

## OF 4 AND ASCERTAINING THE MEANING OF SEVERAL NOT DETERMINABLE BY TI

At 3:22 in the morning, December 13, following a busy day of conducting ghost research, seeking Bartholomews in a telephone book, and working on his needlepoint, Junior awakened to singing. A single voice. No instrumental accompaniment. A woman..After taking a preliminary statement from Celestina, Bellini left to romance a judge out of bed and obtain a search warrant for Enoch Cain's residence, having already ordered a stakeout of the Russian Hill apartment. Celestina's description of her assailant was a perfect match for Cain. Furthermore, the suspect's Mercedes had been abandoned at her place. Bellini sounded confident that they would find and arrest the man soon..Eventually, Junior remembered the quarter. He reached into the right pocket of the thin cotton bathrobe, but the coin wasn't there, as it should have been. The left pocket also was empty..Finally, only thirty miles south of Spruce Hills, he reluctantly acknowledged that slow deep breathing, positive thoughts, high self esteem, and firm resolve weren't sufficient to subdue his treacherous bowels. He needed to find lodging for the night. He didn't care about a swimming pool or a king-size bed, or a free continental breakfast. The only amenity that mattered was indoor plumbing.. "Maria is coming by with Francesca and Bonita," Agnes said. "We might as well put all the extensions in the table. Barty, call Uncle Jacob and Uncle Edom and invite them for dinner."..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..In either case, printing the name in blood was a ritualistic act, and ritualism of this nature was an unmistakable symptom of a seriously unbalanced mind. Evidently, the wife killer would be easier to crack than expected, because his shell was already badly fractured..Dropped, the wineglass had shattered. But the bottle of Merlot had survived again, rolling across the vinyl-tile floor until it bumped gently against the base of a cabinet..Both the red and the white wines were too cheap for Junior's taste' so he drank Dos Equis beer and got two kinds of high by inhaling enough secondhand pot smoke to cure the state of Virginia's entire annual production of hams. Among the two or three hundred partyers, some were tripping on some exhibited the particular excitability and talkativeness typical of cokeheads, but Junior succumbed to none of these temptations. Self-improvement and self control mattered to him; he didn't approve of this degree of self indulgence.. "From time to time now, you're going to be written about," Helen warned. "Be prepared for a peevish critic or two, furious about your optimism."..As he was wheeled headfirst into the operating room, Barty raised off the gurney pillow. He fixed his gaze on his mother until the door swung shut between them..On New Year's Day, the town learned that it had lost its first son in Vietnam. Agnes had known the parents all her life, and she despaired that even with her willingness to help, with all her good intentions, there was nothing she could do to ease their pain. She recalled her anguish as she'd waited to learn if Barty's eye tumors had spread along the optic nerve to his brain. The thought of her neighbors losing a child to war made her turn to Paul in the night. "Just hold me," she murmured..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..Grace, of course, was a strong woman for whom faith was an armor against far worse than embarrassment. Celestina knew that Mom would suffer immeasurably more heartache by remaining in Oregon than what pain she might experience at her daughter's side, but Phimie was too young, too naive, and too frightened to grasp that in this matter, as in all others, her mother was a pillar, not a reed..Finally: "A trial lawyer, whether specializing in criminal or civil matters, is like an actor, Mr. Cain. He must believe deeply in his role, in the truth of his portrayal, if he's to be convincing. I always believe in the innocence of my clients in order to achieve the best possible settlement for them."..Although she knew how, and although she knew the pointlessness of asking why, Agnes asked, "Why? Oh, Lord, why must a blind boy climb a tree?"..In the Fairmont coffee shop, Junior ordered french fries, a cheeseburger, and cole slaw. He requested that the burger be served cooked but unassembled: the halves of the bun turned face up, the meat pattie positioned separately on the plate, one slice each of tomato and onion arranged beside the pattie, and the slice of unmelted cheese on a separate dish.. "It seems it was his own idea, your majesty."..Such quiet filled the house that Agnes couldn't hear even the murmuring miseries of the past.. "We don't believe it does, do we, Daddy? We don't believe blood tells. We believe we're born to hope, under a mantle of mercy, don't we?"..Junior held the silencer-fitted 9-mm pistol under his left arm, clamped against his side, freeing both hands to use the automatic pick..At the open kitchen door, arms laden with a stack of four bakery boxes, her mother said, "Will you get those last four pies for me there on the table? And don't jostle them, dear."..Although not quite as young as Baval Poriferan, this artist was equally adored by critics and widely regarded as a genius. He went by a single and mysterious name, Sklent, and in the publicity photo of him that was posted in the gallery, he looked dangerous.. "Maybe I won't have to try as hard as I think, because you make it so easy, Barty."..Sklent proved to be angry, suspicious, volatile, but also a man of tremendous intellectual power. A profound and dazzling conversationalist, he rattled off breathtaking insights into the human condition, astonishing yet unarguable opinions about art, and revolutionary philosophical concepts. Later, except in the matter of ghosts, Junior would not be able to remember a single word of what Sklent had said, only that it had all been brilliant and really cool..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 detective wasn't the only person in the world who liked "Someone to Watch over Me." Anyone in the lounge might have requested it. Or maybe this number was part of the pianist's usual repertoire..Maria stopped praying with her knuckle rosary and resorted to a long swallow of wine..Recalling how the title of the exhibition had resonated with him when first he'd seen the gallery, brochure, Junior felt certain now that a tape-recorded early draft of this sermon was the kinky "music" that accompanied his evening of passion with

Seraphim. He couldn't remember one word of it, let alone any element that would have deeply moved a national radio audience, but this didn't mean that he was shallow or incapable of being touched by philosophical speculations. He'd been so distracted by the erotic perfection of Seraphim's young body and so busy jumping her that he wouldn't have remembered a word, either, if Zedd himself had been sitting on the bed, discussing the human condition with his customary brilliance. "You're heaven-sent," Grace assured Paul at breakfast Saturday morning. "With all your stories, you lifted our hearts when we most needed to be lifted." ". . . then how come you couldn't walk where your eyes were healthy and leave the tumors there," she remembered. KATHLEEN IN THE candlelight, her ginger eyes a glimmer with images of the amber flame. Icy martinis, extra olives in a shallow white dish. Beyond the tableside window, the legendary bay glimmered, too, darker and colder than Kathleen's eyes, and not a fraction as deep. Gradually, Agnes realized that this was not a prayer for the soul of a deceased infant but for the survival of one still alive. In the cab, pulling into traffic, the driver said, "The mister tells me you're the star of the show tonight." "One of the four legs of the tower is dangerously fractured where it's seated into the underlying foundation caisson." The ninth card was a jack of spades. Maria called it a knave of and at the sight of it, her bright smile dimmed. In San Francisco, Seraphim Aethionema White lies beyond all hope of resuscitation. So beautiful and only sixteen. Although the ace of hearts had only positive meanings, and although, according to Maria, multiple appearances, especially in sequence, meant increasingly positive things, a series of chills nevertheless riffled through Agnes's spine, as if her vertebrae were fingers shuffling. Heinlein dreamed of traveling to far worlds. Prior to his death, John Kennedy had promised that men would walk on the moon before the end of the decade. Barty wanted nothing so grand, only to read a few stories, to lose himself in the wonderful private pleasure of books, because soon each story would be a listening experience only, no longer entirely a private journey. 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. "Lock it anyway. And don't hang up. Stay on the line until the patrolmen get there." 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. Somehow, Agnes knew that in his younger days, Obadiah had been a stage magician. Artlessly, she drew him out on the subject. She might have attributed his problem to eyestrain from all the reading he'd done during the past few days. She might have put drops in his eyes, told him to leave the books alone for a while, and sent him into the backyard to play. She might have counseled herself not to be one of those alarmist mothers who detected pneumonia in every sniffle, a brain tumor behind every headache. Every nerve in Junior's body was a tautly strung trigger wire. If something set him off, he might explode so violently that he'd blow himself into a psychiatric ward. Nellie found the strength to rise, but having risen, she was unable to speak. Her mouth shaped words, but her voice deserted her. "Oh, dear God," she whispered, and although she had always been a strong woman who stood on a rock of faith, who drew hope as well as air with every breath, she was as weak now as the unborn child in her womb, sick with fear. When Renee, sweetly oblivious of her looming doom, claimed to have inherited a sizable industrial-valve fortune, Junior thought she might be inventing the wealth or at least exaggerating to make herself more desirable. But when he accompanied her back to her place, he discovered a level of luxury that proved she wasn't a shop girl with fantasies. "You'd never cheat me. I know you. We'd have Christmas twice a year and parties for half birthdays." He moved from a crib to a bed of his own, with guardrails, months ahead of the average toddler. Within a week, he requested that the rails be left down. "If I had a wife, she wouldn't feel too lucky. I'm not of the persuasion that wants a wife, dear." He was still her boy. As always, her boy. Bartholomew. Barty. Her sweetie. Her kiddo. This was not the time to ponder the nature of the relationship between the treacherous Miss Bressler and Vanadium. Junior had a bloody trail to cover, and precious time was ticking away. Junior was flattered, he really was. Women couldn't get enough of him. The story of his life. They never let go gracefully. He was wanted, needed, adored, worshiped. Women kept calling after they should have taken the hint and gone away, insisted on sending him notes and gifts even after he told them it was over. Junior wasn't surprised that women would return from the dead for him, nor was he surprised that women he'd killed would try to find a route back to him from Beyond, without malice, without vengeance in their hearts, merely yearning to be with him again, to hold him and to fulfill his needs. As gratified as he was by this tribute to his desirability, he simply didn't have any romantic feelings left for Naomi and Seraphim. They were the past, and he loathed the past, and if they wouldn't let him alone, he would never be able to live in the future. And speak the tongues of man and drake. The doors slid open, and they rolled Barty corridor to corridor, past the scrub sinks, to a waiting surgical nurse in green cap, mask, and gown. She alone effected his transfer into the positive pressure of the surgery. As he turned the corner onto Jasmine Way, he felt his heart lift in expectation of the sight of his home. It wasn't a grand residence--a typical Main Street, USA, house--but it was more splendid to Paul than Paris, London, and Rome combined, cities that he would never see and would never regret failing to see. He knew that he needed to get a grip on himself. But he could not keep his breathing slow and deep, couldn't remember any of Zedd's other foolproof methods of self-control, couldn't recall a single useful meditative technique. On the day that Vanadium attended the graveside service for Seraphim and subsequently stopped at Naomi's grave to needle Cain, he had suspected that Phimie didn't die in a traffic accident, as claimed, but he hadn't for a moment thought that the wife killer was in any way connected. Now, finding this gallery brochure in the nightstand drawer seemed to be one more bit of circumstantial proof of Cain's guilt. For a long time, she stood beside the bed, holding his hand, confident that on some level he was aware of her presence, though he gave no indication whatsoever that he knew she was there. "Mrs. Lampion, in a case like this, I've found that the greatest mercy is directness. Your son has retinoblastoma. A malignancy of the retina." As Agnes slipped excess pillows out from behind him and eased him down into the covers, Barty half woke, muttering about how the

police were going to kill poor LummoX, who hadn't meant to do all that damage, but he'd been frightened by the gunfire, and when you weighed six tons and had eight legs, you sometimes couldn't get around in tight places without knocking something over. Happy weekend. His attitude amazed her, and his strength in the face of darkness gave her courage. Wally and Celestina went to dinner at the Armenian restaurant from which he'd gotten takeout on the day in '65 that he rescued her and Angel from Neddy Gnathic. Red tablecloths, white dishes, dark wood paneling, a cluster of candles in red glasses on each table, air redolent of garlic and roasted peppers and cubeb and sizzling soujouk-plus a personable staff, largely of the owners' family-created an atmosphere as right for celebration as for intimate conversation, and Celestina expected to enjoy both, because this promised to be a most momentous day in more ways than one. Not all of the pins were knocked to the shear line with a single pull of the trigger. Three pulls were the minimum required, sometimes as many as six, depending on the lock. "Salt water would be too cumbersome anyway. He'd have to drink a lot of it shortly before he heaved, but he was surrounded by cops with good reason to keep an eye on him. Does ipecac come in capsule form?" Paul realized that the kitchen had fallen silent, that the women had turned to the two children and now stood as motionless as figures in a waxworks tableau. 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. Throughout the evening, Barty and Angel-sitting side by side and across the table from Paul-listened to the adults at times and occasionally joined in the larger conversation, but primarily they talked between themselves. When the kids' heads weren't together conspiratorially, Paul could hear their chatter, and depending on what else was being discussed around the table, he sometimes tuned in to it. He picked up on the word rhinoceros, tuned in, tuned out, but a couple minutes later, he dialed back in when he realized that Celestina, sitting two places farther along the table from him, had risen from her chair and was staring in amazement at the kids. Opening his eyes blinking back his tears just as more agonizing contractions knotted his abdomen, he could see ribbons of red in the watery green mess that gushed from him. Bright red. Gastric blood would be dark. This must be pharyngeal blood. Unless an artery had ruptured in his stomach, torn by the incredible violence of these intransigent spasms, in which case he was puking his life away. In addition to mulling over strategy, Tom had spent a lot of time lately brooding about culpability: his own, not Cain's. By seizing on the name that he heard Cain speak in a dream, by making use of it in this psychological warfare, had he been the architect of the killer's Bartholomew obsession, or if not the architect, then at least an assisting. He met her eyes, but at once shifted his gaze to the porch floor again. "I've come to say ... how sorry I am, how miserably sorry." Babies of unwed mothers-especially of dead unwed mothers, and especially of dead unwed mothers whose fathers were ministers unable to endure public mortification-were routinely put up for adoption. Since Seraphim had given birth here, the baby would be-no doubt already had been-adopted by a San Francisco-area family. Under a sullen afternoon sky, in the winter-drab hills, the yellow-and-white station wagon was a bright arrow, drawn and fired not from a hunter's quiver but from that of a Samaritan. Because she'd enjoyed some limited use of her right arm, it was less wasted than her left, although not normal. Paul pulled down that sleeve of her pajamas. Agnes had struggled recently to find a way to explain to Barty that his uncles had lost their hope, to convey also what it meant to live without hope-and somehow to tell the boy all this without burdening him, at such a young age, with the details of what his monstrous grandfather, Agnes's father, had done to her and to her brothers. The task was beyond her abilities. The fact that Barty was a prodigy six times over didn't make his mother's work easier, because in order to understand her, he would require experience and emotional maturity, not just intellect. Junior spoke the three words aloud and felt a strange resonance between them and his dim memories of Reverend White's voice on that long-ago night. Yet the link, if any actually existed, remained elusive. Jacob cooked corn bread, cheese-and-parsley omelettes, and crisp home fries with a dash of onion salt. Junior hadn't noticed when the detective stopped turning the coin across his knuckles. Nothing he could do about it now. Having Naomi's body moved to another grave, in a cemetery without Negroes, would cause a lot of talk. He didn't want to draw more attention to himself. Naomi's beautiful countenance rose in his mind, and she looked beautiful for a moment, but then he thought he saw a certain slyness in her angelic smile, a disturbing glint of calculation in her once loving eyes. She fussed over him, took his temperature, and spooned two chips of ice into his parched mouth. Leaving, she gave Celestina a meaningful look and tapped her wristwatch. Focus. Prepare to kill Bartholomew and anyone who tries to protect Bartholomew on January 12. Prepare for all contingencies. Admittedly, she had allowed herself to be disturbed by the fall of the cards, too. According them any credibility at all opened the door to full belief. 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. Junior liked women who drank a lot. They were usually amorous or at least unresistant. In his voice, he heard a tremor that had nothing to do with the hideous deaths in Effingham more than sixteen years previous. "Oil and natural-gas pipelines will fracture, explode. A sea of fire will wash cities, killing hundreds of thousands more." Before the pianist could cry out, Junior drove him between the toilet and the sink, slamming him against the wall hard enough to knock loose his breath and to cause the water to slosh audibly in the nearby toilet tank. He wanted to say: The vain, power-mad politicians who milk cheers from ignorant crowds, the sports stars and preening actors who hear themselves called heroes and never object, they should all wither with shame at the mention of your name. Your vision, your struggle, the years of grueling work, your enduring faith when others doubted, the risk you took with career and reputation--it's one of the great stories of science, and I'd be honored if I could shake your band. He nodded. "You do. Yes. But you don't need to know right now. Later,

when you're calmer, when you're clearer. It's too important to rush you through it now." The musician's eyes met Junior's for an instant, widening with surprise. Obviously he knew that Gammoner was a lie. So he must be aware of Junior's real identity..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..Clutching the purse as though determined to resist robbery even in death, the guy dropped, sprawled, shuddered, and lay still. He'd gone down with no shout of alarm, with no cry of mortal pain, with so little noise that Junior wanted to kiss him, except that he didn't kiss men, alive or dead, although a man dressed as a woman had once tricked him, and though a dead pianist had once given him a lick in the dark..Barty came out of the house with the library copy of Podkayne Of Mary, which his mother had promised to read to him later, in the hospital. "Are we all going?" he asked..Music played within. An up-tempo number. Possibly swing. He couldn't quite identify the tune..Considering his battered and stitched face, considering also his tragic and colorful history, Vanadium spoke with remarkably little drama. His voice was calm, nearly flat, rising and falling so little that he almost talked in a monotone..The nurse led the way, while the orderly pushed the gurney from behind Barty's head..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..Smiling, pulling the blanket more tightly around herself, she said, "You look after your old mom, don't you?"

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