

## LITTLE LISA AND THE MATH SCORE

These past ten days had been the most difficult of her life, harder even than those following Joey's death. Back then, although she had lost a husband and a gentle lover and her best friend all at once, she'd had her undiminished faith, as well as her newborn son and all the promise of his future. She still had her precious boy, even though his future was to some extent blighted, and her faith remained with her, too, though diminished and offering less solace than before..She closed her eyes, and he thought that she was gone, but then she opened them again. "There is one place beyond all the ways things are." The first was an ace of hearts. This, Maria said, was a very good card, indeed. It meant that Barty would be lucky in love..RED SKY IN THE morning, sailors take warning; red sky at night, sailors delight..Maria looked stricken when she answered the doorbell, for she intuited that a visit, instead of a call, meant the worst..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.. "By the close of business tomorrow," said the lawyer, "I expect to have an offer for your consideration." One of the paramedics knelt beside the body, checking Naomi for a pulse, although in these circumstances, his action was such a formality that it was almost harebrained..Lord, help me here. Give me this one, just this one, and I'll follow thereafter where I'm led. I'll always thereafter be your instrument, but please, please, GIVE ME THIS CRAZY EVIL SON OF A BITCH!.To Edom, humanity was obviously not the greater of these two destructive forces. Men and women were part of nature, not above it, and their evil was, therefore, just one more example of nature's malignant intent. They had stopped debating this issue years ago, however, neither man conceding any credibility to the other's dogma..He hurried the length of the diner, pushing past waitresses, checking out all three of the possibilities, but of course, none of them was the dead detective--or anyone else Junior had ever seen before. He was looking for--what?--a ghost, but vengeful ghosts didn't sit down to a meat-loaf lunch in the middle of a hauntin.Words eluded him again, and he surveyed the coffee shop, as if someone might step forward to speak for him. He realized people were staring, and embarrassment drew a tighter knot in his tongue..Junior found the acclaim gratifying, but the widespread use of his photograph was a high price to pay even for the recognition of his contribution to art. Fortunately, with his bald head and pocked face, he no longer resembled the Enoch Cain for whom the authorities were searching. And they believed that the bandages on his face, at the church, had been merely an exotic disguise. One psychologist even speculated that the bandages had been an expression of the guilt and shame he felt on a subconscious level. Yeah, right..To the windows, then, drawing all the blinds securely down. And still, irrationally, she felt watched..Round of face and round of body, Vinnie didn't walk like other men; he seemed to bounce lightly along, as if inflated with a mixture of gases that included enough helium to make him buoyant, though not so much that he was in danger of sailing up and away like a birthday balloon. His smooth cheeks and merry eyes left a boyish impression, but he was a good attorney, and shrewd..Glorying in the cloudless day and the warmer than usual weather, he drove seventy miles north, through phalanxes of evergreens that marched down the steep hills to the scenic coast. All the way, he monitored the traffic in his rearview mirror. No one followed him..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..Gore made him sick. He refused to attend movies that dwelt on the consequences of violence, and he had even less of a stomach for blood in real life..For breakfast, he avoided sugar. He ate cold roast beef and drank milk laced with a double shot of brandy..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 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." "What room has Mrs. Lombardi been moved to?" she asked. "I'd like to ... to see her before I go." Maria stopped praying with her knuckle rosary and resorted to a long swallow of wine..THE SUN ROSE above clouds, above fog, and with the gray day came a silver drizzle. The city was lanced by needles of rain, and filth drained from it, swelling the gutters with a poisonous flood..The tone sounded, as promised, and a man's voice spoke from the box: "It's Max. You're psychic. I found the hospital here. Poor kid had a cerebral hemorrhage, arising from a hyperensive crisis caused by ... eclampsia, I think it is. Baby survived. Call me, huh?".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.. "We do look somewhat alike," Edom said, shifting his attention to Jacob's left ear..Junior's attorney-Simon Magusson--insisted upon full disclosure of maintenance records and advisories relating to the fire tower and to other forest-service structures for which the state and the county had sole or joint custodial responsibility. If a wrongful--death suit was filed, this information would have to be divulged anyway during normal disclosure procedures prior to trial, and since maintenance logs and advisories were of public record, Hisscus and Knacker and Nork agreed to provide what was requested..Seeing her, Joey leaped up front his armchair again. He managed to hold on to his book this time, but he stumbled into the footstool and nearly lost his balance..The currents of irrational fear, which bring periodic turbulence to virtually every childhood, didn't disturb the smoothly flowing river of Barty's first three years. He showed no fear of the doctor or the dentist.. "I don't know anyone named Bartholomew." He decided that the truth, in this instance, could not harm him..Life was too short to waste it working if you had the means to afford lifelong leisure..Sometimes Angel seemed troubled by what she'd been told about her grandfather, and at those moments she appeared downcast, somber. But she was just three, after all, too young to grasp the permanence of death. She would probably not have been surprised if Harrison White had walked through the door in a little while, during

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. or The Lucy Show.. "It's a miracle both of you didn't go through that railing," the attorney agreed.. In addition to these scavengers, another presence was here, unseen but not unfelt. The chill of this invisible entity pierced Junior to the marrow: the stubborn, vicious, psychotic, prickly-bur spirit of Thomas Vanadium, maniac cop, not satisfied to haunt the house in which he'd died, not ready yet to seek reincarnation, but instead pursuing his beleaguered suspect even after death, capering--to paraphrase Sklent like an invisible, filthy, scabby monkey here on this city street, in bright daylight.. The glimmering bay and the shimmering amber candlelight provided the perfect atmosphere for the song that arose now from the piano in the bar.. First, Victoria Bressler was listed as one of his victims, although as far as he knew, the authorities still had every reason to attribute her murder to Vanadium.. Throughout this procedure, Barty appeared solemn and thoughtful. When he had squeezed the tenth toe, he stared at it, brow furrowed.. "Fifteen fifty-six?" Bill frowned. "Hell, the Chinese probably didn't even have mud back then..". tasteful hint of it was on display; nothing about this beauty could be called cheap.. Junior remembered the very words the detective had used: They say she died in a traffic accident.. In the neatly ordered bedroom, he removed his shoes. Stretching out on the bed, he stared at the ceiling, feeling useless.. Celestina smiled distractedly. Since arriving at the hotel an hour ago, she had been openly debating with herself whether to call her parents in Spruce Hills or to wait until later in the afternoon, when she might be able to report not just that she had a fianc?, and not only that she had a fianc? who'd been shot and nearly killed, but also that his condition had been upgraded from critical to serious. As she'd explained to Tom, in addition to worrying them with the news about Cain, she'd be stunning them with the announcement that she was going to marry a white man twice her age. "My folks don't have one ounce of prejudice between them, but they sure do have firm ideas about what's appropriate and what's not." This would ring the big bell at the top of the White Family Scale of the Inappropriate. Besides, they were preparing for the funeral of a parishioner, and from personal experience, Celestina knew their day would be full. Nevertheless, at ten minutes past eleven, after picking at her breakfast, she finally decided to call them.. When at last he spoke, real grief, quiet but profound, softened his voice: "March first, three years ago, my wife and two sons--Danny and Harry, both seven, twins--were coming home from visiting her parents in New York. Shortly after takeoff ... their plane went down..". Maria fished another chip from the sweating carafe, rejected it, and scooped out a larger piece. She hesitated, staring at it for a moment, and then spooned it between Agnes's lips. "Water can be broken if it will be first made into ice..". 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.. In a few instances, when his suspicions were aroused in spite of their denials, Junior tracked down their residences. He observed them in the flesh and made additional-and subtle-inquiries of their neighbors until he was satisfied that his quarry was elsewhere.. "Dr. Lipscomb delivered the baby like two minutes ago. The afterbirth hasn't even been removed yet," the nurse informed her.. Without ceremony or prayer, although with much righteous anger, Junior hoisted the dead musician over the lip of the Dumpster. For a dreadful moment, his left arm tangled in the loosely cinched belt of the London Fog raincoat. Straining a shrill bleat of anxiety through his clenched teeth, he desperately shook loose and let go of the body.. "It's an uncommon reaction," the physician acknowledged, "but not so uncommon as to be rare..". Four blocks from his office, on a street more upscale than his own, Nolly came to the Tollman Building. Built in the 1930s, it had an Art Deco flair. The public areas featured travertine floors, and a WPA-ers mural extolling the machine age brightened a lobby wall.. Looking toward the nearest window, where the wet night kissed the glass, he said, "Lawn sprinklers?". Through the cacophony of shattering glass, splintering wood, and cracking plaster, Paul heard the hard roar of an engine, the blare of a horn, and suspected what must have happened. Some drunk or reckless driver had crashed at high speed into the parsonage.. "That's not what they say," the boy replied with a giggle, for his extensive reading had introduced him to words that he and she agreed were not his to use.. Agnes rubbed noses with him again, kissed him, and rose from the edge of the bed.. For the first few bites of crab in a light cornmeal crust, Nolly suspended their conversation. Bliss.. All windows opening onto the fire escape featured a laminated sandwich of glass and steel-wire mesh to prevent easy access by burglars. Tom Vanadium knew all the tricks of the best B-and-E artists, but he didn't need to break in order to enter here.. was trying her best to ensure the health of the baby while still remaining slim enough to avoid suspicion.. Nolly liked to watch her hands while she worked. They were slim, graceful, the hands of an adolescent girl.. 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 gonorrhea, 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.. Carrying the brochure, Vanadium returned to the bathroom and switched on the overhead light. He stared at the slashed wall, at the name red and ravaged.. 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.. Junior knew that he looked as guilty as any man had ever looked this side of the first apple and the perfect garden. The sweating, the spasms of violent tremors, the defensive note that he could not keep out of his voice, the inability to look anyone directly in the eyes for more than a few seconds--all were telltales that none of these

professionals would overlook. He desperately needed to get a grip on himself, but he couldn't find a handle..Highly impressed by the spot-on hyena scream with which Frieda had purged herself of the childhood emotional trauma inflicted by an authoritarian grandmother, Junior asked her to go out with him..His dry tongue, his parched mouth, his desiccated throat felt packed fall of sand, and his voice lay buried alive down there..In retrospect, coming here wasn't a wise move. Evidently, the detective had been following him. Now, Vanadium would puzzle out a motive for this late-night graveyard tour..He felt lightheaded again. But this time he knew why. Not an oncoming case of the flu. He was straining against the cocoon of his life to date, straining to be born in a new and better form. He had been a pupa, encased in a chrysalis of fear and confusion, but now he was an imago, a fully evolved butterfly, because he had used the power of his beautiful rage to improve himself. When Bartholomew was dead, Junior Cain would at last spread his wings and fly.. "Bet I could, and sell it, too," she said. "I might not be as good at it as I am at teeth, but I'd be better than some I've read." "I'll always know your face," he promised. "Even if you have to go away and you're gone a hundred years, I'll remember what you looked like, how you felt."..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..Not once did he look back to see if the fire had grown visible as a glow against the night sky. The events at Victoria's were part of the past. He was finished with all that. Junior was a forward-thinking, future-oriented man..Reading the dates on the headstone, he saw that the minister's daughter had died on the seventh of January, the day after Naomi had fallen from the fire tower. If ever asked, Junior would have no trouble accounting for his whereabouts on that day..In the face of his kindness, however, she couldn't refuse his request. She nodded..White as a Viking winter, these magnificent choppers, and as straight as the kernel rows in the corn on Odin's high table. Superb occlusal surfaces. Exquisite incisor ledges. Bicuspids of textbook formation nestled in perfect alignment between molars and canines..Edom removed two of the pies from the table and put them on the counter near the ovens..Yes, she did, she had one, but not much of one, and compared to the McIntosh in Google's throat, this was just a bitty crab apple, easy to overlook, not excessive for a woman..Max hung up. The Ansaphone made a series of small robot-mouse noises and then fell silent..In a state of wonderment that was laced with dread rather than delight, he looked up from the quarter, seeking an explanation from Vanadium, expecting to see that anaconda smile..The quiet passion in Vanadium's voice was genuine, expressed with reason but not fervor, not in the least sentimental or unctuous-which made it more disturbing. "Vibrations in one string set up soft, sympathetic vibrations in all the other strings, through the entire body of the instrument."..Junior released Neddy and, letting him slide down the wall to the floor, returned to the door to lock it. Reaching for the latch, he suddenly expected the door to fly open, revealing Thomas Vanadium, dead and risen. The ghost didn't appear, but Junior was shaken by the mere thought of such a supernatural confrontation in the middle of this crisis..In the foyer, Hanna Rey and Nellie Oatis sat side by side on the stairs. Hanna, the housekeeper, was gray-haired and plump. Nellie, was Perri's daytime- companion, could have passed for Hanna's sister..Maybe he went a little crazy then. He wouldn't deny a brief, transient madness..Matching his mother's whisper, taking obvious delight in their conspiracy, he said, "Our own secret society."..Copyright (c) 1999 by Ursula K. Le Guin. "Dragonfly" first appeared in Legends..Without the pillow, she wouldn't have been able to lift her head to look toward the back of the ambulance..If Vanadium was watching, however, he would interpret the pitch of the coin to mean that his unconventional strategy was working, that Junior's nerves were frayed to the breaking point. With an adversary as indefatigable as this cuckoo cop, you dared never show weakness.. "No pie!" Agnes agreed. She parenthesized his head with her hands and punctuated his sweet face with kisses..As before, the name tolled through him like the ominous note of the deepest bass bell in a cathedral carillon, struck on a cold midnight..A quick survey of the lavatory floor. The musician hadn't left anything behind, neither a popped button nor crimson petals from his boutonniere..Licky took him down into the mines to show him the gangues, the kinds of earth the ore was likely to occur in. A few miners were working at the end of a long level..Angel didn't join the grieving women, but sat on the floor in front of the television, switching back and forth between Gunsmoke and The Monkees. Too young to be genuinely involved in either show, nevertheless she occasionally made gunfire sounds when Marshal Dillon went into battle or invented her own lyrics to sing along with the Monkees..Choking fumes, blinding soot. A licking heat told him that slithering fire had followed the smoke up the stairs and now coiled perilously close in the murk..Earlier, after sprinting down the fire road, he had been breathing hard when he reached his Chevy, and by the time that he'd raced to Spruce Hills, the nearest town, he had spiraled down into this strange condition. His driving became so erratic that a black-and-white had tried to pull him over, but by then he was a block from a hospital, and he didn't stop until he got there, taking the entry drive too sharply, jolting across the curb, nearly slamming into a parked car, sliding to a stop in a no-parking zone at the emergency entrance, lurching like a drunkard as he got out of the Chevy, screaming at the cop to get an ambulance..THOUGH OTHERS MIGHT see magic in the world, Edom was enthralled only by mechanism: the great destructive machine of nature grinding everything to dust. Yet wonder suddenly bloomed in him at the sight of the ace bearing his nephew's name..Onward he came, past the left front fender, gleefully hopping up and down, as if on a pogo stick, still waving..He hadn't killed this one, of course. A traffic accident. Wasn't that what Vanadium had said? Ten months ago, following tendon surgery for a leg injury, Seraphim had been an outpatient at the rehab hospital where Junior worked. She was scheduled for therapy three days a week..He ardently wished that he hadn't killed her with such merciful swiftness. If he'd tortured her first, he would now have the memory of her suffering from which to take

consolation..NED--"CALL ME NEDDY"--Gnathic was as slim as a flute, with a flute-quantity of holes in his head from which thought could escape before the pressure of it built into an unpleasant music within I his skull. His voice was always soft and harmonious, but frequently he spoke allegro, sometimes even prestissimo, and in spite of his mellow tone, Neddy at maximum tempo was as irritating to the ear as bagpipes bleating out Bolero, if such a thing were possible..Perched on a chair with two plump bed pillows to boost her, Angel extracted one crisp strip from her club sandwich and asked Tom, "Where's bacon come from?".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.."All right," Celestina conceded, and looked relieved. "Thank you, Paul. You're not only an exceptionally brave man but a gracious one, as well."In the sermon that brought him a moment of fame that he'd found more uncomfortable than not, Daddy had used the life of Bartholomew to illustrate his point that every day in every life is of the most profound importance. Bartholomew is arguably the most obscure of the twelve disciples. Some would say Lebbaeus is less known, some might even point to Thomas the doubter. But Bartholomew certainly casts a shadow far shorter than those of Peter, Matthew, James, John, and Philip. Daddy's purpose in proclaiming Bartholomew the most obscure of the twelve was then to imagine in vivid detail how that apostle's actions, seemingly of little consequence at the time, had resonated down through history, through hundreds of millions of lives-and then to assert that the life of each chambermaid listening to this sermon, the life of each car mechanic, each teacher, each truck driver, each waitress, each doctor, each janitor, was as important as the resonant life of Bartholomew, although each dwelt beyond the lamp of fame and labored without the applause of multitudes..Succinctly, Edom told Jacob about visiting Obadiah, the magician with the mangled hands. Then: "When we left, I followed Agnes, and Obadiah held me back to say, 'Your secret's safe with me.'".They had a few days for quiet celebration of this astonishing recovery of his sight, and in that time, she never tired of watching him read to her. He didn't think she even listened closely. It was the fact of him made whole that lifted her spirits so high as they were now, not any writer's words nor any story ever written..Reflecting upon her son's clever, diligent, and uncomplaining adaptation to darkness, she wished that she had described to him the dazzling sunset..under which they had made their journey home. Although her words might have been inadequate to the spectacle, he would have elaborated on them to create a picture in his mind; with his creative skills, the world that he'd lost with his sight might be remade in equal splendor in his imagination..He switched on his flashlight. In the beam, on the blacktop, a silver disc. Like a full moon in a night sky..Junior in the fog. Trying oh-so-hard to live in the future, where the winners live. But being relentlessly sucked back into the useless past by memory..The police. The stupid police. Ringing the bell when they knew he'd been shot. Ringing the damn doorbell when he lay here helpless, the Industrial Woman lurching toward him, his toe on the other side of the kitchen, ringing the doorbell when he was losing enough blood to give transfusions to an entire ward of wounded hemophiliacs. The stupid bastards were probably expecting him to serve tea and a plate of butter cookies, little paper doilies between each cup and saucer..He was a patriotic guy, and he preferred American rock to the British brand. He had nothing against the English, no prejudices against people of any nationality. Nevertheless, he believed that the American Top 40 ought to feature American music exclusively..One moment, girl and yellow vinyl ball. The next moment, gone as if they'd never been..As kids-living in a house that was run like a prison, stifled by the oppressive rule of a morose father who believed that any form of entertainment was an offense against God-they conducted secret card games as their primary act of rebellion. A deck of cards was small enough to hide quickly and to keep hidden successfully even during one of their father's painstakingly thorough room searches..The instant he flipped the coin, he opened both hands-palms up, fingers spread-with a distracting flourish..'A energy fighting over jurisdiction. We cooperate. The sheriff can de not to put a lot of his limited resources into this, and no one will blame him. He can call it an accident and close the case, and he won't.Agnes got out of bed, switched on the lamp, and tucked Barty in once more. "Say your silent prayers."I Junior didn't believe in ghosts, anyway. He believed in flesh and bone, stone and mortar, money and power, himself and the future..Reminding himself that nature was merely a dumb machine, utterly devoid of mystery, and that the unknown would always prove familiar if you dared to lift its veil, Junior discovered he could move. Each of his feet seemed to weigh as much as one of Wroth Griskin's cast bronzes, but he crossed the sidewalk an went into Galerie Coquin..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..He missed Naomi. She'd always known exactly the right thing to say or do, improving his mood with a few words or with just her touch, when he was feeling down..Posing as a counselor with Catholic Family Services, he phoned each listed Bartholomew, with a question related to his or her recent adoption. Those who expressed bafflement, and who claimed not to have adopted a child, were generally stricken from his list..The tenderness with which Grace acceded to Phimie's desire, at the expense of her own peace of mind, filled Celestina with emotion. She'd always admired and loved her mother to an extent that no words-or work of art-could adequately describe, but never more than now..He tucked his left arm tight against his side and threw himself against the door. The obstructing furniture was heavy, but it moved an inch. If it would give one inch, it would give two, so it wasn't immovable, and he was already as good as in there..ANGEL WAS DRESSED in as much red as the devil himself: bright red shoes, red socks, red leggings, red skirt, red sweater, and a knee length red coat with a red hood.."What are you strongest in?".She started toward the door, stopped, and turned to him in the dark. "Kid of mine?".He couldn't much longer take advantage of Paul Damascus's hospitality. Since bringing Wally to town, Tom had been staying in Paul's guest bedroom. He knew that he was welcome indefinitely, and the sense of family that he'd found with these people had only grown since January, but he nevertheless felt that he was imposing.."You're better at concentrative meditation without seed than anyone I've ever known, better than me. That's why you, especially,

should never undertake a long session unsupervised," Chicane scolded. "At the very least, the very least, you should use your electronic meditation timer. I don't see it here, do I?" Instinctively, he knew he should not give massages to Negroes. He sensed that somehow he would be physically or morally polluted by this contact.

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