

## **LOOSE LEAF FOR EMPLOYMENT LAW FOR BUSINESS**

Jolene started to refill his coffee mug-then thought better of it. "Maybe you don't need more caffeine, Edom." He switched off the flashlight and stood solemnly for a moment, paying his respects to Seraphim. She had been so sweet, so innocent, so supple, so exquisitely proportioned. He had difficulty picturing the detective pattering in the garden on weekends. Unless there were bodies buried under the roses. Barty set one other rule: "Without dying first ... and you have to be sure you can get back." Footsteps in the hall drew their attention to the open door, where the surgeon appeared in his loose cotton greens. efficiency of a nurse, but as a courtesan might perform the task: smiling enticingly, a flirtatious glimmer in. Maria looked stricken when she answered the doorbell, for she intuited that a visit, instead of a call, meant the worst. The missing paintings. The missing collection of Zedd's books. You didn't take these things with you for a weekend in Reno. You took them if you thought you might never be coming back. Worried that tears would frighten Barty, that indulging in a few would result in a ruinous flood, Agnes held back the salt tides. A mother's duty proved to be the stuff from which dams were built. On the sofa, Celestina finally worked up the courage to dial her parents' number in Spruce Hills. Nolly's gums were in great shape, too: firm, pink, no sign of recession, snug to the neck of each tooth. "Who else? I think there's romance in the air. The cow-eyed way he looks at her, she could knock his knees out from under him just by giving him a wink." In her campaign to keep her weight gain to a minimum, anorexia was her ally. She learned to find pleasure in hunger pangs. Instead, he sat in the breakfast nook with his phone books and resumed the grueling search for Bartholomew. With her brothers, she adjourned to the waiting room, where the three of them sat drinking vending-machine coffee, black, from paper cups. The funeral director and his assistant were the only people, other than Junior, remaining at the grave. They asked if they might lower the casket or if he would rather that they wait until he was gone. Nolly said, "We've never really had a song of our own, in spite of all the dancing we do. I think this is a good one. But so far, you've only sung it to another man." The front door was unlocked. This was no longer one house; it had been converted to an apartment building. "Here we are," said the driver, braking to a stop at the curb in front of the gallery. If the ace of diamonds, in quartet, must be taken seriously, then why not the rest of the draw? Agnes supposed Jacob trembled in anticipation of the crash of an airliner or at least a light aircraft. Edom might be calculating the odds that this serene place-at this specific hour-would be the impact point for one of those planet-killing asteroids that reputedly wiped most life off the earth every few hundred thousand years or so. where everyone spoke a single language and had all the blueberry pies they needed. Alone, Junior sat in the breakfast nook with a pot of coffee and an entire Sara Lee chocolate fudge cake. The corroded casement-operating mechanism began to give way, as did the hinges, and the window sagged outward. Carrying the candlestick, he raced to the kitchen at the end of the short hall. The door stood open, but he had to enter the room to see Victoria slumped in one of the two chairs at the small dinette. Later, as Bonita and Francesca proudly served their mother's individually molded Christmas-tree-shaped servings of flan, which they themselves had plated, Barty leaned close to his mother and, pointing to the table in front of them, said softly but excitedly, "Look at the rainbows!" "You don't get the heebie-jeebies," Max said. "You give 'em. Tell me what's wrong." The musician's behavior required explanation. After wending through the crowd, Junior located the man in front of a painting so egregiously beautiful that any connoisseur of real art could hardly resist the urge to slash the canvas to ribbons. Everywhere in the fabled city, calves and knees and magnificent expanses of taut thighs were on display. This brought out the dreamy romantic in Junior, and more than ever he yearned desperately for the perfect woman, the ideal lover, the matching half of his incomplete heart. Knickknacks and mementos were not to be found anywhere in the house. And until now Junior had seen nothing hanging on the barren walls except a calendar in the kitchen. Using a three-step folding stool, he was able to get near enough to one of the vent plates in the living room to determine whether it might be the source of the song. just then the singing stopped. 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. "I know how to build boats, how to sail boats." Later, weak and shaken, as he was packing his suitcase, the urge overcame him again. He was astonished to discover that anything could be left in his intestinal tract. She thought of herself as a creative person, a capable and efficient and committed person, but she did not think of herself as a strong person. Yet she would need great strength for what lay ahead. Celestina stared curiously at Tom Vanadium. She had witnessed the effect of vanishment, though she hadn't actually seen the coin disappear in midair. Yet she seemed to sense either that something more than sleight of hand had just transpired or that the trick had a meaning she'd missed. Sobbing desperately, he dropped the telephone handset on the secretary, seized the dishtowel. He wrapped the cloth tightly around the shattered stump, applying pressure to diminish the bleeding. "From 1604 through 1610, Erzebet Bathory, sister of the Polish king, with the assistance of her servants, tortured and killed six hundred girls. She bit them, drank their blood, tore their faces off with tongs, mutilated their private parts, and mocked their screams." of the deceased. This memorial was modest, neither large nor complicated in design. Nevertheless, often the carvers in this line of business followed days after the morticians, because the stones to which they applied their craft demanded more labor and less urgency than the cold bodies that rested under them. Rhythmic breathing. Slow and deep. Slow and deep. Per Zedd, the route to tranquility is through the lungs. Oblivious that she and Barty had become the center of attention, Angel said, "Does he ever get the quarters back?" Havnor Great Port is the city at the heart of the world, white-towered above its bay; on the tallest tower the sword of Erreth-Akbe catches the first and last of daylight. Through that city passes all the trade and commerce and learning and craft of Earthsea, a wealth not hoarded. There the King sits, having returned

after the healing of the Ring, in sign of healing. And in that city, in these latter days, men and women of the islands speak with dragons, in sign of change..He bought knives. And then sheaths for the knives. He acquired a knife-sharpening kit and spent the evening grinding blades..Sklent came to mind, perhaps because of the strange drawing on the girl's sketch pad. Sklent at that Christmas Eve party, only a few months ago but a lifetime away. The theory of spiritual afterlife without a need for God. Prickly-bur spirits. Some hang around, haunting out of sheer mean stubbornness. Some fade away. Others reincarnate..Shortly past nine o'clock, an hour after Edom and Jacob had gone, Barty came downstairs, book in hand. "The twisties are back." "From childhood, I've had this ... awareness, this perception of an infinitely more complex reality than what my five basic senses reveal. A psychic claims to predict the future. I'm not a psychic. Whatever I am ... I'm able to feel a lot of the other possibilities inherent in any situation, to know they exist simultaneously with my reality, side by side, each world as real as mine. In my bones, in my blood-".Paul checked the back of the Suburban, since he fancied himself the wagonmaster. He wanted to be sure that the goods were loaded in such a way that they were unlikely to slide or be damaged. "Packed tight. Looks just fine," he declared, and closed the tailgate door..Admitting to the likelihood that he would never again devote himself seriously to his business, Paul sold it to Jim Kessel, long his good right hand and fellow pharmacist..Shopping for fashion accessories relaxed Junior. He spent a few hours browsing for tie chains, silk pocket squares, and unusual belts. Riding the up escalator in a department store, between the second and..Junior had made a mistake when he smashed the pewter stick into Vanadium's face after the cop was already unconscious. He should have bound the bastard and attempted to revive him for interrogation..He shouldered past two counter waitresses, past the short-order cook who was working eggs and burgers and bacon on the open griddle and grill. Whatever expression wrenched Junior's face, it must have been intimidating, for without protest but with walleyed alarm, the employees squeezed aside to let him pass.. "When the Iroquois Theater in Chicago burned on December 30, 1903" he said aloud, testing his memory, "during a matinee of Mr Blue Beard, six hundred two people perished, mostly women and children." Agnes saw no arc of color from candle to candle, and she thought that he must mean for her to look at the many cut-crystal wineglasses and water glasses, in which the lambent flames were mirrored. Here and there, the prismatic effect of the crystal rendered reflections of the flames into red-orange-yellow-green-blue-indigo-violet spectrums that danced along beveled edges..They were in the rain, the solid-glassy-pounding-roaring rain, every bit as much as Gene Kelly had been when he danced and sang and capered along a storm-soaked city street in that movie, but whereas the actor had been saturated by the end of the number, these two children remained dry. Tom's eyes strained to resolve this paradox, even though he knew that all miracles defied resolution.. "One of the four legs of the tower is dangerously fractured where it's seated into the underlying foundation caisson-".By invoking the word emergency, Celestina was able quickly to reach her own physician in San Francisco. He agreed to treat Phimie and to have her admitted to St. Mary's upon her arrival from Oregon..Wet cobblestones and tattered blacktop. Hurry, hurry. Past the lighted casement window in the gallery men's room..Both angry and mortified, yet still fearful, a walking multimedia collage of emotions, Junior left the gallery..Junior was reminded of a scene in an old movie, something Naomi wanted to watch, a love story set during the Black Plague: a horse drawn cart rolling through the medieval streets of London or Paris, the driver ringing a hand bell and crying, "Bring out your dead, bring out your dead!" If contemporary San Francisco had provided such a convenient service, he wouldn't have had to toss Neddy Gnathic in the Dumpster in the first place..Saturday morning, he walked to a drugstore in town and purchased eight decks of cards. With four, he passed the day re-creating, again and again, what he'd done at the dining-room table the previous evening. The four knaves never appeared..His request felt like an assault. Agnes almost rocked backward as though struck..To the phone, the police. No dial tone. Pointless to rattle the disconnect switch. The line had been cut..Neither Agnes nor Edom knew of Jacob's great skill with cards. He had been discreet about his apprenticeship with Obadiah, and for almost twenty years, he'd resisted the urge to dazzle his siblings with his expertise..Junior was free of superstition. He believed in neither gods nor demons, nor in anything between..She figured that she could stay home, devoting herself to Barty, for perhaps three years before she would be wise to find work..When he located the new grave, approximately where he'd guessed that it would be, he was surprised to find a black granite headstone already set in place, instead of a temporary marker painted with the. "We want the scary one, 'specially if it has spiders, Pixie Lee said squeakily but defiantly..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.. "I was raised to understand it," said Celestina, and when she looked across the room, she saw that her words had moved her mother..Wait here in the car. Give them time to settle down. At this hour, they would put the kid to bed first. Then Ichabod and Celestina would go to their room, undress for the night..He wasn't a marksman, anyway. He couldn't handle anything more than close-up work..He realized that like so many women, Seraphim wanted it, asked for it-yet had no place in her self-image to accommodate the truth that she was sexually aggressive. She wanted to think of herself as shy, demure, virginal, as innocent as a minister's daughter ought to be which meant that to get what she wanted, she required Junior to be a brute. He was happy to oblige..Kathleen watched him with obvious amusement, aware that he was savoring her suspense as much as he was the appetizer..Head lowered, as if his visit to Jacob were a weight that bowed him, his attention was on the ground. Otherwise, he might not have noticed, might not have been halted by, the intricate and beautiful pattern of sunlight and shadow over which he walked..A sudden strange weakness, a formless dread, dropped Agnes out of her crouch and onto her knees beside the boy..Supposing that this new enthusiasm was an attempt to uncover skullduggery in Seraphim's accident, then the girl would be doing Junior a service even after her demise. Whether or not the

traffic accident was an accident, Junior hadn't had anything to do with it. "No pie!" Agnes agreed. She parenthesized his head with her hands and punctuated his sweet face with kisses. Incredibly, Renee came after him, slinky and seductive, trying to calm him and lure him back into an embrace. During the girl's final appointment, Junior discovered she would be home alone that same night, her parents at a function she wasn't required to attend. She appeared to reveal this inadvertently, quite innocently; however, Junior was a bloodhound when it came to smelling seduction, regardless of how subtle the scent. Returning his attention to his own shoes, Jacob said, "So ... what am I supposed to do about this?" He desperately needed closure in the matter of Naomi's death. That was what these past three years and these supernatural events were all about. 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. To Dr. Parkhurst, Vanadium said, "In my work, I see lots of people who've just lost loved ones. None of them has ever puked like Vesuvius." "It's just that you never know what anyone's hand has been up to recently," Jacob explained. "That respectable banker down the street might have thirty dismembered women buried in his backyard. The nice church-going lady next door might be sleeping in the same bed with the rotting corpse of a lover who tried to jilt her, and for a hobby she makes jewelry from the finger bones of preschool children she's tortured and murdered." Edom and Jacob arrived, dinner was served, and while the food was wonderful, the conversation was better—even though the twins occasionally shared their vast knowledge of train wrecks and deadly volcanic eruptions. Paul didn't contribute much to the talk, because he preferred to bask in it. If he hadn't known any of these people, if he had walked into the room while they were in the middle of dinner, he would have thought they were family, because the warmth and the intimacy—and in the twins' case, the eccentricity—of the conversation were not what he expected of such newly made friends. There was no pretense, no falsity, and no avoidance of any awkward subject, which meant there were sometimes tears, because the death of Reverend White was such a fresh wound in the hearts of those who loved him. But in the healing ways of women that remained mysterious to Paul even as he watched them do. Charmed by the vulnerability of the young, he'd never slept with an older woman. The prospect intrigued him. She would have tricks in her repertoire that younger women were too inexperienced to know. At those cutting-edge galleries where he attended receptions, no one got in without a printed invitation. And even with the authentic paper in hand, you might still be refused entry if you failed to pass the cool test. The criteria of cool were the same as at the current hottest dance clubs, and in fact the bouncers controlling the gate at the finest avant-garde galleries were those who worked the clubs. Celestina's question had been about Phimie, but they had told her about the baby, and she was alarmed by their evasion. There in more genteel and gilded ages, and her flights of imagination sometimes acquired such vivid detail that they were eerily like memories. The second medic wheeled the gurney to the rear of the van, calling for one of the policemen to accompany him to the hospital. Apparently, he needed help if he was to deliver the baby and also stabilize Apes while en route. Too much had happened in those rooms. They were stained dark with family history, and in the night, when either Edom or Jacob slept under that gabled roof, the past came alive again in dreams. For reasons of mice and dust, doors at the Lampion house were never left ajar, let alone open this wide. The 9-mm pistol rested in the complementary shoulder holster, under Junior's leather coat. But the sound-suppressor hadn't been attached; it was in one of his coat pockets. The extended barrel, too long to lay comfortably against his left side, would most likely have hung up on the holster when drawn. This morning, Damascus had left the house early, before Vanadium came downstairs, which was perfect for Junior's purposes. While the maniac cop was finishing his shave and shower, Junior crept upstairs to check his room. He discovered the revolver in the second of the three places that he expected it to be, did his work, and returned the weapon to the nightstand drawer in precisely the position that he had found it. Narrowly avoiding an encounter with Vanadium in the hall, he retreated to the ground floor. After some fussing over the most effective placement, he left the quarter and the luggage—just as Vanadium, the human stump, clumped down the stairs. Junior experienced an unexpected delay when the detective spent half an hour making phone calls from the study, but then Vanadium went into the kitchen, allowing him to slip out of the house and complete his work. In Losen's service was a man who called himself Hound, because, as he said, he had a nose for witchery. His employment was to sniff Losen's food and drink and garments and women, anything that might be used by enemy wizards against him; and also to inspect his warships. A ship is a fragile thing in a dangerous element, vulnerable to spells and hexes. As soon as Hound came aboard the new galley he scented something. "Well, well," he said, "who's this?" He walked to the helm and put his hand on it. "This is clever," he said. "But who is it? A newcomer, I think." He sniffed appreciatively. "Very clever," he said. "We've been planning this a long time," Angel assured her. "I've climbed the tree a hundred times, maybe two hundred, mapping it, describing it to Barty, inch by inch, the trunk and its four divisions, all the major and minor limbs, the thickness of each, the degree of resilience, the angles and intersections, knots and fissures, all the branches down to the twigs. He's got it cold, Aunt Aggie, he's got it knocked. It's all math to him now." Yet his heart slammed hard and heavy against his confining ribs, and fear stippled the nape of his neck. Edom complied, and in the arc of red Bicycle patterns, one card revealed too much white corner, because it was the only one face up. Shortly after six o'clock, Saturday morning, she stirred from a fretful dream and saw Barty sitting up in bed, reading. Nolly was, as usual, "Nolly" to everyone, but here Kathleen was "Mrs. Wulfstan." It was then that village sorcery, and above all women's witchery, came into the ill repute that has clung to it since. Witches paid dearly for practicing the arts they thought of as their own. The care of pregnant beasts and women, birthing, teaching the songs and rites, the fertility and order of field and garden, the building and care of the house and its furniture, the mining of ores and metals—these great things had always been in the charge of women. A rich lore of spells and charms to ensure the good outcome of such

undertakings was shared among the witches. But when things went wrong at the birth, or in the field, that would be the witches' fault. And things went wrong more often than right, with the wizards warring, using poisons and curses recklessly to gain immediate advantage without thought for what followed after. They brought drought and storm, blights and fires and sicknesses across the land, and the village witch was punished for them. She didn't know why her charm of healing caused the wound to gangrene, why the child she brought into the world was imbecile, why her blessing seemed to burn the seed in the furrows and blight the apple on the tree. But for these ills, somebody had to be to blame: and the witch or sorcerer was there, right there in the village or the town, not off in the warlord's castle or fort, not protected by armed men and spells of defense. Sorcerers and witches were drowned in the poisoned wells, burned in the withered fields, buried alive to make the dead earth rich again..Thus far, none of these women of mercy was as lovely as Victoria Bressler, the ice-serving nurse who was hot for him. Nevertheless, he kept looking and remained hopeful..In adversity lies great opportunity, as Caesar Zedd teaches, and always, of course, there is a bright side even when you aren't able immediately to see it..He was simplifying and combining concepts, but he knew no other way to quickly give them a feel for the wonder, the enigma, the sheer spookiness of the world revealed by quantum mechanics..Mocked by the silvery ping-ting-jingle of the maniac detective emptying his ghostly pockets, Junior ran..Most likely, if Victoria was entertaining, the visitor's car would have been parked in the driveway..Tom pointed to the nearly finished martini that stood on the table before him. Balanced on the thin rim of the glass: impossibly, precariously--the coin..Over many proud generations and at least to the extent of second cousins, no one on either side of Celestina's family had skin of this light color. They were without exception medium to dark mahogany, many shades darker than this infant..After mentally reviewing what he must say, after working up a nervous edge, he dialed the SFPD emergency number..because the car was either struck again by the pickup or hit by other traffic or perhaps it collided with a parked vehicle, but whatever the cause, the breath was knocked out of her, and her screams became ragged gasps..Curious to know what Neddy had said, Junior quickly approached the same gallery staffer. "Excuse me, but I've been looking for my friend ever so long in this mob, and then I saw him talking to you--the gentleman in the London Fog and the tux--and now I've lost him again. He didn't say if he was leaving, did he? He's my ride home."..Although he had made no effort to summon them, tears spilled from Junior's closed eyes. They weren't drawn from him by thoughts of poor Naomi. These next few days--perhaps weeks--were going to be tedious, until he could have Nurse Victoria Bressler. Under the circumstances, he had good reason to feel sorry for himself..In the first drawer, he discovered an address book. Logically, Vanadium would have taken this with him, even if on the lam from a murder rap, so Junior tucked it in his jacket pocket..As he raced into the future, the past caught up with him in the form of intestinal spasms, and by the time that he had driven only three miles, whimpering like a sick dog, he made an emergency stop at a service station to use the rest room..On Thursday, January 4, he used his John Pinchbeck identity to purchase a new Ford van with a cashier's check. He leased a private garage space in the Pinchbeck name, near the Presidio, and stored the van there..Celestina nodded, unable to respond to the aide's kindness. Sometimes kindness can shatter as easily as soothe..As Celestina and her mother loaded the last of the pies into the ice chests in the Suburban, Paul and Agnes came back from her station wagon at the head of the caravan..She was four years older than Phimie. They hadn't i;mn a great deal of each other during the past three years, since Celestina had come to San Francisco. Although distance and time, the press of her studies, and the busyness of daily life had not made her forget that she loved Phimie, she had forgotten the purity and the power of love. Rediscovering it now, she was shaken so badly that she had to pull a chair to the side of the bed and sit down..Struggling to keep a grip on consciousness, Junior told himself to focus on the future, to live in the future, free of the useless past and the difficult present, but he could not get into the future far enough to be in a time when the pain was no longer with him..Strapped to the bracing board, semi-immobilized to prevent the accidental dislodgement of the intravenous feed, Junior's right arm felt half numb, stiff from disuse..She kissed his cheek, and he pulled his arms out from under the covers to hug her. Such small arms, but such a fierce hug..The hateful window. The hateful, frozen window. Celestina wrenched on the crank with all of her strength, and felt something give a little, wrenched, but then the crank popped out of the socket and rapped against the sill..Junior no longer leaned casually on the casing. He put both hands flat against the door..Junior intended to pack only a single bag, leaving most of his clothes behind. He could afford a fine new wardrobe.."I can talk to you," he said to Salk. "You'll understand. She was hero, the only one I ever knew till I met you. I've read about them all my life, in pulp magazines and paperbacks. But Perri ... she was the real thing. She didn't save tens of thousands--hundreds of thousands of children like you've done, didn't change the world as you've changed it, but she faced every day without complaint, and she lived for others. Not through them. For them. People called her to share their problem, and she listened and cared, and they called her with their good news be cause she took such joy in it. They asked for her advice, and though she was inexperienced, really, so short of experience in so many ways, she always knew what to say, Dr. Salk. Always the right thing. She had great heart and natural wisdom, and she cared so much."."Cash," Junior said. "I'll pay cash, with whatever amount of deposit is required."..During the past few hours, he had changed his life again, as dramatically as he had changed it on that fire tower almost three years ago..Celestina finally zipped shut the satchel. "You better watch out for the big bad wolf."..The detective gazed at the cash as longingly as a glutton might stare at a custard pie, as intensely as a satyr might ogle a naked blonde. "Impossible. Too damn much integrity in their system. You might as well ask me to go to Buckingham Palace and fetch you a pair of the queen's undies."..Warily, Junior ventured into the gallery to make inquiries. He expected the staff to express utter bafflement at the name Celestina White, expected the poster to have vanished when he returned to the display window..By now, Junior realized that he had been locked in a meditative trance for at least eighteen hours. He had settled into the lotus position at

five o'clock Monday afternoon-and Bob Chicane had shown up or their regular instruction session at eleven Tuesday morning..Neither of them needed to confirm their mutual attraction with even so much as an additional nod or a smile. Victoria knew, as he did, that their time would come, when all this current unpleasantness was I behind them, when Vanadium had been thwarted, when all suspicion had been forever laid to rest.