

COURTS OF RECORD OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK OTHER THAN THE COURT OF APPEALS AND THE APPELLATE DIVISION OF THE SUPREME COURT

The next thing he knew, he was at the kitchen sink, turning off the water, which he couldn't remember having turned on. He appeared to have washed the bloody candlestick-it was clean-but he had no recollection of this bit of housekeeping..Worse, the vengeful and vicious bitch-or bastard, whatever-evidently had made up vile stories about him, which on a slow evening she'd shared with Neddy, with the bartender, with anyone who would listen. The staff of the lounge believed Junior was a dangerous sadist, No doubt she had concocted other lurid stories, as well, charging him with everything from a degenerate interest in bodily wastes to the selfmutilation of his genitalia.."Everyone knows about Vanadium. He's a crusader, self-appointed champion of truth, justice, and the American way. A holy fool, if you will. With the case closed, he has no authority to harass you..".Does my dad like Christmas?" Barty asked, sitting on the grave grass in front of the headstone..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.The sensual memories of his torrid evening with Seraphim had left Junior aroused. Unfortunately, the only female nearby was Industrial Woman, and he wasn't that desperate..At one point late in the afternoon, as all three Hackachaks were hurling scorn and invective at Junior, he noticed Vanadium standing in the doorway, observing. Perfect. He pretended not to see the cop, and when next he sneaked a look, he discovered that Vanadium had vanished like a wraith. A thick slab of a wraith..Celestina was amazed by her own courage in combat and by the steady calm that served her so well now. She wasn't shaken by the thought of what might have happened to her, and to her daughter, because her mind and her heart were with Wally-and because, having been watered with hope all of her life, she had a deep reservoir on which to draw in a time of drought..The unmatched suite of bedroom furniture, cheap and scarred, might have been purchased at a thrift shop. A double bed and one nightstand. A small dresser..Agnes was only thirty-nine years old, full of plans and vigor, so Angel's words seemed premature. Yet in too few years, she would have reason to wonder if perhaps these gifted children foresaw, unconsciously, that she would need the comfort of having witnessed this climb..When Victoria finally calmed her racing heart, she returned the spoon to the tray on the nightstand, stoppered the carafe, and said, "That's enough for now, Mr. Cain. In your condition, even too much I melted ice might trigger renewed vomiting..".The report on the tower forced Junior to consider his mortality; fear, hurt, and self-pity roiled in him. His voice trembled with offense: "You do know, Mr. Magusson, what happened to my Naomi was an..By invoking the word emergency, Celestina was able quickly to reach her own physician in San Francisco. He agreed to treat Phimie and to have her admitted to St. Mary's upon her arrival from Oregon..Of the three Bartholomews that he'd turned up recently, he chose Prosser because, burdened by the name Enoch, Junior felt sympathy for any girl whose parents had cursed her with Zelda..After using a paring knife to section and core an apple, Paul withdrew a sheet of stationery from his desk and uncapped a fountain pen. His penmanship was old-fashioned -in its neatness, as precise and appealing as fine calligraphy. He wrote: Dear Reverend WhiteShe was a duplicitous bitch, too. After coming on to him, after teasing a reaction out of him, she had run off and gossiped about him as though he had instigated the seduction. Worse, to make herself feel important, she had told the police her skewed version, surely with much colorful embellishment..Still relishing her little pretense of rejection, Victoria did not touch the rose. "What kind of woman do you think I am?".The high point of his day was coming home to Perri. They met when they were thirteen, married at twenty-two. In May they would celebrate their twenty-third anniversary..ANGEL WAS DRESSED in as much red as the devil himself: bright red shoes, red socks, red leggings, red skirt, red sweater, and a knee length red coat with a red hood..Once, she left the TV and came to Tom, where he sat talking with Paul. "It's like Gunsmoke and The Monkees are next to each other on the TV, both at the same time. But the Monkees, they can't see the cowboys-and the cowboys, they can't see the Monkees..".Visibly nonplussed by Junior's blithe failure to terminate the handshake when the shaking stopped, the fussy Neddy didn't want to be so rude as to yank his hand loose, or to cause a scene regardless of how small, but Junior, smiling and pretending to be as socially dense as concrete, failed to respond to a polite tug. So Neddy waited, allowing his hand to be held, and his face, previously as white as piano keys, brightened to a shade of pink that clashed with his red boutonniere..His artificial eyes were almost a month old. He'd been through surgery to have the eye-moving muscles attached to the conjunctiva, and everybody told him that the look and movement were absolutely real. In fact, they had told him this so often, in the first week or two, that he became suspicious and figured that his new eyes were totally out of control and spinning like pinwheels..face with one hand, as if pulling off cobwebs. "Did you say you were in my house?".While always Agnes held fast to hope, she knew that easy hope was usually false hope, and she didn't allow herself to speculate, even briefly, that his problem had resolved itself. Other symptoms-halos and rainbows-had disappeared for a time, only to return..He might not have this future-living thing down perfectly, but he was absolutely terrific at anger..Softened by a Shantung shade, the lamplight was golden on his small smooth face, but sapphire and emerald in his eyes..Curiosity brought him here. Curiosity and a talent for self-preservation. Earlier, Vanadium had not come to Naomi's graveside as a mourner. He had been there as a cop, on business. Perhaps he had been at the other funeral on business, too..glasses off the table. He seized one of the pewter candlesticks, as well, knocking the candle out of it..The gray pants of her jogging suit, speckled with rain that had blown in through the shattered windshield, were suddenly soaked. Her water had broken..While the horse and then the sheep grazed twelve months each, an H-bomb accidentally fell from a B-52 and was lost in the ocean, off Spain, for two months before being located. Mao Tse-tung launched his Cultural Revolution, killing thirty million people to improve Chinese society. James Meredith, civil rights activist, was wounded by gunfire during a march in Mississippi. In Chicago, Richard Speck murdered eight

nurses in a row-house dormitory, and a month later, Charles Whitman limbed a tower at the University of Texas, from which he shot and killed twelve people. Arthritis forced Sandy Koufax, star pitcher for the Dodgers, to retire. Astronauts Grissom, White, and Chaffee died earthbound, in a flash fire that swept their Apollo spacecraft during a full-scale launch simulation. Among the noted who traded fame for eternity were Walt Disney, Spencer Tracy, saxophonist John Coltrane, writer Carson McCullers, Vivien Leigh, and Jayne Mansfield. Junior bought McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, and though he didn't doubt that she was a fine writer, her work proved to be too weird for his taste. During these years, the world was rattled by earthquakes, swept by hurricanes and typhoons, plagued by floods and droughts and politicians, ravaged by disease. And in Vietnam, hostilities were still underway..An authoritative note came into Parkhurst's voice, that emperor-of- tone that probably was taught in a special medical-school course on intimidation, though he was striking this attitude a little too late to be entirely effective. "My patient is in a fragile state. He mustn't be agitated, Detective. I really don't want you questioning him until tomorrow at the earliest."..inking? The sequined and tasseled hat of fame was too gaudy for her; she was a minister's daughter, from Spruce Hills, Oregon, more comfortable in a baseball cap.."Wouldn't live in the Caribbean if you paid me," Bill said. "All that humidity. All those bugs."..Junior's agony might have made him howl like a cankered dog or might even have dropped him to his knees if he hadn't used the pain to fuel his anger. His knobby countenance was so sensitive that the light breeze flailed his skin as cruelly as if it had been a barbed lash. Empowered by rage even more beautiful than his countenance was monstrous, he crossed the parking lot, looking through car windows in the hope of seeing keys dangling from an ignition..He fished the sound-suppressor from a jacket pocket, drew the pistol from his shoulder holster, and began to screw the former to the latter. He misthreaded it at first because his hands had begun to shake..In spite of the gloom, the boy's miraculous accomplishment was evident: his clothes and hair were dry as though he'd worn a coat and hood.."Don't worry, love. I'll make sure the snap's are constructed so you can get it off me easily enough."..In the front wall of the living room, where once had been a fine bay window, the parsonage lay open to the sunny day. Tom shrubbery, carried in from outside, marked the path of destruction. In the very middle of the room, plowed against a toppled sofa and a thick drift of broken furniture, a battered red Pontiac sagged to the left on broken springs and blown tires. A portion of the crazed windshield quivered and collapsed inward, while plumes of steam hissed from under the buckled hood..When he located the new grave, approximately where he'd guessed that it would be, he was surprised to find a black granite headstone already set in place, instead of a temporary marker painted with the..Junior stalked her, but she eluded him. Always, the song seemed to arise from the next room, but when he passed through the doorway into that space, the voice then sounded as if it came from the room that he'd just left..She knew that the front door was locked, too, because Wally had waited to hear the deadbolts clack shut. Nevertheless, she stepped into the hall, where the light wasn't on, walked quickly past Angel's bedroom, came to the entrance to the lamplit living room-and saw a man backing through the open front door, dragging something, dragging a dark and large and heavy rumpled something, dragging a.."Then I'll attend to everything right away," the doctor said, reaching for the privacy curtain that surrounded the ER bed..This philosophy had worked for him previously, but forgetting the aftermath was more difficult when the aftermath was your own poor, torn, severed toe. Your own poor, torn, severed toe was infinitely more difficult to ignore than a busload of dead nuns..On second thought-no. If Seraphim had told anyone she'd been raped, the police would have been at Junior's doorstep in minutes, with a warrant for his arrest. No matter that they would have no proof. In this age of high sympathy for the previously oppressed, the word of a teenage Negro girl would have greater weight than Junior's clean record, fine reputation, and heartfelt denials..Celestina was better equipped to embrace this transcendental experience for what it appeared to be. She was not one of those artists who celebrated chaos and disorder, or who found inspiration in pessimism and despair. Wherever her eyes came to rest, she saw order, purpose, exquisite design, and either the pale flicker or the fierce blaze of a humbling beauty. She perceived the uncanny not merely in old houses where ghosts were said to roam or in eerie experiences like the one Lipscomb had described, but every day in the pattern of a tree's branches, in the rapturous play of a dog with a tennis ball, in the white whirling currents of a snowstorm-in every aspect of the natural world in which insoluble mystery was as fundamental a component as light and darkness, as matter and energy, as time and space..Only a few theater goers attended the matinee. No one sat near, so Google and Junior openly swapped packages: a five-by-six manila envelope to Google, a nine-by-twelve to Junior.."You'd never cheat me. I know you. We'd have Christmas twice a year and parties for half birthdays."..Of all the kindnesses that we can do for one another, the most precious of all gifts-time-is not ours to give. Bearing this in mind, Agnes did her best to guide her extended family through its grieving for Harrison and for Jacob, into happier days. Respect must be paid, precious memories nurtured, but life also must go on..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.."Nervous," he said, and howled when one of the paramedics proved to be a sadist masquerading as an angel of mercy..Two cranks operated the winch.. The mortician and his assistant turned the handles in unison, and as the mechanism creaked softly, the casket slowly descended into the hole..While Junior had been hospitalized , Vanadium had searched his lace, with or without a warrant. Turnabout was satisfying..gob of mucus in his throat. His face contorted with a misery that he did not have to fake, and he was astonished to feel tears spring to his eyes..After all he'd suffered at Cain's hands, Tom Vanadium surprised himself by laughing at these colorful accounts of the wife killer's misadventures. Indeed, laughter had seemed disrespectful to the memories of Victoria Bressler and Naomi, and Vanadium had been torn between a desire to hear more and a feeling that finding any amusement value in a man like Cain would leave a stain on the soul that no amount of penance could scrub away..The dear man cried and kissed her scars and told her that she was as beautiful as any woman alive. They stood then for a while,

embracing, his hands upon her back, her breasts against his chest, and twice they kissed, but almost chastely, before she put on her blouse again..Vanadium was dead. Pounded with pewter and sunk in a flooded quarry. Gone forever..When she went upstairs at 2:10 in the morning, she found the boy fast asleep in the soft lamplight, Tunnel in the Sky at his side.."I was never Cary Grant, to begin with," said Vanadium, still ceaselessly rolling the quarter across his fingers, "so I had no big emotional investment in my appearance. Cosmetic surgery would have added another year of recuperation time, probably much longer, and I was anxious to get after Cain. Seemed to me this mug of mine might be just the thing to scare him into an incriminating mistake, even a confession."..The guy appeared vulnerable, his arms occupied with the kid and the bag, and Junior considered bursting out of the Mercedes, striding straight to the Celestina-humping son of a bitch, and shooting him point-blank in the face. Brain-shot, he would drop quicker than if the headless horseman had gotten him with an ax, and the kid would go down with him, and Junior would shoot the bastard boy next, shoot him in the head three times, four times just to be sure..Chicane packed the ice against Junior's thighs. "Severe spasm causes inflammation. Twenty minutes of ice alternating with twenty minutes of massage, until the worst passes."..He bolted up from the sofa, saying too loudly, "Canned hams," but at once he realized this made no sense, none, zip, so he searched desperately for something coherent to say--"Potatoes, corn chips"--which was equally ridiculous. Now Obadiah was staring at him with that concerned alarm you saw on the faces of people watching an epileptic in an uncontrolled fit, so Edom plunged across the living room as though he were falling off a ladder, toward the front door, struggling to explain himself as he went: "We've brought some, there are some, I'll get some..First, Victoria Bressler was listed as one of his victims, although as far as he knew, the authorities still had every reason to attribute her murder to Vanadium..In a red coat with a red hood, Bartholomew appeared first in the arms of the tall lanky man, the Ichabod Crane look-alike, who also had a large tote bag hanging from his shoulder..THE GENEROUS EXPENSE allowance provided by Simon Magusson paid for a three-room suite at a comfortable hotel. One bedroom for Tom Vanadium, one for Celestina and Angel..When Paul practiced the quarter trick, he usually did so on the sofa or in an armchair, and always in a room with carpeting, because when dropped on a hard surface, the coin rolled and required too much chasing..He liked her face, too. She wore no makeup, and pulled her brown hair back in a bun. Some might say she was mousy, but the only things mousy that Nolly saw about her were a piquant tilt to her nose and a certain cuteness..a scene out of a movie about Robin Hood: a battle with cudgels on a slippery log bridge over a river. "Yes. I ... I'm still soaked with sweat."..Sliding Victoria's chair away from the table, he turned her to face him. He adjusted her body so that her head was tipped back and her arms were hanging slack at her sides..In that instant, she knew the dreadful shape of the future, if not its fine details..Thanks to his intelligence and his personality, Barty's presence was so great for his age that Agnes tended to think of him as being physically larger and stronger than he actually was. As the scent of grass grew more complex and even more appealing, she saw her son more clearly than she'd seen him in a while: quite small, fatherless yet brave, burdened with a gift that was a blessing but that also made a normal boyhood impossible, forced to grow up at a up faster pace than any child should be required to endure. Barty was achingly delicate, so vulnerable that when Agnes looked at him, she felt a little of the awful sense of helplessness that burdened Edom and Jacob..Junior was disturbed that the mysterious chanteuse had been performing when he wasn't home. He felt violated. Invaded..Certain the caller was the police operator, Junior screamed as though in agony, wondering if his cries sounded genuine, since he'd had no opportunity to rehearse. Then, in spite of the painkiller, his cries suddenly were genuine..After a while, when no plane crashed on top of him, Jacob got up, went into the kitchen, and mixed a batch of dough for Agnes's favorite treats. Chocolate-chip cookies with coconut and pecans..The baby felt too light to be real. She weighed five pounds fourteen ounces, but she seemed lighter than air, as though she might float up and out of her aunt's arms..The moonlight had faded and the gentle waves had ebbed out of his mind's eye. He concentrated, trying to force the phantom sea to flow back into view, but this was one of those rare occasions when a Zedd technique failed him". "I'm not sad," Tom said, "because though I have this face here in this world, I know there's another me-in fact, lots of other Tom Vanadiums-who don't have this face at all. Somewhere I'm doing just fine, thank you."..trees also revealed Barty, and no radiance from another world shone spectrally through him, as it had shone through Joey-dead-and-risen..Everyone regarded him expectantly, as if there would be more magic, as if flipping a coin into another reality was something you saw every week or two on the Ed Sullivan Show, between the acrobats and the jugglers who could balance ten spinning plates on ten tall sticks simultaneously..Soon he dispensed with picture books and progressed to short novels for more accomplished readers, and then rapidly to books meant for young adults. Tom Swift adventures and Nancy Drew mysteries captivated him through the summer and early autumn..Jacob scared people. He was 'Edom's identical twin, with Edom's boyish and pleasant face, as soft-spoken as Edom, well barbered and neatly groomed. Nevertheless, on the same mission of mercy as Edom, Jacob would leave the pie recipients in a state of deep uneasiness if not outright terror. In his wake, they would bar the doors, load guns if they owned any, and lay sleepless for a night or two..The fire department. The firemen could come without sirens, quietly with their ladders, so as not to break Barty's concentration..being careful to place the point of impact precisely where the bottle had struck her..Turning to face his four trailing escorts, all of whom were hunch shouldered and stiff-necked with tension, Barty said, "What's for dinner? ".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..Only madmen were capable of such butchery. Hopeless lunatics like Ed Gein, out there in Wisconsin, arrested just seven years ago, when Junior had been sixteen.

Ed, the inspiration for Psycho, had constructed mobiles out of human noses and lips. He used human skin to make lampshades and to upholster furniture. His soup bowls had once been human skulls. He ate the hearts and selected other organs of his victims, wore a belt fashioned from nipples, and occasionally danced under the moon while masked by the scalp and face of a woman he had murdered. He snatched up the wine list before she could look at it. "If you're paying, then I'm ordering whatever costs the most, regardless of what it tastes like." The apartment above Elena's Fashions could be reached by a set of exterior stairs at the back of the building. The climb had never before taxed Agnes in the least, but now it took away her breath and left her legs trembling by the time she reached the top landing. Amazed, Agnes gaped at her baby. The throat lump that blocked her speech was part pride, part awe, and part fear, though she didn't at once understand why this wonderful precociousness should frighten her. "All right. Well ... Jesuits are encouraged to pursue education in any subject that interests them, not theology alone. I was deeply interested in physics." Studying the brochure, Junior felt that the best response to this artist's work was to go directly into the bathroom, stick one finger down his throat, and purge himself. Considering his medical history, however, he couldn't afford to be such an expressive critic. 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. The sight of her sister's blood and the persistence of the flow made Celestina weak with apprehension. She was afraid she had done the wrong thing by delaying hospitalization. In spite of the bravado of the responses in Junior's unspoken half of the conversation, he was increasingly unnerved by Vanadium. The cop was a lunatic, all right, but he was something more than a mere nut case. Move, move, like a runaway train, leaving the dead nuns--or at least one dead musician--far behind. Having gotten the new roof for them at cost, Agnes subsequently put together donations from a dozen individuals and one church group to cover all but two hundred dollars of the outlay. Oblivious that she and Barty had become the center of attention, Angel said, "Does he ever get the quarters back?" Although Junior was free of the superstitions that Naomi, in her innocence and sentimentality, had embraced, he wept without pretense. In Maria's kitchen, still just four days past Christmas, Agnes let dissolve her stoic mask, and wept at last. "Your forgiveness won't make any of it right," he said, "nothing could, but it might start to give me a little peace." 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. From Christmas through February, he dated a beautiful stock analyst and broker--Tammy Bean--who specialized in finding value in companies that had rewarding relationships with brutal dictators. Evidently, either Frank Sinatra was an enthusiasm that Victoria and the detective shared, or the nurse purchased some of the crooner's records expressly for their dinner engagement. The old man assumed the solemn and knowing expression of one guarding mysteries, a sphinx without headdress and mane. "If I told you, dear lady, it wouldn't be magic anymore. Merely a trick." "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. Holding on to the jamb with one hand, Barty leaned across the threshold, listening to the day. Birds. Softly rustling leaves. Nobody on the porch. Even trying hard to be quiet, people always made some little noise. Celestina had chosen to shelter the bastard boy, and in so doing, she had declared herself to be Junior's enemy, though he'd never done anything to her, not anything. She didn't deserve him, really, not even one quick bang before the bang of the gun, and maybe after he shot Ichabod, he'd let her beg for a taste of the Cain cane, but deny her. In the physician's eyes, a yearning to believe. In his face, a squint of skepticism. He had visited the library primarily to confirm that Harrison White was unquestionably dead. He'd shot the man four times. Two bullets 'in the gas tank of the stolen Pontiac destroyed the parsonage and should have incinerated the reverend. When you were dealing with black magic, however, you could never be too cautious. Junior said, "I should know your name from the playbill at the lounge, but I'm as bad with names as you are good with faces." Celestina was hardly more than a child herself, pretending to have the strong shoulders and the breadth of experience to bear this burden. She felt half crushed. Celestina, Grace, even Tom himself, had taken extraordinary measures to leave no slightest trail. Those very few authorities who knew how to reach Tom and, through him, the others, were acutely aware that his whereabouts and phone number must be tightly guarded. Agnes could almost visualize the three-dimensional geometric model that her little prodigy had created in his mind, which he now relied upon to reach the upper floor without a serious stumble. Pride, wonder, and sorrow pulled her heart in different directions. She struggled, wept, pretended disgust, faked shame, swore to bring the police down on him. Another man, not as highly skilled at reading men as Junior, might have thought the girl's resistance was genuine. Sat her charges of rape were sincere. Any other man might have backed off, but Junior was neither fooled nor confused. He opened his mouth but stood mute. Raised his right hand from his side. Worked his fingers in the air, as though the needed words could be strummed from the ether. He felt stupid, foolish. Using the brochure as an ice-breaker, Junior circulated through the throng, seeking anyone who'd attended the. 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. Reading the dates on the headstone, he saw that the minister's daughter had died on the seventh of January, the day after Naomi had fallen from the fire tower. If ever asked, Junior would have no trouble accounting for his whereabouts on that day. Consequently, Edom was abroad in the land with pies and parcels, following a list of names and addresses provided by his sister, even though he believed an unprecedentedly violent earthquake, the fabled Big One, was likely to strike before noon, certainly before dinner. This was the last day of the rest of his life. Always, he was good with Barty, and on this occasion, he teased more than the usual number of smiles and giggles from the boy as he tried to get him to read the Snellen chart on the wall. Then he lowered the lights in the examination room to study his eyes with an ophthalmometer and an ophthalmoscope. "That's kind of you," Panglo stammered, "but I have little time for reading, very

little time." Between Isleton and Locke, Junior first became aware of several points of soreness on his face. He could feel no swelling, no cuts or scrapes, and the rearview mirror revealed only the fine features that had caused more women's hearts to race than all the amphetamines ever manufactured..Once he had toured the exhibition, managing not to shudder openly, he tried to hang out within hearing distance of Celestina White, but without appearing to be listening with special intensity..Every mother also believes that her baby is smarter than other babies. Sadly, time and the child's choices in life usually require her to adjust her opinion as she never will in the matter of physical beauty.."Guilt," said the detective. "If he killed her, wouldn't an overwhelming sense of guilt be as likely as anguish to cause acute nervous emesis?" By the time the family was ushered out, protesting, at the end of evening visiting hours, Junior hadn't succumbed to their pressure. If his conversion was to appear convincingly reluctant, he would have to resist them for at least another few days..By his twelfth month, he was toilet-trained, and every time that he had the need to use his colorful little bathroom chair, he proudly and repeatedly announced to everyone, "Barty potty." Champagne, then, and two shopping bags packed full of Armenian takeout. Sou beurek, mujadereh, chicken-and-rice biryani, stuffed grape leaves, artichokes with lamb and rice, orouk, manti, and more. Following a Baptist grace (said by Grace), Wally and the three White women, a fourth present in spirit, sat around the Formica-topped table, feasting, laughing, talking about art and healing and baby care and the past and tomorrow, while up on Nob Hill, Neddy Gnathic sat tuxedoed at a lacquered black piano, sprinkling diamond-bright notes through an elegant room..In the late-afternoon light, on this Christmas Eve, Barty was no ghost, no illusion.."Water can break?" Maria asked, looking toward the faucet at the kitchen sink. She sighed. "I have so much to be learned." The reverend made the first toast, speaking so softly that his tremulous words seemed to bloom in Celestina's mind and heart rather than to fall upon her ears. "To gentle Phimie, who is with God."

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