

## ASTROLOGISCHES VORNAMENBUCH

Because the upper part of the hospital bed was somewhat raised, he didn't have to lift his head from the pillow to study the corner where the phantom waited. He peered beyond the IV rack, past the foot of the bed, the sentences. The substance of what she said and the tone in which she said it were so perfect that it almost seemed as though an angel had relieved her of this burden by possessing her long enough to help her son understand what must happen and why. In a sudden desperate burst of action, Junior tore at the dead man's closed hand, sprang open the trap of fingers and palm and did not find a quarter. Nor two dimes and a nickel. Nor five nickels. Nothing. Zip. Zero. Although a believer, Agnes was not at the moment able to spread the flowers and ferns of faith over the hard, ugly reality of death. Cowled and skeletal, Death was here, all right, scattering his seeds among all her gathered friends, one day to reap them. Although she had never seen snow other than in pictures and on film, this deep-settled silence seemed to speak of failing flakes, of white muffling mantles, and she wouldn't have been in the least surprised if, stepping outside, she had found herself in a glorious winter landscape, cold and crystalline, here on the always-snowless hills and shores of the California Pacific. Angel interrupted, bursting into the room, gasping for breath. "Come quick! It's incredible. It's wonderful. You've got to see this. And I mean, Barty, you have to see this." Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Le Guin, Ursula K., 1929-. Shortly after six o'clock, Saturday morning, she stirred from a fretful dream and saw Barty sitting up in bed, reading. "Of all the things I might be meant to do with my life," he told Agnes, "I believe nothing will matter more than the small part I've had in bringing together these two children." Seraphim's child had been alive as long as Naomi had been dead, almost fifteen months. In fifteen months, Junior should have located the little bastard and eliminated him. Dense, white, slowly billowing masses of fog rolled through the neighborhood, scented with woodsmoke from numerous fireplaces, as though everything north to the Canadian border were ablaze. The paramedic pulled shut the door, leaving Joey outside in the night, in the storm, in the wind between worlds. She bit her lower lip, held her breath, repressed the sob that sought release, and said, "I know." This comment left Tom nonplussed. He could only imagine that Jacob had known someone who died in that crash yet the twin's tone of voice and his expression seemed to suggest that a world without the Bakersfield train wreck would be a less convivial place than one that included it. "No," said Vanadium, "you only think you know who I am and what I am, but you don't know anything. That's all right. You'll learn." Other rooms were furnished as sparsely as those in a monastery. Indeed, the dining room contained nothing whatsoever. The past three years had given Wally much to celebrate, as well. After selling his medical practice and taking an eight-month hiatus from the sixty-hour work weeks he had endured for so long, he'd been giving twenty-four hours of free service to a pediatric clinic each week, providing care to the disadvantaged. He'd worked hard all his life, and saved diligently, and now he was able to focus solely on those activities that gave him the greatest gratification. From her Volkswagen bus in the middle of the line, Maria joined them. "In case we get separated, Agnes, I don't have an itinerary." "You know where it comes from," her mother said with a yawn that betrayed her exhaustion after a night with no sleep and too much drama. He followed an alleyway to the building's service entrance, for which he possessed a key that wasn't provided to other tenants. He unlocked the steel door and stepped into a small, dimly lighted receiving room with gray walls and a speckled blue linoleum floor. "They've gone to bed. They're tired," Wally told her as he put the car in gear and released the hand brake. "Aren't you?" Over the final refrain of "I'll Be Seeing You" came a man's voice from the foyer, raised quizzically, with perhaps a note of surprise: "Victoria. 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. Then it would stop. The torment would stop. Surely. His sense of drift, of sliding aimlessly through the days, would lift from him, and he would find purpose once more in determined self-improvement. He would definitely learn French and German. He would take cooking classes and become a culinary master. Karate, too. As he'd proved to himself on his previous two visits—his first night in town and then two nights thereafter—this number was merely part of the pianist's repertoire. Nothing supernatural here. If he killed Bartholomew and got away clean, as he expected that he would, then he could subsequently return everything in the van to the apartment. He was just being prudent by planning for his future, because the future was, after all, the only place he lived. Already, the girl had taken Barty's hand. The two kids descended from the porch into the rain. They didn't circle the oak, but stopped at the foot of the steps and turned to face the house. Along the hall to his room. Fast and low through the doorframe. Wary of the closet door standing two inches ajar. Squint-eyed, sharp-faced night clerk must not have been the owner, because he wasn't the type to have dreamed up cute spellings for the sign out front. Judging by his appearance and attitude, he was a former Nazi death-camp commandant who fled Brazil one step ahead of the Israeli secret service and was now hiding out in Oregon. The window didn't face the street. It overlooked a five-foot-wide passageway between this house and the next. The police might not spot him leaving. Routinely she dreamed of Joey. Not nightmares. No blood, no reliving of the horror. In her dreams, she was on a picnic with Joey or at a carnival with him. Walking a beach. Watching a movie. A warmth pervaded these scenes, an aura of companionship, love. Except eventually she always glanced away from Joey, and when she looked again, he was gone, and she knew that he was gone forever. Kid's room. Bartholomew's room. Furniture in cheerful primary colors. Pooh posters on the wall. While Angel continued her relentless interrogation of Paul Damascus, Tom joined her mother in front of the large window at the end of the room farthest from the dinner table. Heedless of the rules of standard police procedure, Tom raced to the doorway, crossed the threshold, and saw Barty throw a can of soda at the shaved head and pocked face of a transformed Enoch Cain. After

checking her carotid artery and detecting no pulse, Junior returned to the sofa in the living room. He fluffed the little pillow and left it precisely as he had found it. When people didn't apply themselves to positive goals, to making better lives for themselves, they spent their energy in wickedness. Then, faiths and inhibiting rules that confused humanity, when he was sufficiently enlightened to believe only in himself, he would be able to trust his instincts, for they would be free of society's toxic views, and he would be assured of success and happiness if always he followed these gut feelings. "Yes," she assured him, though her gaze had dropped from his mouth to his hand, so small, which she held in hers. He was prepared to find Vanadium sitting at the pine table, enjoying a cup of coffee. The kitchen was deserted. By now, all here assembled knew Celestina well enough that Tom's final example raised an affectionate laugh from the group. "proud," she said, smiling as she quoted one of their father's most familiar sermons, "nor powerful." "But I've never seen a case like this. Usually, boils appear on the back of the neck. And in moist areas like the armpits and the groin. Not so often on the face. And never in a quantity like this. Really, I've never seen anything like it." Tuesday, January 9, having cashed out a number of investments during the past ten days, Junior made a wire transfer of one and a half million dollars to the Gammoner account in the Grand Cayman bank. Jolene started to refill his coffee mug—then thought better of it. "Maybe you don't need more caffeine, Edom." Not every coincidence, however, has meaning. Toss a quarter one million times, roughly half a million heads will turn up, roughly the same number of tails. In the process, there will be instances when heads turn up thirty, forty, a hundred times in a row. This does not mean that destiny is at work or that God-choosing to be not merely his usual mysterious self but utterly inscrutable—is warning of Armageddon through the medium of the quarter; it means the laws of probability hold true only in the long run, and that short-run anomalies are meaningful solely to the gullible. Yet the coin was as real as dead Naomi broken on the stony ridge at the foot of the fire tower. Even Angel, mere wisp of a cherubim, couldn't squeeze through a seven-inch opening. open grave. In his hand: the white rose, its thorns slick with his blood. He dropped the bloom, and it fell out of sight, into the gaping earth, atop Naomi's casket. Perhaps she was afflicted with only expressive aphasia, but she must be confused to some degree. The baby, which would be placed for adoption, was not hers to name. "One of the things I was searching for in your house was a life insurance policy on your wife. I didn't find one. Didn't find any canceled checks for the premium, either." The rich aromas on the air would have thwarted the will of the most devout monks on a fast of penitence. This morning, only his love for his sister, Agnes, gave him the courage to drive and to become the pie man. Junior was tempted to experiment with the controls. Maybe other messages were recorded on the machine. Listening to them would be delicious—even if every one of them turned out to be as meaningless to him as Max's—a little like browsing through a stranger's diary. Looking down at Barty, Agnes saw the ghost of Joey in the baby's face, and although she half believed that her husband would be alive now if he had never tempted fate by putting such a high price on his life, she couldn't find any anger in her heart for him. She must accept this final generosity with grace—if also without enthusiasm. "Where's your mother this morning?" he asked, for he'd expected to have to shoot his way through a lot more than one adult to reach both children. The Lipscomb house had proved empty, however, and fortune had given him the boy and girl together, with one guardian. But with the silencer attached, the pistol was useful only for close-up work. After passing through a sound-suppressor, the bullet would exit the muzzle at a lower than usual velocity, perhaps with an added wobble, and accuracy would drop drastically at a distance. "I'm wondering," Nolly said, "if you're not an officer of the law anymore, in what capacity are you going to pursue Cain?" Rising from the chair and approaching the bed, the detective kept turning the quarter without hesitation. "She was a very sweet girl. Very romantic. Her diary's full of rhapsodies about married life, about you. She thought you were the finest man she'd ever known and the perfect husband." His first overnight journey, in June of '65, was to La Jolla, north of San Diego. He carried too large a backpack and wore khaki pants when he should have worn shorts in the summer heat. "If he and Agnes were your age, I'd agree. But she's got ten years on you, and he's got twenty, and no previous generations were as wild as yours." Now that neither of them had a doubt that the other shared the same need and that eventually they would satisfy each other, Victoria was opting for discretion. Wise woman. "Would you pretend to wake up if I tried to smother you?" asked Detective Vanadium. "July 14, 1960, in Guatemala City, Guatemala, a fire in a mental hospital—two hundred twenty-five dead." There in more genteel and gilded ages, and her flights of imagination sometimes acquired such vivid detail that they were eerily like memories. PUDDLED ON THE pan-flat face, the port-wine birthmark. In the center of the stain, the closed eye, concealed by a purple lid, as smooth and round as a grape. "I'm not going anywhere," she pledged. She had realized that his voice was growing heavy with sleep. "But it's time for you to go to dreamland." Instinctively, he knew he should not give massages to Negroes. He sensed that somehow he would be physically or morally polluted by this contact. Rena laughed. "Oh, but true! And not just a garden. I'm a field of flowers!" She let go of her skirt, which shimmered like cascades of falling petals. "So tonight will be a famous night, Celestina." "And you give yourself far too little credit," Salk continued gently. "There's no doubt in my mind that Perri was a hero. But she was married to a hero, as well." He waited for Otter to nod, but Otter stood motionless. The right side of the girl's face appeared to be more strongly affected by gravity. Running footsteps, heading toward the ambulance. Apparently Kenny. The second paramedic. He shook so badly that he couldn't remove the cap from the bottle. He was proud to be more sensitive than most people, to be so full of feeling, but sometimes sensitivity was a curse. At home again, in the safety of the family, Barty collapsed in exhaustion from the sustained effort to see with eyes that he didn't possess. A bed for ten days, feverish, afflicted with vertigo and migraine headaches, nauseated, he lost eight pounds before his recovery was complete. Instead of immediately killing anyone, Junior returned to his apartment on the afternoon of December 29, and went to bed, fully clothed. To calm down. To think about focus. LEFT HAND ON the

banister, right hand with knife tucked close to his side and ready to thrust, Tom Vanadium climbed cautiously but quickly to the upper floor, glancing back twice to be sure that Cain didn't slip in behind him..For the first time since walking to La Jolla to meet Jonas Salk, Paul planned a journey with a specific purpose.."It's not a specific brand you can't have, it's the whole idea of a candy bar.".She loosened her hair and brushed it out, and Nolly took her to dinner at their favorite place, which had the decor of a classy saloon and a bay view suitable for God's table. They came here often enough that the maitre d' greeted them by name, as did their waiter..The night of Barty's birth, when Joey actually lay dead in the pickup-bashed Pontiac, as a paramedic had rolled Agnes's gurney to the back door of the ambulance, she had seen her husband standing there, untouched by that rain as her son was untouched by this. But Joey-dry-in-the-storm had been a ghost or an illusion fostered by shock and loss of blood..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.".The sill was about four and a half feet off the lavatory floor. With both hands, Junior levered himself onto it..As if vengeful spirits weren't trouble enough, he had for three years been struggling unwittingly against the terrible power of the minister's curse, black Baptist voodoo that made his life miserable. He knew now why he had been plagued by violent nervous emesis, by epic diarrhea, by hideously disfiguring hives. The failure to find a heart mate, the humiliation with Renee Vivi, the two nasty cases of gonorrhoea, the disastrous meditative catatonia, the inability to learn French and German, his loneliness, his emptiness, his thwarted attempts to find and kill the bastard boy born of Phimie's womb: All these things and more, much more, were the hateful consequences of the vicious, vindictive voodoo of that hypocritical Christian. As a highly self-improved, fully evolved, committed man who was comfortable with his raw instincts, Junior should be sailing through life on calm seas, under perpetually sunny sides, with his sails always full of wind, but instead he was constantly cruelly battered and storm-tossed through an unrelenting night, not because of any shortcomings of mind or heart, or character, but because of black magic..The air was spicy with incense and with the fragrance of the lemon oil polish used on the wooden pews..They were inseparable, her son and this cherished girl, as they had been virtually since the moment they had met, more than six years ago. The special perception that they shared--all the ways things are-accounted for part of their closeness, but only part. The bond between them was so deep that it defied understanding, as mysterious as the concept of the Trinity, three gods in one..even allow himself as much as a lascivious wink or a quick caress of Victoria's hand..As she commented on each masterpiece, Frieda grew steadily less coherent. She had drunk a few cocktails, the better part of a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon, and two after-dinner brandies..During the following ten days, he withdrew money from several accounts. He converted selected paper assets into cash, as well..HAVING COMPLETED HER English lesson, Maria Elena Gonzalez went home with a plastic shopping bag full of precisely damaged clothes and a smaller, paper bag containing cherry muffins for her two girls..Apparently, he'd been drooling for a long time. Where his chin and throat were not sticky, a crust of dried saliva glazed his skin..Spacious, the living room was furnished for two purposes: as a parlor in which to receive visiting friends, but also with two beds, because here Paul and Perri slept every night..Two soft-boiled eggs, one slice of bread neither toasted nor buttered, a glass of apple juice, and a dish of orange.mouth was turned down in half a frown. From the corner of her lips oozed a stream.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.."Your father denies the rape ever occurred, apparently out of what I'd call a misguided willingness to trust in divine justice." Agnes was not fully aware of how she was lifted from the car, but she remembered looking back and seeing Joey's body huddled in the tangled shadows of the wreckage, remembered reaching toward him, desperate for the anchorage that he had always given her, and then she was on the gurney and moving..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..But she knew. Barty, buoyant as ever, seemed not to be much worried about the problem with his vision. He appeared to expect that it would pass like any sneezing fit or cold..pending storm gathered as if called forth by a curse cooked up from eye of newt, toe of frog, wool of bat, and tongue of dog..Alone, Junior sat in the breakfast nook with a pot of coffee and an entire Sara Lee chocolate fudge cake.."That wasn't gossip," Grace insisted. "I was just telling you that Paul got the swing repaired and rehung.".Hisscus, Nork, and Knacker exchanged sharp glances, nonplussed. Finally, one of them said, "We couldn't do that, Mr. Cain. Not until you've consulted an attorney.".In the living room, the central and largest window framed a magnificent view, and swagged silk brocatelle draperies framed the window. An oversize hand-painted and heavily gilded chaise lounge, upholstered in an exquisite tapestry, stood against this backdrop of city and silk, and Renee pulled Junior down upon the chaise, desperate to be ravished there..Celestina hadn't noticed the infant being taken away. She had wanted to see it once more, even though she was sickened by the sight of it..Because this kind of fictional fact, like maps of imaginary realms, is of real interest to some readers, I include the description after the stories. I also redrew the geographical maps for this book, and while doing so, happily discovered a very old one in the Archives in Havnor..Dinner arrived, and Tom persuaded Celestina and Grace to come to the table for Angel's sake, even if they had no appetite. After so much chaos and confusion, the child needed stability and routine wherever they could be provided. Nothing brought a sense of order and normality to a disordered and distressing day more surely than the gathering of family and friends around a dinner table..Barty's reading and writing skills appeared to be related to his talent for math, as well. To him, language was first phonics, a sort of music that symbolized objects and ideas, and this music was then translated into written "syllables using the alphabet-which he saw as a system of math employing twenty-six digits instead of ten.."Poker." Keeping his hands high, like a penitent confessing sin at a revival meeting and asking God to wash him clean, Obadiah

said, "My specialty was close-up magic. Oh, I pulled a rabbit out of a hat more than once, silk scarves from thin air, doves from silk scarves. But close was my love. Coins, but mostly ... cards." The reception still roared in both showrooms of the gallery. Legions of the uncultured, taste-challenged in every regard except in their appreciation for hors d'oeuvres, yammered about art and chased their cloddish opinions with mediocre champagne. His inner turmoil boiled ever more fiercely, and the external evidence of it grew more obvious. In the cool air of the fading afternoon, he perspired as profusely as a man already being strapped into an electric chair; it streamed, gushed. He shook, shook, and he was half convinced that he could hear his bones rattling together like the shells of hard-boiled eggs in a rolling cook pot. Junior's throat wasn't half as sore as it had been the previous afternoon, and to these men, his soft, coarse voice must have sounded not abraded, but raw with emotion. "I don't care what's customary. I don't want anything. I don't blame anyone. These things happen. If you have a liability release with you, I'll sign it right now." Granted that he was only three going on four, nevertheless Barty had never met anyone with as much cheerful imagination as Angel. He intended to marry her in, oh, maybe twenty years. Clearly, the musician recognized him, which seemed unlikely, even extraordinary, considering that they'd never spoken to each other, and considering that Junior must be only one of thousands of customers who had passed through that lounge in the past three years.

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