

1 DRAMATICOS CONTEMPORANEOS A LOPE DE VEGA COLECCION ESCOGIDA Y

Rudy Hackachak--Big Rude to his friends--was six feet four, as rough-hewn as a log sculpture carved with a woodsman's ax. In a green polyester suit with sleeves an inch too short, an unfortunate urine yellow shirt, and a tie that might have been the national flag of a third world country famous for nothing but a lack of design sense, he looked like Dr. Frankenstein's beast gussied up for an evening of barhopping in Transylvania..In the top drawer, in addition to the expected items, Tom Vanadium found a gallery brochure for an art exhibition. In the hooded flashlight beam, the name Celestina White seemed to flare off the glossy paper as though printed in reflective ink..Prosser--fifty-six, a widower, an accountant--had a thirty-year-old daughter, Zelda, who was an attorney in San Francisco. Junior had driven to Terra Linda previously, to research the accountant; he already knew Prosser had no connection to Seraphim's fateful child..Agnes at last relented. "Someday, you're going to have to learn to relax, Maria."..Mysteriously, on the first day of sunny weather in weeks, the 707 had crashed into Jamaica Bay, Queens, killing everyone aboard. Now, in 1965, it remained the worst commercial-aviation disaster in the nation's history, and because of the unprecedented dramatic television coverage, the story was a permanent scar in Celestina's memory, although she had been living a continent away at the time..After Maria, Bonita, and Francesca had gone, when Agnes and her brothers joined forces to clear the table and wash the dishes, Barty kissed them good-night and retired to his room with The Star Beast..As yet, he hadn't taken either an antiemetic or antihistamine to ward off vomiting and hives, because he wanted to medicate --against those conditions as shortly before the violence as was practical, to ensure maximum protection. He'd intended to dose himself only after he followed Celestina home from the gallery and could be reasonably certain that he had located the lair of Bartholomew..He surprised himself by sitting up in bed and shouting, "Shut up, shut up, shut up!"..He did wonder why he had chosen this night of all nights to become even a more fearless adventurer, rather than a month ago or a month hence. Instinct told him that he'd felt the need to test himself, that a crisis was fast approaching, and that to be ready for it, he must be confident that he could do what had to be done when the crunch came. Slipping into sleep, Junior suspected that Prosser might have been less lark than preparation.. "Don't you say that. The society isn't silly, especially not now. It's us, it's what we were and how we are, and I do so much love everything that's us."..First room on the left. Move. Kick the door open. The sense of a larger space beyond, no bathroom this time, and darker. Fan the pistol, gripping with both hands. Two quick shots: muffled cough, muffled cough..He hurried into the bedroom and switched on the nightstand lamp, without concern for whether the light might be seen from the street..Edom had noticed them earlier. Now he saw they were in worse condition than he'd thought. Enlarged knuckles, fingers not entirely at natural angles to one another. Perhaps Obadiah had rheumatoid arthritis, like Bill Klefton, though a less crippling case..No one in Junior's circles seemed to care about the crisis in American music. He supposed he had a greater awareness of injustice than did most people..When she left Our Lady of Sorrows a few minutes later, she was convinced that the knave of spades--whether a human monster or the devil himself--would never cross paths with Barty Lampion.. "I was once doubting Thomas," said the detective, but not from beside the bed any longer. His voice seemed to come from across the room, perhaps near the door, though he had made not a sound as he'd moved..Edom and Jacob arrived, dinner was served, and while the food was wonderful, the conversation was better--even though the twins occasionally shared their vast knowledge of train wrecks and deadly volcanic eruptions. Paul didn't contribute much to the talk, because he preferred to bask in it. If he hadn't known any of these people, if he had walked into the room while they were in the middle of dinner, he would have thought they were family, because the warmth and the intimacy--and in the twins' case, the eccentricity--of the conversation were not what he expected of such newly made friends. There was no pretense, no falsity, and no avoidance of any awkward subject, which meant there were sometimes tears, because the death of Reverend White was such a fresh wound in the hearts of those who loved him. But in the healing ways of women that remained mysterious to Paul even as he watched them do..Last night, in the superintendent's basement apartment, as they shared a bottle of wine, Sparky had told Vanadium numerous weird tales about Cain: The Night He Shot Off His Toe, The Day He Was Saved from a Meditative Trance and Paralytic Bladder, The Day the Psychotic Girlfriend Brought a Vietnamese Potbellied Pig to His Apartment When He Was Out and Fed It Laxatives and Penned It in His BedroomThe full nature of the nightmare continued to elude him, but he became convinced that good reason for his fear existed, that the dream had been more than a dream. He had a nemesis named Bartholomew not merely in dreams, but in the real world, and this Bartholomew had something to do with ... babies..At first, he couldn't gather the nerve to return to the kitchen. He was crazily certain that in his absence, the dead detective would have risen and would be waiting for him..His throat was still so raw from the explosive vomiting, seared by stomach acid, that he sounded like a character from a puppet show for children on Saturday-morning television, hoarse and squeaky at the same time. If not for the pain, he would have felt ridiculous, but the hot and jagged scrape of each word through his throat left him unable to..The floor of the spacious bathroom featured beige marble tiles with diamond-shaped inlays of black granite. The countertop and the shower stall were fabricated from matching marble, and the same marble was employed in the wainscoting.. "Crafty men" is what they called wizards in those days.. "You're one to talk," Celestina said. "Who was it told us they were sitting hand in hand on the front-porch swing."..Harmless though they were, the sight of them, swaddled and for the most part concealed, first troubled him and then quickly brought him --inexplicably, irrationally, undeniably--to the trembling edge of outright fear..At last Maria answered Jacob's question in a murmur, making the f sign of the cross once more as she spoke. "Never saw four. Never even just I see three. But four ... is to be the devil himself."..Recognizing the danger of saying the wrong thing, the potential for self-incrimination, Junior clenched his jaws and

waited.. "If he gets back within the next hour, better ring me at his place so I can scoot." And now she didn't need him anymore. He gazed at her face, held her cooling hand; his anchor was slipping away from him, leaving him adrift.. From San Francisco south to Orange County Airport on a crowded commuter flight, then farther south along the coast by rental car, Paul Damascus brought Grace, Celestina, and Angel to the Lampion house. "Before we go to my place, there's someone I very much want you to meet. She's not expecting us, but I'm sure it'll be okay." Like autumn-red ivy, lushly leafed vines of flame crawled up the house. The porch under them was ablaze, as well. Shingles smoldered beneath their feet, and flames ringed the roof on which they stood.. Now he shuffled the first of the four decks precisely as he had shuffled the first deck on Friday evening, and he set it aside.. The big trees on Vanadium's property also stood bare, allowing a relatively unobstructed view of the house. The back of the residence as dark, but a soft light warmed two windows at the front.. You scrawl names on the walls with your own blood, play Psycho with a Sheetrock stand-in for Janet Leigh- and then fly off to Reno for a weekend of blackjack, stage shows, and all-you-can-eat buffets. Not likely.. With a bark of pain, chest to chest with defeat, the killer was borne downward by the fragrant weight, in a clink and clatter of brass handles.. The second medic wheeled the gurney to the rear of the van, calling for one of the policemen to accompany him to the hospital. Apparently, he needed help if he was to deliver the baby and also stabilize Apes while en route.. The most shameful thing Junior found was the "art" on the walls. Tasteless, sentimentalized realism. Bright landscapes. Still lifes of fruit and flowers. Even an idealized group portrait of Prosser, his late wife, and Zelda. Not one painting spoke to the bleakness and terror of the human condition: mere decoration, not art.. Symptoms of food poisoning usually appear within two hours of dining. The hideous intestinal spasms had rocked him at least six hours after he'd eaten. Besides, if the culprit were food poisoning, he would have vomited; but he hadn't felt any urge to spew.. "Jacob scares people," Agnes said. "No one would eat a pie that Jacob delivered without having it tested at a lab." 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.. Wally drove slowly, carefully, with all the responsibility that you would expect from an obstetrician, pediatrician, and spanking-new fianc?. The trip home to Pacific Heights took twice as long as it would have taken in clear weather on a night without a pledge of troth.. Perhaps, reluctant to admit to herself that she had yearned for him to do everything that he'd done, she had slowly been inflamed by guilt, until she convinced herself that she had, indeed, been raped. Psychotic little bitch.. The rich aromas on the air would have thwarted the will of the most devout monks on a fast of penitence.. In the motel office, Junior paid for another night in advance. His preference in lodgings didn't run to greasy carpeting, cigarette-scarred furniture, and the whispery scuttling of cockroaches in the dark, but though feeling better, he was too tired and shaky to drive.. The coin stopped turning, pinched flat between the knuckles of the cops middle and ring fingers. He retrieved a box of Kleenex from the nightstand and offered it to his suspect. "Here." The crazy bitch wielded it with such ferocity that the force of the impact with the floor, rebounding upon her, must have numbed her arms. She stumbled backward, dragging the chair, temporarily unable to lift it.. Maria looked stricken when she answered the doorbell, for she intuited that a visit, instead of a call, meant the worst.. The reverend couldn't easily escape church obligations on such short notice, but Grace wanted to be with her daughters. Phimie, however, pleaded that only Celestina accompany her.. He'd acted boldly, recklessly, without scoping the territory to be sure Prosser was alone. The accountant lived by himself, but a visitor might be present.. Cold, wind-driven rain slashed through the missing windows, and voices rose in the street as people ran toward the Pontiac- thunder in the distance- and on the air was the ozone scent of the storm and the more subtle and more terrible odor of blood, but none of these hard details could make the moment seem real to Agnes, who, in her deepest nightmares, had never felt more like a dreamer than she felt now.. The boy dashed for the front passenger's door. Agnes didn't follow him, because she knew that he would politely but pointedly express frustration if any attempt was made to help him with a task that he could perform himself.. Outside, Celestina took Angel's hand as they descended the front steps to the street.. The night that followed might as well have been a night in Hell, though a hell in which Satan provided an electrolytically balanced beverage.. Ordinarily, she would have returned to the first of the candles and offered a second fragment to Saint Peter. In this case, however, she entrusted it to the least known of the apostles, because she was sure that he must have special significance in this matter.. The investigator's suite- a minuscule waiting room and a small office- lacked a secretary but surely harbored all manner of vermin.. The operator attempted to calm him, but he remained hysterical. Between gasps and sharp squeals of pretended pain, he shakily rattled off his name, address, and phone number.. The window was French with small panes, so Celestina couldn't simply break the glass and climb out.. "You didn't at all," Dr. Salk assured him. "I need to talk to you. If you would give me a little of your time..." On this momentous day, however, drawing provided no solace. Frequently, her hands shook, and she could not control the pencil.. The calls to Bellini in San Francisco and to others in Oregon were made with a prayer for news, but the prayer went unanswered. Cain had not been seen, heard from, smelled, intuited, or located by the pestering clairvoyants who had attached themselves to the sensational case.. Joey was standing just outside, gazing in at her. His blue eyes were seas where sorrow sailed.. "I never saw a Moor-- never saw the Sea-- Yet know I how the Heather looks-- And what a Billow be." Her hands trembled as she attempted to fold her sister's clothes into the small suitcase. What should have been a simple task became a daunting challenge; the fabric seemed to come alive in her hands and slip through her fingers, resisting every attempt to organize it. When eventually she realized there was no reason to be neat, she tossed the garments into the bag without concern for wrinkling them.. The driver shook his head. "I knew everything anyone would need to know about you when I heard you ask your kid what would happen if the stupid boogeyman showed up in her dream." He wasn't afflicted with parenthood envy. A baby was the last

thing he would ever want, aside from cancer. Children were nasty little beasts. A child would be an encumbrance, a burden, not a blessing. Further preparation-the purchase of gold coins and diamonds, the establishment of false identities-had to be delayed due to the hives. An hour short of dawn, Junior was awakened by a fierce itching not limited to his phantom toe. His entire body, over every plane and into every crevice, prickled and tingled and burned as with fever-and itched. Alone with Agnes, the physician said, "I want you to take Barty to a specialist in Newport Beach. Franklin Chan. He's a wonderful ophthalmologist and ophthalmological surgeon, and right now we don't have anyone like that here in town." By the grace of Caesar Zedd and Remy Martin, Junior eventually slipped into undulant currents of sleep, and as he drifted away on those velvet tides, he took some solace from the thought that come what may, December 29 would be a better day than December 28. Because he hadn't heard Victoria Bressler speak in so long-and then only on two occasions-and because the woman on the phone had spoken so softly, Junior couldn't tell whether or not their voices were one and the same. He swept the immediate area with the flashlight, and shadows spun with shadows, waltzing spirits in the ballroom of the night. To his room then, where they sat side by side in bed, a plate of chocolate-chip cookies between them. Through the evening, they stepped off this earth and out of all its troubles, into a world of adventure, where friendship and loyalty and courage and honor could deal with any malignancy. When he closed his eyes, he saw a bowling pin, a leftover image from his with-seed days. In less than a minute, he was able to make the pin dematerialize, filling his mind with featureless, soundless, soothing, white nothingness. Jacob intended to carry the luggage, and Edom announced that he would carry Barty. The boy, however, insisted on making his own way to the house. 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. Uneasy nevertheless, Agnes went down the hall to her son's room and found that he had fallen asleep sitting up, while reading. She slipped The Star Beast out of the tangle of his arms, marked his place with the jacket flap, and put the book on the nightstand. "It's a lot," Angel insisted. "Wally gave me an Oreo, last time I saw him. You like Oreos?" "Oh, Wally, I am worried. I'm deeply worried. My mama is going to buy herself a first-class ticket to the fiery pit if she doesn't stop this prevaricatin'." Vanadium's smile, in that tragically fractured face, might have alarmed most people, but Kathleen found it appealing because of the indestructible spirit it revealed. WALLY HAD NOT gone home with Death, but they had definitely been at the dance together. With a cry of alarm, he bolted to the bathroom and made it with not a second to spare. He seemed to be on the throne long enough to have witnessed the rise and fall of an empire. From his motel room, he telephoned Hanna Rey in Bright Beach. She still looked after his house on a part-time basis, paid the bills from a special account while he traveled, and kept him informed about events in his hometown. From Hanna, he learned that Barty Lampion's eyes had been lost to cancer. He went upstairs to change out of his dark blue suit and badly scuffed black shoes. No one seemed to realize that predicting the future might not be a suitable entertainment in this house, at this time, considering that Agnes had so recently and horribly been blindsided by fate. 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 White Now the message ... Something about a hospital. Someone dying. A cerebral hemorrhage. "Well, certainly, I understand," said Panglo, slowly lowering the offered hand, although he clearly didn't understand at all. Only Angel spoke, with nary a catch or quiver, fully confident in her Barty. "Anything he can teach me, I can learn, and anything I can see, he can know. Anything, Aunt Aggie." "He's crafty, you say. Can you use him?" From time to time, customers had crossed the cocktail lounge to drop folding money into a fishbowl atop the piano, tips for the musician. A few had requested favorite -tunes. When Junior walked the cracked-linoleum corridor and descended the six flights of stairs to the street, he discovered that a thin drizzle was falling. The afternoon grew darker even as he turned his face to the sky, and the cold, dripping city, which swaddled Bartholomew somewhere in its concrete folds, appeared not to be a beacon of culture and sophistication anymore, but a forbidding and dangerous empire, as it had never seemed to him before. If the state police did get involved, and even if they found evidence that the accident was staged, they would most likely point the finger of blame at the man for whom Victoria had been preparing dinner. "I just wanted everyone to come see the spider, that's all. It was a really, really icky interesting bug." 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. As the heavysset nurse retreated with the baby, Phimie's grip on her sister's hand relaxed, but then grew firm once more as her gaze also became more intense. "Love ... you." Because of his blindness and his intellectual gifts, Barty was home schooled; besides, no teacher was a match for his autodidactic skills, nor could anyone possibly inspire in him a greater thirst for knowledge than the one with which he had been born. Angel went to this same informal classroom, and her sole fellow student was also her teacher. They aced the periodic equivalency tests that the law required. Their constant companionship seemed to be all play, yet was filled with constant learning, too. If she'd connected with his left side, as she intended, she might have broken his arm or cracked a few ribs. But lie saw the chair coming, and as agile as a base runner dodging a shortstop's tag, he turned away from her, taking the blow across his back. A SEVERE THIRST INDICATED to Agnes that she wasn't dead. There would be no thirst in paradise. Candle flames blurred into bright smears, and the faces of her good parents shimmered like the half-seen countenances of angels in dreams. "it totally destroyed four towns, as if they were hit by atom bombs, tore up parts of six more towns, destroyed fifteen thousand homes. That's just the homes. This thing was black, huge and black and hideous, with continuous lightning snapping through it, and a roar, they said, like a hundred thunderstorms booming all at once." Junior was paying his dinner check and calculating the tip when the pianist launched into "Someone to Watch over Me." Although he'd expected it all evening, he

twitched when he recognized the tune..altogether by taking slow deep breaths, slow deep breaths, and by remembering that each of us has a right to be happy, to be fulfilled, to be free of fear..Holding his precious face between her hands, she kissed him. She met his gaze, and furiously she blinked away her tears, for she wanted to be clear-sighted, to be looking into his eyes, to see him, the truest part of him in there beyond his eyes, until that very last moment when she could not have him anymore..Barty whispered: "The North Pole Society of Not Evil Adventurers is now in session."..Having risen higher in the sky during the past couple hours, the gold-coin moon reminted itself as silver, and in the black lake, its reflection rolled across the knuckles of the quiet wavelets..Trying to ignore his phantom toe, which itched furiously, he searched the apartment. He proceeded carefully, determined not to shoot himself in the foot accidentally this time..And there are songs, old lays and ballads from small islands and from the quiet uplands of Havnor, that tell the story of those years.."We've mapped three routes to the top," Angel said, "and each offers different challenges. Barty's eventually going to climb all of them, but he's starting with the hardest."..into darkness, Celestina sat down to dinner with her mother and her father in the dining room of the parsonage..Maybes were for babies, but Caesar Zedd had failed to provide a profundity with which Junior could ward off the what-ifs as easily as the maybes..She switched off the hall light and stood at the half-open door, listening, waiting..Agnes rubbed noses with him again, kissed him, and rose from the edge of the bed..Sometimes, just the thought of getting in the car and venturing into the dangerous world was intolerable. Then he settled into his La-ZBoy and waited for the natural disaster that would soon scrub him off the earth as though he had never existed.."Phimie said the creep thought it was funny, but using Daddy's voice as background music also ... well, aroused him, maybe because it further humiliated her and because he knew it would humiliate our father. But we never told Daddy that part of it. Neither of us saw any useful reason for telling him."..One apartment to the right, one to the left. Junior went to the right, to Apartment 1, where he'd seen the lights come on behind the curtained windows..Vanadium's wounds were too grievous to pass for accidental injuries. Even if there were some way to disguise them through clever staging, no one would believe that Victoria had died in a freak fall and that Vanadium, rushing to her side, had slipped and tumbled and sustained mortal head injuries, as well. Such a strong whiff of slapstick would put even the Spruce Hills police on to the scent of murder..Daylight had retreated from the windows. Winter night, wound in scarfs of fog, like a leprous mendicant, rattled out a breath as though begging their attention beyond the glass..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..Swift and yellow, Angel flew to her mother, grabbing at one of the bunched drapes as if she might hide behind it..greatest fright of his life. He jumped inside his skin, and his heart knocked, knocked, and he half expected to hear his bones rattle one against another, like those of a dangling skeleton in a funhouse..They agreed that to the outside world, Barty must continue to appear to be a sightless man-or otherwise either be treated like a freak or be subjected, perhaps unwillingly, to experimentation. In the modern world, there was no tolerance for miracles. Only family could be told of this development..The subcontractor who built the quarter-spitting coin boxes was James Hunnicolt, but everyone called him Jimmy Gadget. He specialized in electronic eavesdropping, building cameras and recorders into the most unlikely objects, but he could do just about anything requiring inventive mechanical design and construction..Academy of Art College and might have met Celestina White. The critiques of her paintings.What good was she to anybody, what good could she ever hope to be, if she couldn't even save her little sister?.Stopping at the door without opening it, Vanadium turned to stare at Junior, but said nothing.."Now you don't have to worry," Angel said, "about what happens to him if ever you're gone, Aunt Aggie. If he can do this, he can do anything, and you can rest easy."..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..At best, Vanadium might decide Junior had come here to learn what other funeral his nemesis had attended-which was, in fact, the true motivation. But this made it clear that Junior feared him and was striving to stay one step ahead of him. Innocent men didn't go to such length. As far as the fruitcake cop was concerned, Junior might as well have painted I killed Naomi on his forehead..Agnes remained mystified by this talk, but a week before, in the rain-swept cemetery, she had learned there was substance to it..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."..Happiness could grow out of unspeakable tragedy with such vigor that it produced dazzling blooms and lush green bracts. This insight served, for Celestina, as a primary inspiration for her painting and as proof of the grace granted in this world that we might perceive and be sustained by the promise of an ultimate joy to come..Murmuring reassurances, Celestina put a hand on the girl's head and smoothed her brow, her hair, until the sour dream was sweetened by the touch..Intending to keep the front of the gallery under surveillance from behind the wheel of his Mercedes, Junior checked the time as he walked toward the car. His wrist was bare, his Rolex missing..Therefore, after the nasty shooting, as the Bartholomew hunt continued, so did the good life..Even though he now knew what a hateful person the nurse was, he remained strongly attracted to her. He was not the kind of man, however, who would take advantage of an unconscious woman..The previously flat, monotonous voice had in it now a subtle but undeniable new roundness of tone: "And every human being, every living thing, is a string on that instrument."..At home, Agnes had no appetite, but she fixed Barty a cheese sandwich, spooned potato salad into a dish,

added a bag of corn chips and a Coke, and served this late dinner on a tray, in his room, where he was already in bed and reading Tunnel in the Sky..Too much clatter, drawing attention. No leisure for romance now, no chance for a two-sister score. just kill Celestina, kill Bartholomew, and go, go..Because of the events regarding Barty and Angel back in January, Celestina, Grace, and Wally were no longer displaced persons waiting to return to San Francisco. They had begun anew here in Bright Beach; and judging by all indications, they were going to be as happy and as occupied with useful work as it was possible to be on this troubled side of the grave..their work, tears were followed by reminiscences that brought a smile and soothed, and hope was always found to be the flower that bloomed from every seed of hopelessness..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.".Maria gathered up the four jacks and tore them in thirds. She put the twelve pieces in the breast pocket of her blouse. "I buy to you new cards, but no more ever can you to be having these.". "That's the Oreo. After I ate it up, the cookie went smooosh--smooosh into my finger.".Reluctantly, Jacob finally returned the cards to the packs and admitted to himself that superstition had seized him and would not let go. Somewhere in the world was a knave, a human monster-even worse, according to Maria, a man as fearsome as the devil himself-and for reasons unknown, this beast wanted to harm little Barty, an innocent baby. By some grace that Jacob could not understand, they had been warned, through the cards, that the knave was coming. They had been warned..Tom opened his empty hands and then filled one of them with his water glass. The rattling ice belied his calm face..He hesitated, because until the limited explanations he'd made to Celestina in San Francisco, he had never discussed his special perception with anyone except two priest counselors in the seminary. At first he felt uneasy, talking of these matters to strangers-as if he were making a confession to laity who held no authority to provide absolution but as he spoke to this hushed and intense gathering, his doubts fell away, and revelation seemed as natural as talk of the weather..She. Heretofore, Celestina hadn't given a thought to the gender of the baby, because, to her, it had been less a person than a thing..This time, even San Francisco, under a Chinese-blue sky stippled with a cloisonne of silver-and-gold clouds, couldn't provide solace or calm Celestina's nerves. Her sister's dilemma wasn't as easily put out of mind as any problem of her own might have been-and she herself had never been in such an awful situation as Phimie was now.

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