

JOHN PATTON AND HIS DESCENDANTS

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on each of the long sides, leaving the ends unused. "It'll be cozier if we all sit across from one another." Copyright (c) 2001 by Ursula K. Le Guin All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher..1969 through 1973: the Year of the Rooster, chased by the Year of the Dog, followed fast by the Pig, faster by the Rat, with the Ox passing in a stampede pace. Eisenhower dead. Armstrong, Collins, Aldrin on the moon: one giant step on soil untouched by war. Hot pants, plane hijackings, psychedelic art. Sharon Tate and friends murdered by Manson's girls seven days before Woodstock, the Age of Aquarius stillborn, but the death unrecognized for years. McCartney split, Beatles dissolved. Earthquake in Los Angeles, Truman dead, Vietnam sliding into chaos, riots in Ireland, a new war in the Middle East, Watergate..Sudden rain spared her the need to finish the sentence. A few fat drops drew both their faces to the sky, and even as they rose to their feet, this brief light paradiddle of sprinkles gave way to a serious drumming.. "Vomiting. I'm told it was an exceptionally violent emetic episode." "He spewed like a fire hose," Vanadium said matter-of-factly..Their evenings together were comfortable bliss, though usually they just watched television, or he read to her. She enjoyed being read to: mostly historical novels and occasional mysteries..Paul sat by himself, at the far end of the restaurant from them. He ordered orange juice and waffles.. "You can't take much of anything by mouth for a few hours yet," said the nurse. "Nausea is too great a risk. Retching might start you hemorrhaging again."..The telephone rang, putting an end to their chat, but Agnes would remember the substance of it later that year, on the day before Christmas, when Barty took a walk in the rain and changed forever his.. "Please just call me Tom. I've been forcibly retired from the Oregon State Police, with full disability because of this face, so I'm not officially a detective anymore. Yet until Enoch Cain is behind bars, where he belongs, I'm not ready to be anything but a cop, official or not."..Junior would have liked to pursue spiritual matters with Sklent, but numerous other partyers wanted their time with the great man. In parting, sure that he would give the artist a laugh, Junior withdrew the brochure for "This Momentous Day" from his jacket and coyly asked for an opinion of Celestina White's paintings..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.. "Who else? I think there's romance in the air. The cow-eyed way he looks at her, she could knock his knees out from under him just by giving him a wink."..A s?ance was what it appeared to be at first. Eight people were gathered around the dining-room table, which stood utterly bare. No food, no drinks, no centerpiece. They all exhibited that shiny-faced look of people nervously awaiting the revelations of a spirit medium: part trepidation, part soaring hope.. "That's just ... an old joke," she heard herself saying, as from a distance. "You didn't really walk between the drops?"..At last: the humiliating backless gown, the precious drugs, even a pretty nurse who seemed to like him, and then oblivion..He turned the brochure in his hands, to look at the front of it again. Gradually he began to suspect that the title of the exhibition might be what had brought to mind the reverend's unremembered sermon..After an interminable silence, the detective said, "Do you know what believe about life, Enoch?"..Polio, largely an affliction of younger children, had stricken her two weeks before her fifteenth birthday. Thirty years ago..An alley opened on Junior's left. He stepped out of the crowd, into this narrow service way shaded by tall buildings, and walked even more briskly, still not quite running because he continued to believe that he possessed the unshakable calm and self-control of a highly self improved man.. "So what I am is I'm your talking eyes." Lowering her hand from his face, Angel said, "Do you know where bacon comes from?"..One worrisome problem: Neddy might be found in the container before it had been hauled away, instead of at the landfill that preferably would serve as his next-to-last resting place. If his body was discovered here, it must be at a distance from any trash bin used by the gallery. The less likely the cops were to connect Neddy to Greenbaum's art-sausage factory, the less likely they also were to connect the murder to Junior..Celestina slammed the door, pressed the lock button in the knob, shoved-rocked-muscled the dresser in front of the door, astonished by her own strength, and heard Angel speaking into the phone: "Mommy's moving furniture."..Junior strove to appear properly mortified. "Thought I heard something. Searched the apartment."..Gazing into the mirror, which ought to have been clouded with self-pity as though with steam, Junior Cain searched for his anger and found it. This was a black and bitter anger, as poisonous as rattlesnake venom; with little difficulty, his heart was distilling it into purest rage..A pink spot in the center of Victoria's forehead marked the point of impact. Soon it would be an ugly bruise. The skull bone did not appear to have been cratered..Paul stayed with her, sometimes wincing at the ground as though the danger were there, not above-which, in a sense, it was, because impact rather than the fall itself is the killer-and at other times putting his arms around her, staring up at the boy above. But he, too, was silent..This time he didn't flip the quarter straight into the air. He tipped his hand, and with his thumb, he shot the coin toward Agnes..So burning with anger was he that his car, by direct thermal transmission from his hands upon the wheel, should have been glowing cherry red in the January night, should have been scorching tunnels of clear dry air through the cold fog. Rancor, virulence, acrimony, vehemence: All words learned for the purpose of self-improvement were useless to him now, because none adequately conveyed the merest minimum of his anger, which swelled as vast and molten as the sun, far more formidable than his assiduously enhanced vocabulary.. "You know Mommy," Barty said, almost desperately sponging up the sight of his little girl's face and wringing the images into his memory to sustain him in the next long darkness..Turning to face his four trailing escorts, all of whom were hunch shouldered and stiff-necked with tension, Barty said, "What's for dinner?".. "Making too many wrong choices," Grace White said, "produces too many branches-a gnarled, twisted, ugly growth."..These kids were the same age, yet listening to them was akin to hearing Angel do her charming shtick with an adult who had a lot of patience, a sense of humor, and an awareness of generational ironies..Phimie's speech had been slurred later, as well, immediately following the birth of the baby, when she had struggled to convey her desire to name her daughter Angel.. "Stop it, stop it!" Agnes, only ten years old, slender and shaking, but wild with righteousness, until now held in thrall by her own fear, by the memory of all the beatings that she herself has taken. She screams at their father and strikes him with a book she's brought from the house. The Bible. She strikes their father with the Bible, from which he's read to them every night of their lives. He drops the roses, tears the holy book out of Agnes's hands, and pitches it across the yard. He rakes up a handful of the scattered roses, intending to make his son resume this dinner of sin, but here comes Agnes once more, the Bible recovered, brandishing it at him, and now she says what all of them know to be true but what none of them has ever dared say, what even Agnes herself will never again dare to say after this day, not while the old man lives, but she dares to say it now, holding the Bible toward him, so he can see the gold-embossed cross upon the imitation-leather cover. "Murderer," Agnes says. "Murderer." And Edom knows that they're all as good as dead now, that their father will slaughter them right here, right this minute, in his rage. "Murderer," she says accusingly, behind the shield of the Bible, and she doesn't mean that he is killing Edom, but

that he killed their mother, that they heard him in the night, three years before, heard the short but awful struggle, and know that what happened was no accident. Roses fall from his skinned and pierced hands, a flurry of petals yellow and petals red. He rises and takes a step toward Agnes, his dripping fists crimson with his blood and with Edom's. Agnes doesn't back away, but thrusts the book toward him, and scintillant sunlight caresses the cross. Instead of tearing the book out of her hands again, their father stalks away, into the house, surely to return with club or cleaver ... yet they will see no more of him this day. Then Agnes-with tweezers for the thorns, with a basin full of warm water and a washcloth, with iodine and Neosporin and bandages-kneels beside him in the yard. Jacob, too, comes forth from the dark crawlspace under the porch, having watched in terror from behind the latticework skirt. He is shaking, crying, flushed with embarrassment because he didn't intervene, although he was wise to hide, for the disciplinary beating of one twin usually leads to the pointless beating of the other. Agnes gradually settles Jacob by involving him in the treatment of his brother's wounds, and to Edom she says, often thereafter, "I love your roses, Edom. I love your roses. God loves your roses, Edom." Overhead, agitated wings quiet to a soft flutter, and the shrieking crows grow silent. The air pools as still and heavy as the water in a hidden lagoon within a secret glade, in the perfect garden of the unfallen.....Joey rested not under the stern watch of the cypresses, but near a California pepper tree. With its graceful, cascading boughs, it appeared to stand in meditation or in prayer..Nothing in life was risk free, so he hesitated only a moment: at the foot of the porch steps before climbing them and knocking on the door..Two soft-boiled eggs, one slice of bread neither toasted nor buttered, a glass of apple juice, and a dish of orange.If her beautiful son was to be a prodigy of any kind, she would thank God for his talent and would do anything she could to help him achieve his destiny..He supposed Victoria might have a visitor. Perhaps a relative or a girlfriend. Not a man. No. She knew who her man was, and she would have no other while she waited for the chance to surrender to him and to consummate the relationship that had begun with the spoon and the ice in the hospital ten days previously..Sitting on the edge of the bed, Maria lightly salted the runny eggs and spooned them into Agnes's mouth. "Eggs is as chickens does." Tom Vanadium was too unnerved by the Cain scare to be interested in the newspaper anymore. The strong black coffee, superb before, tasted bitter now..If Vanadium appeared among these men, Junior would not only puke out the contents of his stomach, but also would disgorge his internal organs, every last one of them, and spew up his bones, too, until he emptied out everything within his skin..At nearly forty years of age, Edom still dreamed of that grim summer afternoon, although not as often as in the past. When it troubled his sleep these days, it was a nightmare that gradually metamorphosed into a dream of tenderness and hope. Until the last few years, he'd always awakened when the roses were being jammed into his mouth or when the thorns flicked through his eyelashes, or when Agnes began to strike their father with the Bible, thus seeming to assure worse punishment. This additional act, this transition from horror to hope before he woke, had been added when Agnes was pregnant with Barty. Edom didn't know why this should be so, and he didn't try to analyze it. He was simply grateful for the change, because he woke now in a state of peace, never with worse than a shudder, no longer with a hoarse cry of anguish..The boy's difference was defined as much by what he didn't do as by what he did. For one thing, he didn't observe the Terrible Twos, the period of toddler rebellion that usually frayed the nerves of the most patient parents. No tantrums for the Pie Lady's son, no bossiness, no crankiness..From the moment the girl was admitted on the evening of January 5, the nurses at St. Mary's Hospital in San Francisco called her Phimie, too, not because they knew her well enough to love her, but because that was the name they heard Celestina use..Music played within. An up-tempo number. Possibly swing. He couldn't quite identify the tune..He waited for Otter to nod, but Otter stood motionless.."Tom, Wally, I'm sorry for the brusque introductions," Agnes Lampion apologized. "We'll have plenty of getting-to-know-each other time over dinner. But the people in this room have been waiting an entire week to hear from you, Tom. We can't wait a moment longer." In the gallery windows, eight of the nine sculptures were so disturbing that many passersby, catching sight of them, blanched and looked away and hurried on. Not everyone can be a connoisseur..From the bathroom, Junior gathered an electric razor and toiletries. He added these to the suitcases..She wanted so badly to believe, to see her son made whole again, and the funny thing was that she could believe, and without emotional risk, because it was true..At the beginning of his third month, instead of at the end of his fifth, he was combining vowels and consonants: "ba-ba-ba, ga-ga-ga, la-la-la, ca-ca-ca." Finally Angel dropped and slithered, vanishing under the overhanging bedclothes with a final flurry of yellow socks..The middle finger on his right hand throbbed under the pair of Band-Aids. He'd sliced it earlier, while using the electric sharpener to prepare his knives, and the wound had been aggravated when he'd had to strangle Neddy Gnathic. He would never have cut himself in the first place if there had been no need to be well-armed and ready for Bartholomew and his guardians..Junior's breath smoked from him as if he contained a seething fire of his own. He felt a sheen of condensation arise on his face, cold and invigorating..A sense of mystery overcame Agnes, unnerving but not entirely or even primarily unpleasant..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..The bow business had started a few months ago. Angel said she wanted to look pretty in her sleep, in case she met a handsome prince in her dreams..So here it came again, the hateful past, returning when Junior thought he was shed of it. This tall, lanky, Celestina-humping son of a bitch, guardian of Bartholomew, had driven away, gone home, but he couldn't stay in the past where he belonged, and he was opening his mouth to say Who are you or maybe to shout an alarm, so Junior shot him three times..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.."Oh, yes, I recall it now. Polar bears eating tourists in Union Square, wolf packs prowling the Heights."..Playing with fire was fun when you didn't have to attempt to conceal the fact that it was arson..Junior didn't believe in gods, devils, Heaven, Hell, life after death. He put his faith in one thing: himself..Alone with Paul, as he stood abashed, she removed her blouse and bra and, with arms crossed over her breasts, revealed to him her savaged back. Whereas her father had used open-hand slaps and hard fists to teach his twin sons the lessons of God, he preferred canes and lashes as the instruments of education for his daughter, because he believed that his direct touch might have invited sin. Scars disfigured Agnes from shoulders to buttocks, pale scars and others dark, crosshatched and whorled..Striving to appear casual, but obviously unnerved, the pencil-thin man backed off again. "The paintings are lovely, wonderful, I'm enormously impressed. I'm a friend of the artist's, you know. She was a tenant of mine, I was her landlord during her early college years, in her salad days, a nice little studio apartment, before the baby. A lovely girl, I always knew she'd be a success, it was so apparent in even her earliest work. I just had to come tonight, even though a friend's covering two of my four sets. I couldn't miss this." Celestina stared curiously at Tom Vanadium. She had witnessed the effect of vanishment, though she hadn't actually seen the coin disappear in midair.

Yet she seemed to sense either that something more than sleight of hand had just transpired or that the trick had a meaning she'd missed. 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. Ursula K. Le Guin. Junior tipped his head back and gazed up toward the section of broken-out railing along the high observation deck. Happy weekend. His attitude amazed her, and his strength in the face of darkness gave her courage. Junior wanted to shoot all of them, but he said, "Take it. Keep it. Get it the hell out of here." The ghost cop was forty feet behind him, beyond ranks of other pedestrians, every one of whom might as well have been faceless now, smooth and featureless from brow to chin, because suddenly Junior could see no countenance other than that of the walking dead man. The haunting visage bobbed up and down as the grim spirit strode along, vanishing and reappearing and then vanishing again among all the bobbing and swaying heads of the intervening multitudes. The sudden change of subject, from the airliner crash to Phimie, confused Celestina. She hadn't sung since the early-morning hours of October 18, and no other paranormal event had occurred since then. The waiting between manifestations scraped at Junior's nerves worse than the manifestations themselves. In November, Edom asked Maria Gonzalez to dinner and a movie. Although he was only six years older than Maria, both agreed that this was a date between friends, not really a boy-girl thing. Jacob's mentor had been a man named Obadiah Sepharad. They had met when Jacob was eighteen, during a period when he'd been committed to a psychiatric ward for a short time, his eccentricity having been briefly mistaken for something worse. Rising, Celestina said to Tom, "Last Tuesday night, we had to switch on the lawn sprinklers. This will be much better." "You might as well beat a cloud for raining," said Otter's mother. He knew the titles that he wanted: "Tunnel in the Sky, Between Planets, Starman Jones." Getting out of the stuffy car into air much chillier than it had been when he'd left this place, Junior stood unsteadily as the police and the paramedics gathered around him. Then he led them through the wild grass to Naomi, moving haltingly, stumbling on small stones that the others navigated with ease. Before they set out for the amusement park, Agnes pulled him aside, held him close, and said, "Listen, kid of mine, I'm not giving up. Don't think I ever would. Let's have fun today. This evening, you and I and Angel will convene a meeting of the North Pole Society of Not Evil Adventurers"-the girl had become the third member years ago" and all truths will be told and secrets known. He was having difficulty focusing his attention on the problem at hand. Through his mind, odd and disconnected thoughts rolled like slow, greasy, eye-of-the-hurricane waves on an ominous sea. With a prayer to the Holy Mother, Maria held one third of a knave of spades to the bright flame of the first candle. When it caught fire, she dropped the fragment into the votive glass, and as it was consumed, she said aloud, "For Peter," referring to the most prominent of the twelve apostles. "In a way, he does," Vanadium said. "When you're as hollow as Enoch Cain, the emptiness aches. He's desperate to fill it, but he doesn't have the patience or the commitment to fill it with anything worthwhile. Love, charity, faith, wisdom-those virtues and others are hard won, with commitment and patience, and we acquire them one spoonful at a time. Cain wants to be filled quickly. He wants the emptiness inside poured full, in quick great gushes, and right now." Celestina put Angel down, and the girl raced to the bathroom as Wally stepped into the public hall and pulled the apartment door shut behind him. "Sometimes it's sad here, Mommy. But it's not sad every place you are. Lots of places, Daddy's with you and me, and we're happier, and everything's okay." "Periodic violent emesis without an apparent cause can be one indication of locomotor ataxia, but you've no other symptoms of it. I wouldn't worry about that unless this happens again." "I didn't know it myself till I realized I was right in your neighborhood. I assumed your mother and Angel would be here, and I hoped you might be. If I'm intruding." Caesar Zedd teaches that every experience in our lives, unto the smallest moment and simplest act, is preserved in memory, including every witless conversation we've ever endured with the worst dullards we've met. For this reason, he wrote a book about why we must never suffer bores and fools and about how we can be rid of them, offering hundreds of strategies for scouring them from our lives, including homicide, which he claims to favor, though only tongue-in-cheek. 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. Using this apartment as a base, Nolly and Kathleen had conducted some of the small skirmishes in the first phase of the war, including the ghost serenades. They left the place tidy. Indeed, the only sign that they had ever been here was a packet of dental floss left behind on the sill of a living-room window. In his room, he settled on the bed with his constipating snacks and the county telephone book. Because he had packed the directory with the Zedd collection, the thief hadn't gotten it.

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