her death would have touched him more deeply..To achieve certain narrative effects, I've fiddled slightly with the floor plan and the interior design of St. Mary's Hospital in San Francisco. In this story, the characters who work at St. Mary's are fictional and are not modeled after anyone on the staff of that excellent institution, either past or present..MONDAY MORNING, far above Joe Lampion's grave, the translucent blue California sky shed a rain of light so pure and clear that the world seemed to have been washed clean of all its stains..The gurney, one wheel rattling. The young orderly behind it, dressed all in white. And the nurse again..Ichabod passed Bartholomew through the open door to Celestina in the passenger's seat, went around the Buick, put the tote bag in the back, and climbed behind the wheel once more..But she knew. Barty, buoyant as ever, seemed not to be much worried about the problem with his vision. He appeared to expect that it would pass like any sneezing fit or cold.. "That's enough?" "Silly man." "Cain looks like a movie star." "Does he have nice teeth?" she asked. "They're good. Not perfect." "So kiss me, Mr. Perfect." The rocking chair stopped squeaking under her. She heard the sincerity in Vinnie's voice, and as her disbelief dissolved, she was shocked into immobility. She whispered, "My little superstition."..He felt some guilt at this-but only a little. His sister had done much for him; but jobless, ruled by his obsessions, hobbled by too much of his father's dour nature, there wasn't a lot that he could do for her. Just this benign deceit with the cards..Shivering, Junior slammed the trunk lid and warily surveyed the lonely landscape. Black pines spread bristled arms through the charr night, and the moon cast down a jaundiced light that seemed to obscure more than it illuminated..Clenching his right hand around the quarter, waving left hand over right, he intoned, "Jingle-jangle, mingle-jingle." Opening his right hand, he revealed that the coin had vanished.. "If I ever have trots, you'll know." And then in the Cheese voice: "CAN WE LISTEN TO THE BOOK TALK IN YOUR ROOM?". After moving all of a hundred feet, Celestina and Wally-with Grace fretting that someone would be hurt-had torn down the high stave fence between properties, for theirs had become one family with many names: Lampion, White, Lipscomb, Isaacson. When backyards were joined and a connecting walkway poured, Barty's travels from house to house were greatly simplified, and regular visits by the Gonzalez, Damascus, and Vanadium branches of the clan were also facilitated..Tom himself had decided to build a new life here, as well, assisting Agnes with her ever-expanding work. He was not yet sure whether this would include the rededication to his vows and a return to the Roman collar, or whether he would spend the rest of his days in civvies. He was delaying that decision until the Cain case was resolved..Junior didn't make the mistake of thinking that Magusson's new conciliatory attitude meant they were friends, that confidences could be shared or truths exchanged. The money-grubbing toad's only real friend would always be the one he saw in a mirror. If he discovered that Junior was having a great time post-Naomi, Magusson would store the information until he found a way to use it to his advantage..Neither customers nor staff could be found in the first of the three large rooms. Only cheaper galleries were crowded with browsers and unctuous sales personnel. In an establishment as upscale as Coquin, the hoi polloi were discouraged from gawking, while the high value and extreme desirability of the art were made evident by the staff's almost pathological aversion to promoting the merchandise..She asked him how many fingers she was holding up, and he said four, and four it was. Then two fingers. Then seven. Her hands so pale, the palms both bruised..With the stocky detective looming, Junior wasn't able to stroke his imagination into an erotic mood. In his mind's eye, Victoria's ample bosom remained concealed behind a starched white uniform..Then from San Francisco International, through the fog-shrouded streets of the night city, to St. Mary's, to Room 724. And to the discovery that Phimie's blood pressure was so high-210 over 126-that she was in a hypertensive crisis, at risk of a stroke, renal failure, and other life-threatening complications..madness or a brilliant deductive insight: Naomi, the hateful bitch, she poisoned me!."A ship without an anchor can never be at rest," he answered. "It's at the mercy of the sea."..Junior opened his eyes and saw that only the second of the two rounds had found its intended mark. The first had cracked through the center of a cabinet door, surely shattering dishes within..Only one member of the distant funeral party did not disperse toward the line of cars on the service road. A man in a dark suit headed downhill, between the headstones and the monuments, directly toward Naomi's grave..Neddy, dressed for work but overdressed for his own funeral, slumped against the wall, head bowed, chin on his chest. His pale hands were splayed at his sides, as though he were trying to strike chords from the floor tiles..Phimie's stubbornly high blood pressure, the presence of protein in her urine, and other symptoms indicated her preeclampsia wasn't a recent development; she was at increased risk of eclampsia. Her hypertension was gradually coming under control-but only by resort to more aggressive drug therapy than the physician preferred to use..He wanted Celestina to sit in her seat and use her lap belt, but she insisted on cuddling next to him, as if she were a high-school girl and he were her teenage beau..His daughter, his affliction, his millstone, granddaughter of the boil-giving voodoo BaptistNolly was, as usual, "Nolly" to everyone, but here Kathleen was "Mrs. Wulfstan."..To

his surprise, when Naomi expressed an interest in romance, Junior was a bull again. He would have thought he had left his best stuff at Reverend Harrison White's parsonage..He had taken refuge in meditation, because he'd been frustrated by his continuing failure in the Bartholomew hunt and disturbed by his apparently paranormal experiences with quarters and with phone calls from the dead. More deeply disturbed than he had realized or had been able to admit..Golden lamplight gilded the front windows downstairs. He would sit with Victoria on the living-room sofa, sipping wine as they got to know each other. She might tell him to call her Vicky, and maybe he'd ask her to call him Eenie, the affectionate name Naomi had given him when he wouldn't tolerate Enoch. Soon, they would be necking like two crazy kids. Junior would disrobe her on the sofa, caressing her smooth pliant body, her skin buttery in the lamplight, and then he would carry her, naked, to the dark bedroom upstairs.. "In the early hours of January seventh," Nolly continued, "Miss White died in childbirth, as you figured..". "For the love of God," Junior pleaded, "can't you please give me something for the pain?". By telephone, he had been prepared for this boy. Strange as it was to find a Bartholomew in their lives, given Enoch Cain's peculiar obsession, Tom nonetheless agreed with Celestina that the wife killer could have no way to know about this child-and could certainly have no logical reason to fear him. The only thing they had in common was Harrison White's sermon, which had inspired this boy's name and might have planted the seed of guilt in Cain's mind.. "Usually, I throw out a bunch of hocus-pocus, flourishes and patter, to distract people, so they don't even realize that what they've seen was real. They think the midair disappearance is just a trick..". She must have sensed his assessment of her and realized that she had little chance of charming him, for she turned at once away and never looked in his direction again.. The past three years had given Wally much to celebrate, as well. After selling his medical practice and taking an eight-month hiatus from the sixty-hour work weeks he had endured for so long, he'd been giving twenty-four hours of free service to a pediatric clinic each week, providing care to the disadvantaged. He'd worked hard all his life, and saved diligently, and now he was able to focus solely on those activities that gave him the greatest gratification.. He found it difficult to make a painful personal revelation sound sincere when delivered in a shout, but he managed well enough to bring a shine of tears to her eyes: "Part of my left foot was shot off in this upcountry sweep we did..". calm. He tried to imagine what Victoria's breasts would look like, freed from all restraint.. "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..". 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..". Increasingly, he used meditation to relieve stress. He was so skilled at concentrative meditation without seed-blanking his mind-that half an hour of it was as refreshing as a night's sleep.. This was a test of Junior's gullibility, and he would not give Vanadium the satisfaction of searching his robe for the coin.. Neddy favored a quick greeting, two curt pumps, but Junior held fast after the handshake was over. He didn't grind the musician's knuckles, nothing so crude, just held on pleasantly but firmly. His intention was to confuse and further rattle the man, taking advantage of his obvious dislike of having his personal space encroached upon, in the hope that Neddy would reveal why he'd been watching Junior so intently from across the room.. "All under here's worked out long since" Licky said. And Otter had begun to be aware of the strange country under his feet: empty shafts and rooms of dark air in the dark earth, a vertical labyrinth, the deepest pits filled with unmoving water. "Never was much silver, and the watermetal's long gone. Listen, young'un, do you even know what cinnabar is?". 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.. Between new women and needlepoint pillows, he participated in s?ances, attended lectures given by ghost hunters, visited haunted houses, and read more strange books. He even sat for the camera of a famous medium whose photographs sometimes revealed the auras of benign or malevolent presences hovering in the vicinity of her subject, though in his case she could discern no telltale sign of a spirit.. She didn't hide the diagnosis from the family, but she delayed telling them the prognosis, which was bleak. Already, her bones were tender, packed full of mutated immature white cells that hindered the production of normal white cells, red cells, and platelets.. Of course, he also might have shot off his own thumbs as double insurance against being drafted and sent to Vietnam.. As Barty climbed to the porch without benefit of the railing and held out his right hand, Paul Damascus said, "Tom, we're wondering if Barty can extend to you the protection he gives to Angel in the rain. Maybe he can ... since the three of you share this ... this awareness, this insight, or whatever you want to call it. But he won't know until he tries..". He realized that like so many women, Seraphim wanted it, asked for it-yet had no place in her self-image to accommodate the truth that she was sexually aggressive. She wanted to think of herself as shy, demure, virginal, as innocent as a minister's daughter ought to be which meant that to get what she wanted, she required Junior to be a brute. He was happy to oblige.. "They've gone to bed. They're tired," Wally told her as he put the car in gear and released the hand brake. "Aren't you?". His apartment, over the large garage, was reached by a set of exterior stairs. The space was divided into two rooms. The first was a combination living room and kitchenette, with a corner dining table seating two. Beyond was a small bedroom with adjoining bath.. Maria Elena Gonzalez, where no one lived with fear like her brothers Edom and Jacob.. She was also a cat lover, working with the Kitten Konservatory to save abandoned felines from death in the city pound. She was the charity's investment manager. Within ten months, Tammy grew twenty thousand in Konservatory funds into a

quarter million by speculating in the stock of a South African firm that hit it big selling germ-warfare technology to North Korea, Pakistan, India, and the Republic of Tanzania, whose chief export was sisal..After poring through enough sensational newspaper accounts to be convinced that the curse-casting reverend was undeniably dead, Junior had acquired four pieces of surprising information. Three were of vital importance to him..Round one hit Ichabod in the left thigh, because Junior fired while bringing the weapon up from his side, but the next two were solid torso scores. This was not bad for an amateur, even if the distance to target was nearly short enough to define their encounter as hand-to-hand combat, and Junior decided that if the deformation of his left foot hadn't prevented him from fighting in Vietnam, he would have acquitted himself exceptionally well in the war..By the time they reached the seventh painting, alcohol and rich French cuisine and Jack Lientery's powerful art combined to devastate Frieda. She shuddered, leaned with one hand on a canvas, hung her head, and committed an act of bad PR..Naked, dripping, he roamed the apartment. As on the night of December 13, the voice seemed to arise from thin air: ahead of him, then behind him, to the right, but now to the left..The paramedic snatched the oxygen feed from his patient's nose and quickly elevated his head, providing a purge towel to catch the thin ejecta..Now he had to focus on being ready for the evening of January 12: the reception for Celestina White's art show. She had adopted her sister's baby. Little Bartholomew was in her care; and soon, the kid would be within Junior's reach.. "Nevertheless, even if Muffin assaulted you, she's otherwise such a sweet little thing. What would Maria think of you if you told her you'd smashed poor Muffin with a shovel?"..Dr. Lipscomb brought his hands to his face, covering his nose and mouth as earlier they had been covered with a surgical mask, as though he were in danger of drawing in, with his breath, an idea that would forever change him..Instinct, even reason, told him that some connection existed between this person, this Bartholomew, and Celestina. The name had terrified Cain in a bad dream, the very night of the day that he'd killed Naomi, and Vanadium therefore had incorporated it into his psychological-warfare strategy without knowing its significance to his suspect. As strongly as he sensed the connection, he couldn't find the link. He lacked some crucial bit of information..Without the pillow, she wouldn't have been able to lift her head to look toward the back of the ambulance..Since discovering the quarter in his cheeseburger, Junior had been half convinced that the maniac cop survived the bludgeoning. In spite of his grievous wounds, perhaps Vanadium had swum up through a hundred feet of murky water, barely avoiding being drowned..He might suspect, but he couldn't know. He would but would be left with at least a shred of doubt about Junior's..When the convulsive seizure passed, as he collapsed back on the spattered pillow, shuddering at the stench rising from his hideously fouled clothes, Junior was suddenly struck by an idea that was either..Onto its roof now, the Pontiac spun as it slid, grinding loudly against the blacktop, and regardless of how determinedly Agnes held on, she was being pulled out of her seat, toward the inverted ceiling and also backward. Her forehead knocked hard into the thin overhead padding, and her back wrenched against the headrest..He picked up Angel, picked up Barty. "Hold on." He carried them out of the room, down the stairs, out of the house, to the yard under the great tree, where they would wait for the police, and where they would not see Jacob's body when the coroner removed it by way of the front door..During the past three years, he'd suffered much because of these sisters, including most recently the humiliation in the Dumpster with the dead musician, Celestina's pencil-necked friend with a propensity for postmortem licking. The memory of that horror flared so vividly--every grotesque detail condensed into one intense and devastating flash of recollection--that Junior's bladder suddenly felt swollen and full, although he had taken a long satisfying leak in an alleyway across the street from the restaurant at which the postcard-painting poseur had enjoyed a leisurely dinner with Ichabod..NOLLY WULFSTAN, private detective, had the teeth of a god and a face so unfortunate that it argued convincingly against the existence of a benign deity..She damaged more of Joey's things than her own solely because he was such a big, dear giant, which made it easier to believe that he was constantly bursting out of his clothes..In August, he developed an interest in meditation. He began with concentrative meditation--the form called meditation "with seed"--in which you must close your eyes, mentally focus on a visualized object, and clear your mind of all else..Celestina, standing next to Agnes, put an arm around her waist, as perhaps she had once been in the habit of doing with her sister..The porch light wasn't on. No landscape lighting brightened the backyard. Barty was a gray shadow moving through darkness and through the darkling drizzle..He was no longer in his scrubs, but wore gray wool slacks and a blue cashmere sweater over a white shirt. Face somber, he looked less like an obstetrician engaged in the business of life than like a professor of philosophy forever pondering the inevitability of death..To celebrate, upon leaving the gallery, he went to the coffee shop in the Fairmont Hotel, atop Nob Hill, determined to have a beer and a cheeseburger..No inquiring voice echoed off the passage walls, no accusatory shout. He was alone with the cadaver in this mist-shrouded moment of the metropolitan night--but perhaps not for long..By "all of that," he meant the groceries that she and Joey often sent along with the pies, the occasional mortgage payment they made for someone down on his luck, and the other quiet philanthropies..Deciduous black oaks lined the street. All were leafless at this time of year, gnarled limbs clawing at the moon..Copyright (c) 1997 by Ursula K. Le Guin..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..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..He had time to think of quite a few, because he drove five miles per hour below the posted speed limit. He couldn't risk being stopped for a traffic

violation when Thomas Vanadium, the human stump, was dead and bundled in the back..When at last the caller spoke again, her voice sounded a kingdom away: "Will you tell Bartholomew ... ?".dent? You do believe that? Because I don't see ... I don't know how could work with someone who thought I was capable of . . . ".A deep-set casement window. Two latches on the right side, one high, one low. Detachable hand crank lying on the foot-deep sill. Mechanism socket in the base casing..He went upstairs to change out of his dark blue suit and badly scuffed black shoes..In his blindness, Barty listened to her reports and, through her, saw more than he could have seen if never he had lost his eyes..At Tom Vanadium's request, the taxi dropped him one block from his new-and temporary-home shortly before ten o'clock in the evening..Yet he didn't fault himself for a lack of sensitivity. He'd met this woman only once before. He wasn't emotionally invested in her as he had been in sweet Naomi..When pale light came to her eyes again, she heard the paramedic and the cop talking anxiously as they worked on her, but she couldn't understand their words. They seemed to be speaking not just a foreign tongue but an ancient language unheard on earth for a thousand years..From childhood, Celestina was encouraged to be confident that life had meaning, and when she'd needed to share that belief with Dr. Lipscomb as he struggled to come to terms with his experience in the operating room, she'd done so without hesitation. Strangely, however, she herself was having difficulty absorbing these two small miracles..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..Neddy talked when Celestina paused for breath, talked over her when she didn't pause, heard only his own mellifluous voice and was pleased to conduct both sides of the conversation, wearing her down as surely as-though far more rapidly than-the sand-filled winds of Egypt diminished the pharaohs' pyramids. He talked through the first polite "Excuse me" of the tall man who stepped into the open doorway behind him, through the second and third, and then with an abruptness that was as miraculous as any cure at the shrine of Lourdes, he fell silent when the visitor put a hand on his shoulder, eased him gently aside, and entered the apartment.

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