"More than remorse," the magician said. "Shame. I come from good people. I wasn't raised to be a cheat. Sometimes, trying to figure how I went wrong, I think it wasn't the need for money that ruined me. At least not that alone, not even that primarily. It was pride in my skill with the cards, frustrated pride because I wasn't getting enough nightclub work to show off as much as I wanted to."

He was able to play peekaboo in his fifth month instead of his eighth, stand while holding on to something in his sixth instead of eighth... Waking from a starry night in the Old West into electric light, gazing up into a blur of faces sans cowboy hats, Agnes felt someone moving a piece of ice in slow circles over her bare abdomen. Shivering as the cold water trickled down her sides, she tried to ask them why they were applying ice when she was already chilled to the bone, but she couldn't find her voice... He let go of the girl's chin, and at once she scrunched into the corner of the window seat, as far away from him as she could get. The knowing look in her eye wasn't that of an ordinary child, not that of a child at all. Not his imagination, either. Terror, yes, but also defiance, and this knowing expression, as though she could see right through him, knew things about him that she had no way of knowing... holding hands as they watched John Wayne in The Searchers, David Niven in Around the World in 80 Days. They were so young then, sure they would live forever, and they were still young now, but for one of them, forever had arrived... For each of them, Agnes put one scoop of vanilla ice cream in a tall glass of root beer, and after changing quickly into their pajamas, they sat together in Barty's bed, enjoying their treats, while she read aloud the last sixty pages of Starman Jones... Requests for permission to make copies of any part of the work should be mailed to the following address: "April 23, 1940, Natchez, Mississippi, dance-hall fire-one hundred ninety-eight dead. December 7, 1946, Atlanta, Georgia, the Winecoff Hotel fire-one hundred nineteen dead." "It doesn't have to be grand," she said, with a seductive leer, "but if we're going to wait, then the wedding better be soon." Otter shook his head. "Harsh... though he were people, 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... Paul couldn't remember when he began to love her. Not at first sight. But before she contracted polio. Love came gradually, and by the time it flowered, its roots were deep... Raising one hand, wiggling the fingers, he said, "Toes, toes, toes, toes, toes." "Guilt," said the detective. "If he killed her, wouldn't an overwhelming sense of guilt be as likely as anguish to cause acute nervous emesis?" "Dear Lord, how she loved her sugarpie, her little M&M. Three years had passed in what seemed like a month, and although there had been stress and struggle, too few hours in every day, less time for her art than she would have liked, and little or no time for herself, she wouldn't have traded being blindsided by motherhood for any amount of wealth, not for anything in the world... except to have Phimie back. Angel was the moon, the sun, the stars, and all the comets streaking through infinite galaxies: an ever-shining light... 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... "At home," Otter said. "It wasn't a lie. He did have a pouch at home. He kept his fine-work tools and his bubble level in it. And he wasn't altogether lying about the wind. Several times he had managed to bring a bit of magewind into the sail of a boat, though he had no idea how to combat or control a storm, as a ship's weatherworker must do. But he thought he'd rather drown in a gale than be murdered in this hole... Extending his hand, watching the pianist closely, Junior said, "My name's Richard Gammoner."

In that slow, flat delivery with which Junior was becoming increasingly impatient, Detective Vanadium said, "We all were, Doctor. It was another election year, remember? More than once during that campaign, I could've chugged icepcap. What else would work if I wanted to have a good vomiit?" The ship of night floated over the city and cast down nets of darkness, gathering millions of lights like luminous fishes in its black toils... Adoption records would have been kept as secret from Celestina as from everyone else. But perhaps she knew something about the fate of her sister's bastard son that Junior didn't know, a small detail that would seem insignificant to her but that might put him on the right trail at last... Celestina was better equipped to embrace this transcendental experience for what it appeared to be. She was not one of those artists who celebrated chaos and disorder, or who found inspiration in pessimism and despair. Wherever her eyes came to rest, she saw order, purpose, exquisite design, and either the pale flicker or the fierce blaze of a humbling beauty. She perceived the uncanny not merely in old houses where ghosts were said to roam or in eerie experiences like the one Lipscomb had described, but every day in the pattern of a tree's branches, in the rapturous play of a dog with a tennis ball, in the white whirling currents of a snowstorm-in every aspect of the natural world in which insoluble mystery was as fundamental a component as light and darkness, as matter and energy, as time and space... Junior's heart knocked so hard and fast that he wouldn't have been surprised if Vanadium, at the far end of the room, had begun to tap his foot in time with it... During the past week, Junior had undertaken quiet background research on the prestidigitator with a badge. The cop was unmarried. He lived alone, so this bold visit entailed no risk... Junior knew that he must remain vigilant. "Who is this?" he demanded, although for a demand, the words came out too thin, too squeaky... Hesitantly, the ivory tickler shook hands. "I'm... uh... I'm Ned Gnathic. Everyone calls me Neddy."

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Amused, Wally said, "You artists do love to dramatize—or have I forgotten the San Francisco blizzard of '65?" "After the quake," Edom said, "forty thousand Ned Gnathic. Everyone calls me Neddy."

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Amused, Wally said, "You artists do love to dramatize—or have I forgotten the San Francisco blizzard of '65?" "After the quake," Edom said, "forty thousand people took refuge in a two-hundred-acre open area, a military depot. A quake-related fire swept through so fast they were killed standing up, so tightly packed together they died as a solid mass of bodies." "No. Ridiculous. Naomi wasn't slumped across him. He wasn't sharing his bed with a corpse. That was E.C. Comics stuff, something from a yellowed issue of Tales from the Crypt... As the nurse gave Junior the injection, Parkhurst said, "You're an exceptionally sensitive man, Enoch. That's a quality to be much admired in an often unfeeling world. But in your current condition,
your sensitivity is your worst enemy." Over potato soup and an asparagus salad, the dinner conversation got off to a promising start: a discussion of favorite potato dishes, observations on the weather, talk of Mexico at Christmas...surreptitiously with Junior. He was accustomed to being an object of desire. This night, however, the only lady he cared about was San Francisco herself, and he wanted to be alone with her...Finding nothing more of interest in the study, he considered searching the rest of the house..."Be quiet, sugarpie," she said, crossing the bedroom to the door, which stood only slightly ajar..."I'll never forget it," Dr. Salk promised. With his attention still on Perri's pictures, he said, "But I'm afraid you give me far too much credit. I'm no superman. I didn't do the work alone. So many dedicated people were involved." And after Phimie was gone...he still hoped to learn the rapist's name, put him in prison. But then something changed his mind...oh, maybe two years ago. Suddenly, he wanted to let it go, leave judgment to God. He said if the rapist was as twisted as Phimie claimed, then Angel and I might be in danger if we ever learned a name and went to the police. Don't stir a hornet's nest, let sleeping dogs lie, and all that. I don't know what changed his mind."..."Will I love you tomorrow, you mean, and the day after tomorrow, and on forever? Of course, forever, Wally, always."Fortifying herself with more coffee, Jolene said, "Edom, you were going to tell us how Joey's coping with fatherhood." After the detective returned the box to the nightstand, the coin began to turn again. It occurred to her that the knave had come, as foretold by the cards on that night long ago. She had expected the knave to be a man with sharp eyes and a wicked heart, but the curse was cancer and not a man at all. He used the kitchen phone, at the corner secretary. The blood had been cleaned up long ago, of course, and the minor damage from the ricocheting bullet had been repaired. This was tedious work and might cost bear fruit. He needed to begin somewhere, however, and the telephone directory was the most logical starting point..."I'm a less philosophical sort than Kathleen," Nolly said, "so what I've been wondering is where you learned the tricks with the quarter. How is it you're priest, cop-and amateur magician?" Gradually, Agnes realized that this was not a prayer for the soul of a deceased infant but for the survival of one still alive...Mary was at play here, and the sight of her, his first in seven years, almost brought Barty to his knees. She was the image of her mother, and he knew that this must be at least a little bit what Angel had looked like when, at three, she had initially arrived here in 1968, when she explored the kitchen on that first day and found the toaster under a sock. ISBN 0-15-100561-3 I. Fantasy fiction, American, [I. Fantasy. 2. Short stories.] I. Title...Junior wanted to shoot all of them, but he said, "Take it. Keep it. Get it the hell out of here." 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...In the three years since Perri's death, he had walked thousands of miles. He hadn't kept a record of the cumulative distance, because he wasn't trying to get into Guinness or to prove anything..."I'm not sad," Tom said, "because though I have this face here in this world, I know there's another me-in fact, lots of other Tom Vanadiums-who don't have this face at all. Somewhere I'm doing just fine, thank you." When she went upstairs at 2:10 in the morning, she found the boy fast asleep in the soft lamplight, Tunnel in the Sky at his side...Although their apartments were above the garage, back to back, each was served by a separate exterior staircase. As often as either man entered the other's domain, they might as well have lived hundreds of miles apart...Celestina threw down the weapon even before she turned, and as two cops entered the room, she cried, "He's getting away!"...Wednesday, with a swiftness that confirmed its eagerness to make a deal, the state supplied records on the fire tower. For five years, a significant portion of the maintenance funds had been diverted by bureaucrats to other uses. And for three years, the responsible maintenance supervisor filed an annual report on this specific tower, requesting immediate funds for fundamental reconstruction; the third of these documents, submitted eleven months prior to Naomi's fall, was composed in crisis language and stamped urgent...Angel was lying on a towel on the convertible sofa, where Grace had just changed her diaper...If they were suspicious of him, they showed no obvious alarm. The three went inside in no particular rush, and judging by their demeanor, Junior decided that they hadn't spotted him, after all...She slammed it shut before he could stop her, whether he had intended to stop her or not, and she engaged the deadbolt lock..."Cancer," he said, because that was more tragic and far less suspicious than a fall from a fire tower...The girl was creepy, no doubt about it, and Junior felt now precisely as he had felt on the night of Celestina's exhibition at the Greenbaum Gallery, when he had come out of the alleyway after disposing of Neddy Gaithic in the Dumpster and had checked his watch only to discover his bare wrist. He was missing something here, too, but it wasn't merely a Rolex, wasn't a thing at all, but an insight, a profound truth...He was, admittedly, surprised that Nurse Bressler was strongly compelled to come on to him even though she had read his patient file and knew that he'd recently been a veritable geyser of noxious spew, that during the violent seizure in the ambulance, he had also lost control of bladder and bowels, and that he might at any moment suffer an explosive relapse. This was a remarkable testament to the animal lust he inspired even without trying, to the powerful male magnetism that was as much a part of him as his thick blond hair...In the morning, after Agnes showered and dressed, when she went downstairs, she discovered Barty already at the kitchen table, eating a bowl of cereal while riveted to the book. Finished with breakfast, he returned to his room, reading as he went...Agnes drew him into her arms and lifted him off the desk and embraced him tightly, with his head on her shoulder and his face nestled against her neck, as she held him when he was a baby...What the commodifiers of fantasy count on and exploit is the insuperable imagination of the reader, child or adult, which gives even these dead things life-of a sort, for a while...Whether the cop was unhinged or not, Junior had nothing to gain by talking to him, especially in this disorienting darkness. He was exhausted, achy, with a sore throat, and he couldn't trust himself to be as...As quick as a snake strikes, Vanadium was much closer to the bed than he had been when he tossed the coin, at Junior's side now, leaning over the railing. "Naomi was...
six weeks pregnant."."Yes. In syrup form. It's a good item for your home medicine chest, in case your child ever swallows poison and you need to purge it from him quickly.".Allowing one month for the job might be optimistic. On the other hand, he'd had a long time to perfect a strategy." And maybe," said Agnes, caught up in the speculation, "when your life comes to an end in all those many branches, what you're finally judged on is the shape and the beauty of the tree."Magically, a shiny quarter appeared in Thomas Vanadium's right hand. It turned end over end, knuckle to knuckle, disappeared between thumb and forefinger, and reappeared at the little finger, beginning its cross-hand journey once more...Even as this news pleased Junior, it also saddened him. He was not merely interring a lovely wife, but also his first child. He was burying his family..."Just now." Although Angel tried to sound nonchalant, she was trembling. "I'm not sure I can do it again.".Agnes met them, pulling Grace and Angel to her side. Her eyes were bright with excitement. "Tom, you're a man of faith, even if you've sometimes been troubled in it. Tell me what you make of all this."The presence of the brochure disturbed Vanadium also because he assumed that after being dead-ended by Nolly, Cain had subsequently discovered that Celestina had taken custody of the baby to raise it as her own. For some reason, the nine-toed wonder originally believed the child was a boy, but if he'd tracked down Celestina, he now knew the truth."Some men," she said, "wouldn't be able to sustain desire when their hands touched my back. I'll understand if you're one of them. It's not beautiful to the eye, and rough as oak bark to the touch. That's why I brought you here, so you'd know this before you consider where you want to go from... where we are now."So smoothly did the waiter move, that three martinis on a cordlined mahogany tray seemed to float across the room in front of him and then hover beside their table while he served the cocktails to the lady first, the guest second, and the host third..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.."The gowny, one wheel rattling. The young orderly behind it, dressed all in white. And the nurse again."Great guy. Do you have an address for her, a way maybe I could get in touch about her brother?".With Barty's presence, Christmas Eve had become even more agreeable, especially this year when he was almost-three-going-on-twenty. He talked about the visits to friends that he and his mother and Edom had made earlier in the day, about Father Brown, as if that cleric-detective were real, about the puddle-jumping toads that had been singing in the backyard when he and his mother had arrived home from the cemetery, and his chatty was engaging because it was full of a child's charm yet peppered with enough precocious observations to make it of interest to adults..Maybe the watch wouldn't be discovered with the corpse. Maybe it would settle into the trash and not be found until archaeologists dug out the landfill two thousand years from now...Monitoring Barty from the comer of-she eye, Agnes paced herself to the strides of his short legs, so she was drenched and chilled when she reached the station wagon...Instinctively, he knew he should not give massages to Negroes. He sensed that somehow he would be physically or morally polluted by this contact...Such quiet filled the house that Agnes couldn't hear even the murmuring miseries of the past."A friend's daughter. They say she died in a traffic accident down in San Francisco. She was even younger than Naomi."And when she finally looked directly at him, blinked at him, her lashes flicking off a spray of fine droplets, Agnes saw that Barty was dry. Not a single jewel of rain glistened in his thick dark hair or on the baby-smooth planes of his face. His shirt and sweater were as dry as if they had just been taken off a hanger and from a dresser drawer. A few drops darkened the legs of the boy's khaki pants--but Agnes realized this was water that had dripped from her arm as she'd reached across him to adjust the vent."Really? You really think that?" he asked in his flat voice, which he sometimes wished were more musical, but which he knew lent a sober conviction to anything he said. "You think something so delicious could come from a fat, smelly, dirty, snorting old pig?".At last he said, "And there he is, hands in front of his face, quarters bouncing off him, these kids and this old lady scrambling around him to snare some change."."Loved her? Of course I loved her. Naomi was beautiful and so kind ... and funny. She was the best ... the best thing that ever happened to me."."For more than twenty-three years, he'd given his big toe little consideration, had taken it for granted, had treated it with shameful neglect. Now this lower digit seemed precious, a comparatively small fixture of flesh, but as important to his image of himself as his nose or either of his eyes..Grace and Celestina fell at once into the rhythms of kitchen work, not only brewing the coffee, but also helping Agnes with the pies...Two staff members were at the front desk, when last he'd seen them, out of sight now and too far away to hear the crooning. Junior had been waiting at the doors when the library opened, and thus far he'd encountered no other patrons...This surprised him. Of course, Oregon was not the Deep South. It was a progressive state. Nevertheless, he was surprised. Oregon wasn't home to many Negroes, either, a handful compared to those in other states, and yet until now Junior supposed that they had their own cemeteries.."Maria's hand tamed, the card turned, and another knave of spades revolved into view, snapped against the table.."A friend's daughter. They say she died in a traffic accident down in San Francisco. She was even younger than Naomi.".And when she finally looked directly at him, blinked at him, her lashes flicking off a spray of fine droplets, Agnes saw that Barty was dry. Not a single jewel of rain glistened in his thick dark hair or on the baby-smooth planes of his face. His shirt and sweater were as dry as if they had just been taken off a hanger and from a dresser drawer. 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subconscious level. Yeah, right.. Weird, this kid. Making him uneasy. All in white, with her incomprehensible yammering about talking books and talking dogs and her mother driving pies, and working on a damn strange drawing for a little girl. Victoria lived on the northeast edge of Spruce Hills, where streets petersed into country lanes. Here the houses tended to be more rustic, built on larger and less formally landscaped lots than those closer to the center of town, and set back farther from the street.. A nuclear-powered sound system blasted out the Doors, Jefferson Airplane, the Mamas and the Papas, Strawberry Alarm Clock, Country Joe and the Fish, the Lovin' Spoonful, Donovan (unfortunately), the Rolling Stones (annoyingly), and the Beatles (infuriatingly). Megatons of music crashed off the brick walls, made the many-paned metal framed windows reverberate like the drumheads in a hard-marching military band, and created simultaneously an exhilarating sense of possibility and a sense of doom, the feeling that Armageddon was coming soon but that it was going to be fun.. "Oh, that's me, all right. I'm on the FBI's most-wanted list for criminal pie jostling.".. Frantically, he squirmed around on the floor until he was facing the entrance to the kitchen. Through tears of pain, he expected to see a Frankensteianish shadow loom in the hall, and then the creature itself, gnashing its fork-tine teeth, its corkscrew nipples spinning.. the grass, silent because he is barely conscious, too badly beaten to protest or to plead for mercy, but also. In a sudden desperate burst of action, Junior tore at the dead man's closed lids, 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. "No member of the society ever violates a secret confidence," Agnes assured him.. Instead of staring at Barty directly, he watched Angel as she studied the eyeless boy. She exhibited no horror at the concave slackness of his closed lids, and when one lid fluttered up to reveal the dark hollow socket, she hadn't shown any revulsion. Now she moved closer to Barty's chair, and when she touched his cheek, just below his missing left eye, the boy didn't flinch in surprise. He closed his eyes again and seemed asleep, but then as she clicked off the lamp, he murmured, "You have your halo again." Agnes prepared a dinner to indulge him: hot dogs with cheese, potato chips. Root beer instead of milk. She worried that there would be argument with, and though she knew that she was committed to her decision, she was afraid to have that commitment tested just yet.. He snatched up the wine list before she could look at it. "If you're paying, then I'm ordering whatever costs the most, regardless of what it tastes like." People were at the car windows, struggling to open the buckled doors, but Agnes refused to acknowledge them.. Now Barty peered at the card, smacked his lips, smiled, and said, "Ga." With a flatulent squawk of the butt trumpet, he soiled his diaper. She lay beside her boy in the darkness, gazing at the covered window, where the faint glow of the moon pressed through the blind, suggesting another world thriving with strange life just beyond the thin membrane of light. Shaking his head, his coffee cup rattling against the saucer, Edom said, "Uh, no, sir, no, I don't think we've ever met till now." The hospital room was softly lighted, and shadows roosted on all sides like a flock of slumbering birds.. To the first. Kick the door open, simultaneously firing two rounds, because maybe this was her bedroom, where she kept a gun. Mirrors shattered: a tintinnabulation of falling glass on porcelain, glass on ceramic tile, a lot more noise than the shots themselves.. After examining Barty, Dr. Schurr sent them to the hospital for further tests. There they spent the rest of the day, except for an hour break during which they ate lunch in a burger joint. "Yes, I'm nicely rounding myself into an early grave," he said almost cheerfully. "And I must admit to enjoying it.".. The day before Christmas, along the California coast. Although sun gilded the morning, clouds gathered in the afternoon, but no snow would ease sled runners across these roofs. "The doctors," he continued, "needed to repair damage to the left frontal sinus, the sphenoidal sinus, and the sinus cavernous, which had all been partially crushed by that pewter candlestick. Frontal, malar, ethmoid, maxillary, sphenoid, and palatine bones had to be rebuilt to properly contain my right eye, because it sort of... well, it dangled. That was just for starters, and there was considerable essential dental work, as well. I elected not to have any cosmetic surgery.".. Darkness, the one source of childhood fear that most adults never quite outgrow, held no terror for Barty. Although for a while his bedroom featured a Mickey Mouse night-light, the miniature lamp was there not to soothe the boy, but to quiet his mother's nerves, because she worried about him waking alone, in blackness.. He pushed on the door, but still it resisted, and he surprised himself by letting out a bellow of frustration that expressed quite the opposite of self-control, though no one listening could have the slightest doubt about his determination to commit and command. Worse, the veneful and vicious bitch-or bastard, whatever-evidently had made up vile stories about him, which on a slow evening she'd shared with Neddy, with the bartender, with anyone who would listen. The staff of the lounge believed Junior was a dangerous sadist, No doubt she had concocted other lurid stories, as well, charging him with everything from a degenerate interest in bodily wastes to the selfmutilation of his genitalia. Great anger was apparent in the way that the uneven, red block letters had been drawn on the wall in hard slashes. But the lettering looked like the work of a calm and rational mind compared to what had been done after the three Bartholomews were printed..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. Junior felt a little lightheaded. He felt strange. He hoped he wasn't coming down with the flu.. "To support my eyelids. And because without anything in the sockets, I look gross. People barf. Old ladies pass out. Little girls like you Pee their pants and run screaming.".. MONDAY EVENING. January 15, Paul Damascus arrived at the hotel in San Francisco with Grace White. He had kept watch over her in Spruce Hills for more than two days, sleeping on the floor in the hall outside her room both nights, remaining close by her side when she was in public. They stayed
with friends of hers until Harrison's funeral this morning, then flew south for a reunion of mother and daughter. Junior would have liked to pursue spiritual matters with Sklent, but numerous other partygoers 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 cooly asked for an opinion of Celestina White's paintings. I also wanted information on various things that had happened back then, before Ged and Tenar were born. A good deal about Earthsea, about wizards, about Roke Island, about dragons, had begun to puzzle me. In order to understand current events, I needed to do some historical research, to spend some time in the Archives of the Archipelago. Even on good days, when he wasn't hassled by the spirits of dead cops and wasn't prepping himself to commit murder, Junior sometimes grew uncomfortable in these bustling crowds. This afternoon, he felt especially claustrophobic as he shouldered through the throng-and admittedly paranoid, too. At sunset, the boy stood in the backyard, gazing up through the branches of the giant oak as an orange sky darkened to coral, to red, to purple, to indigo. "Your dad didn't just like Christmas, he loved Christmas. He started planning for it in June. If there wasn't already a Santa Claus, your father would have taken on the job."

Holding the mug in his right hand, Tom picked up the coin and rolled it across the knuckles of his left. Paul's quarter, after all. A two-bit temptation to panic. As gifted with physical grace as with good looks, Junior stepped into the bedroom doorway, lithely and with feline stealth. He leaned against the jamb.

Evidently, either Frank Sinatra was an enthusiasm that Victoria and the detective shared, or the nurse purchased some of the crooner's records expressly for their dinner engagement.

As the nurse slapped a bar of lye soap in Celestina's right hand, she turned on the water in the sink.

With a paper towel, Junior wiped the revolver. He dropped it on the floor beside the riddled nurse. "I'll come by at eight o'clock for breakfast," Wally suggested. "We have to set a date."

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