

# SCRATCH MENTAL STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN A SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

Fresh from sedative-assisted sleep, which hadn't ended until they were in the taxi between the hospital and the hotel, Angel had proved as fully resilient as only children could be when they still retained their innocence. She didn't understand how seriously Wally had been hurt, of course, but if the attack by Cain had terrorized her while she'd watched it from beneath her mother's bed, she didn't seem in danger of being permanently traumatized..No hesitation preceded Grace's response. "That's very generous of you, Paul. And I, for one, accept. Is this the house where you lived with your Perri?".Dr. Walter Lipscomb's fingers were longer and more supple than the pianist's, and he had the presence of a great symphony conductor for whom a raised baton was superfluous, who commanded attention by the mere fact of his entry. A tower of authority and self-possession, he said to the becalmed Neddy, "I am this child's physician. She was born underweight and held in hospital to cure an ear infection. You sound as if you have an incipient case of bronchitis that will manifest in twenty-four hours, and I'm sure you wouldn't want to be responsible for this baby being endangered by viral disease."..just as the smile curved to completion, however, an awful thing happened. The humiliation began with a loud gurgle in his gut..Alone with Agnes, the physician said, "I want you to take Barty to a specialist in Newport Beach. Franklin Chan. He's a wonderful ophthalmologist and ophthalmological surgeon, and right now we don't have anyone like that here in town."..Snapping the cylinder into place, he rose to his feet. Already he had a new plan, and the cop's revolver was the most important tool that he required to implement it..The narrow brick-paved serviceway lay five feet below. The maniac had knocked over trash cans while making his escape, but he wasn't tumbled among the rest of the garbage..For a moment, none of them spoke. The silence was as flawless as the preternatural hush reputed to precede the biggest quakes..The purpose of life was self--fulfillment, per Zedd, and Junior was so rapidly realizing his extraordinary potential that surely he would have pleased his guru..In all the many ways things are, across the infinity of worlds and all Creation, Barty believed that no woman existed whose beauty exceeded hers or whose heart was better..The cord wasn't long enough to allow Celestina to take the telephone handset with her, so she put it down on the nightstand, beside the lamp..Junior realized that thick drool oozed out of the right corner of his mouth. Shakily, he raised one hand to wipe his face..A floor-to-ceiling bookshelf was crammed with pulp magazines that had been published throughout the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, before paperback books supplanted them. The All-Story, Mammoth Adventure, Nickel Western, The Black Mask, Detective Fiction Weekly, Spicy Mystery, Weird Tales, Amazing Stories, Astounding Stories, The Shadow, Doc Savage, G-8 and His Battle Aces, Mysterious Wu Fang ....Three times, Mary vanished, and three times she reappeared, before she led the bamboozled Koko to her mother and father. "Neat, huh?".He arrived at the open door, grinning. No Cheshire-cat grin, hanging disembodied on the air, teeth without tabby. Grin with full Barty..Even at this post midnight hour, the lounge would sometimes be as crowded with worried loved ones as at any other time of the day. This morning, however, the only life under the threat of the scythe appeared to be Wally's; the sole vigil being kept was for him..Shuddering, rubbing furiously at himself, he stumbled into the bathroom. In the mirror, he confronted a face he hardly recognized: swollen, lumpy peppered with red hives..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..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..Downstairs, two shots cracked, and an instant after the second, an explosion shook the parsonage as though the long-promised Judgment were at hand. This was a real explosion, not the impact of another runaway Pontiac..I know what you're thinking," her mother said, reaching across the table and placing one hand over Celestina's. "I know how useless you feel, how helpless, how small, but you must remember this . . .A blood test might prove that Junior was the father. Accusations might sooner or later be made against him by bitter and hate-filled members of her family, perhaps not even with the hope of sending him to prison, but solely for the purpose of getting their hands on a sizable part of his fortune, in the form of child support.. "Mommy, did you know, every day on Mars is thirty-seven minutes and twenty-seven seconds longer than ours?".Looking toward the nearest window, where the wet night kissed the glass, he said, "Lawn sprinklers?".As if he sensed her reluctance to return to Dr. Chan, Barty had kept her occupied with talk of the red planet as they approached the office building, had talked her off the street, along the driveway, and into a parking space, where finally she relinquished the fantasy of an endless road trip. At 5:45, long past the end of office hours, Dr. Chan's suite was quiet..After a while, Franklin Chan asked, "Do you want me with you when you tell him?".In a neatly groomed neighborhood of unassuming houses, Vanadium's place was as unremarkable as those around it: a single-story rectangular box of no discernible architectural style. White aluminum siding with green shutters. An attached two-car garage..she'd crossed herself during Edom's rant about the Tri-State Tornado of 1925. Then, she'd been warding off bad fortune; now, with a smile and a look of wonder, she was acknowledging the grace of God, which, according to the cards, had been settled generously on Bartholomew..A shiver of awe traveled Celestina's spine, because she knew what the physician's next words would surely be..The Hackachaks had arrived post-grief, brought to the hospital by the news that Junior had expressed distaste at the prospect of profiting from his wife's tragic fall. They knew he had turned away Knacker, Hisscus and Nork..Minutes later, once more in a corridor conference with Dr. Daines, she was forced to temper her new optimism..Fragments of the broken wineglass crunched under his shoes as he crossed the small kitchen to the dinette. He opened the bottle of vodka and put it on the table in front of the dead woman..Nicholas Deed was not the knave. He had already brought all the ruin into their lives that he was going to bring.. "When we pull away, people are waving across the street

at the UPS truck, and the driver, he sees them, and he stands there, kind of confused, and then he waves back." The lawyer's eyes appeared as round as his face. "Aggie, please don't tell me you've started to share Jacob's ... enthusiasms? ". There were effective actions and ineffective actions, socially acceptable and unacceptable behavior, wise and stupid decisions that could be made. But if you wanted to achieve maximum self-realization, you had to understand that any choice you made in life was entirely value neutral. Morality was a primitive concept, useful in earlier stages of societal evolution, perhaps, but without relevance in the modern age..Lifted from his despair by this exhilarating wrath, Junior turned away from the mirror, looking for the bright side once more. Perhaps it was the bathroom window..Not incidentally, the project served as a vehicle by which some older citizens, in financial crisis, could receive money in a way that spared their dignity, gave them hope, and repaired their damaged self esteem. Agnes asked Obadiah to enrich the project by accepting a one year grant to record the story of his life with the help of the head librarian..To celebrate, upon leaving the gallery, he went to the coffee shop in the Fairmont Hotel, atop Nob Hill, determined to have a beer and a cheeseburger.."By the way he acted, you'd have sworn that he gave me and Angel shelter in the storm, back then, instead of turning us out to freeze in the snow."..She wanted to tell him not to say these queer things, not to talk this way, yet she couldn't speak those words. When Barty asked her why, as inevitably he would, she'd have to say she was worried that something might be terribly wrong with him, but she couldn't express this fear to her boy, not ever. He was the lintel of her heart, the keystone of her soul, and if he failed because of her lack of confidence in him, she herself would collapse into ruin..When Agnes and Paul returned from a honeymoon in Carmel, they discovered that Edom had finally cleared out Jacob's apartment. He donated his twin's extensive files and books to a university library that was building a collection to satisfy a growing professorial and student interest in apocalyptic studies and paranoid philosophy..He slid his chair sideways to the secretary and leaned forward with the gun in both hands..Leavening his tortured voice as best he could with shock and hurt, as though deeply wounded by the need to speak these words, Junior Cain said, "You ... you think I killed her, don't you? That's crazy."..Waste of time to check those places. More likely, woman and boy were hiding in the last room..The hall was deserted. Then a woman came out of one of the offices and walked toward the gallery, without glancing at him..Edom and Jacob flanked the gurney, each gripping one of Barty's feet through the sheet that covered them, escorting him with the same stony determination that you saw on the faces of the Secret Service agents who bracketed the President of the United States..Happy weekend. His attitude amazed her, and his strength in the face of darkness gave her courage.."It's all right," Tom assured her. To Angel, he said, "No, I'm not sad. And you know why?"..There would be lots of aftermath with three at once, especially if he took them out with point-blank head shots, but Junior was pumped full of reliable antiemetics, antiarrhythmics, and antihistamines, so he felt adequately protected from his traitorous sensitive side. In fact, he wanted to see a significant quantity of aftermath this time, because it would be proof positive that the boy was dead and that all this torment had come at last to an end..Junior could neither speak nor even mewl in agony. All the saliva had been draining forward, out of his open mouth, for so long that his throat was parched and raw. He felt as though he had munched on a snack of salted razor blades that were now stuck in his pharynx. His rattling wheeze sounded like scuttling scarabs..The window mechanism creaked, the two tall panes began to open outward but too slowly, and the cold white night exhaled a chill plume of breath into the room..Relieved but still wary, he toured the small house again to be sure doors and windows were locked..Junior closed his eyes at once and let his jaw sag, breathing through his mouth, feigning sleep..He wanted, all right, but -intuition warned him that he ought to continue to be discreet for a while longer..Vanadium arrived and stood beside Junior. His black suit was cheap, but it fit better than Rudy's..Dropped, the wineglass had shattered. But the bottle of Merlot had survived again, rolling across the vinyl-tile floor until it bumped gently against the base of a cabinet..Thereafter, he was repelled at the prospect of kissing her, and their relationship fell apart..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.."I never spoke with God--Nor visited in Heaven--Yet certain am I of the spot--As if the Checks were given."..Without the pillow, she wouldn't have been able to lift her head to look toward the back of the ambulance..The glimmering bay and the shimmering amber candlelight provided the perfect atmosphere for the song that arose now from the piano in the bar..On Tuesday, less than twenty-four hours after Naomi's funeral, Knacker, Hisscus, and Nork--representing the state and the county held preliminary meetings with Junior's lawyer and with the attorney for the grieving Hackachak clan. As before, the well-tailored trio was conciliatory, sensitive, and willing to reach an accommodation to prevent the filing of a wrongful-death suit..against the operating table. The lights had grown painfully bright, and the air had.."Couldn't carry these three ladies," he said. "Svelte as they are, they still weigh more than a backpack."..Junior stalked her, but she eluded him. Always, the song seemed to arise from the next room, but when he passed through the doorway into that space, the voice then sounded as if it came from the room that he'd just left..In the chilly darkness, his breath plumed visibly, frosted by moonlight. The rapidity and raggedness of his radiant exhalations would have marked him as a guilty man if witnesses had been present..One apartment to the right, one to the left. Junior went to the right, to Apartment 1, where he'd seen the lights come on behind the curtained windows..Anyway-and curiously-Industrial Woman increasingly looked to him like Scamp. As various abraded and inflamed mucous membranes constantly reminded him, he'd had more than enough of Scamp for a while. At last the day arrived: Friday, January 12..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..Sitting on the edge of the bed, Maria lightly salted the runny eggs and spooned them into Agnes's mouth.

"Eggs is as chickens does." By the time all the details of mortuary and cemetery services were settled, Walter Panglo had a nervous tic in his left cheek. His eyes were open wide, as if he'd been so startled that his lids froze in a position of ascension, locked by a spasm of surprise. His hands must have grown clammy; he blotted them repeatedly on his suit. 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. Perhaps, reluctant to admit to herself that she had yearned for him to do everything that he'd done, she had slowly been inflamed by guilt, until she convinced herself that she had, indeed, been raped. Psychotic little bitch. Cupping Angel entirely in his big hands, smiling at her, he said, "Oh, no, Mrs. White, this looks like a healthy young lady to me. No medicine required." Heart racing, but reminding himself that strength and wisdom arose from a calm mind, Junior stood in the center of the small kitchen, slowly turning to study every angle of the room. Hearts represented either a rival in love or a lover who would betray an enemy who would deeply wound the heart. The knave of diamonds was someone who would cause financial grief. The knave of clubs was someone who would wound with words: one who libeled or slandered, or who assaulted you with mean-spirited and unjust criticism. From these ominous spatters, several fibers bristled, having stuck to the pewter when the drizzle was still wet. They appeared to be human hairs. Ashamed and scared, she told no one. Although a victim, she blamed herself, and the prospect of being exposed to ridicule so horrified her that despair got the better of good judgment. Tom was alone. The place should be silent. Hanna Rey, the housekeeper, wasn't scheduled to arrive until ten o'clock. It didn't seem to him to amount to much. It was such an easy matter to him to make a silvery light shine in a dark room, or find a lost pin by thinking about it, or true up a warped joint by running his hands over the wood and talking to it, that he couldn't see why they made a fuss over such things. But his father raged at him for his "shortcuts," even struck him once on the mouth when he was talking to the work, and insisted that he do his carpentry with tools, in silence. Every time Junior glanced back, Vanadium was following his wake through the throng. Stocky but almost gliding. Grim and grimmer. Hideous. And closer. Caesar Zedd teaches that every experience in our lives, unto the smallest moment and simplest act, is preserved in memory, including every witless conversation we've ever endured with the worst dullards we've met. For this reason, he wrote a book about why we must never suffer bores and fools and about how we can be rid of them, offering hundreds of strategies for scouring them from our lives, including homicide, which he claims to favor, though only tongue-in-cheek. The pair of sliding doors at the living-room archway stood half open. Beyond, voices drew Paul against his will. The musician's bird-sharp gaze grew dull. His pink tongue protruded from his mouth, like a half-eaten worm. As a recreational site, Quarry Lake could be judged only a partial success. During the mining operation, trees were cleared well back from the edge of the dig, so that much of the shore would be unshaded on a hot summer day. And along half the strand, signs were posted warning Ungraded Shore: Immediate Deep Water. In places, where lake met land, the bottom lay over a hundred feet below. Junior was impressed and delighted by her clever assumption of it strictly professional voice and demeanor, which convincingly masked her intense desire. Sweet Victoria was a worthy coconspirator. "July 6, 1944, in Hartford, Connecticut, a fire broke out in the great tent of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus at two-forty in the afternoon, while six thousand patrons watched the Wallendas, a world-famous high-wire troupe, ascend to begin their act. By three o'clock, the fire burned out, following the collapse of the flaming tent, leaving one hundred sixty-eight dead. Another five hundred people were badly injured, but one thousand circus animals-including forty lions and forty elephants-were not harmed." Professional magic was not a field in which many Negroes could find their way to success. Obadiah was one of a rare brotherhood. CELESTINA RETURNED TO Room 724 to collect Phimie's belongings from the tiny closet and from the nightstand. He'd once spoken that very sentiment to her. Golden haze, sun in the heart. His words had melted her, tears had sprung into her eyes, and sex been better than ever. He had not yet disposed of her personal effects. In the dark, he went to the dresser, opened a drawer, and found a cotton sweater that she had worn recently. "She was a hero, just like you. I wanted you ... I wanted you to see her and to know her name. Perri Damascus. That was her name." Junior kept both forged driver's licenses in his wallet, in addition to the one that featured his real name. He stowed everything else in Pinchbeck's and Gammoner's safe-deposit boxes, along with the emergency cash. Kathleen savored her martini. "Mmmm ... as cold as a hit man's heart and as crisp as a hundred-dollar bill from the devil's wallet." 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. What if the stubborn, selfish, greedy, grubbing, vicious, psychotic, evil spirit of Thomas Vanadium, which had earlier pursued Junior through another alleyway in broad daylight, had followed him into this one in the more ghost-friendly hours of the night, and what if that spirit were standing just outside the Dumpster right now, and what if it closed the bifurcated lid and slipped a bolt through the latch rings, and what if Junior were trapped here with the thoroughly strangled corpse of Neddy Gnathic, and what if the flashlight failed when he tried to switch it on again, and then what if in the pitch-blackness he heard Neddy say, "Does anyone have a special request?" Blue fire flashed across the top of the range and followed drips down the baked-enamel front to the floor. Blue flared to yellow, and the yellow darkened when the blaze found the cadaver. Late Thursday, following a nine-hour session with Hisscus, Nork, and Knacker, Magusson--negotiating in conjunction with the Hackachak counsel-had indeed reached acceptable terms. Kaitlin Hackachak would receive \$250,000 for the loss of her sister. Sheena and Rudy would receive \$900,000 to compensate them for their severe emotional pain and suffering; this allowed them to undergo a lot of therapy in Las Vegas. Junior would receive \$4,250,000. Magusson's fee was twenty percent prior to trial-forty percent if a settlement had been reached after the start of court proceedings-which left Junior with \$3,400,000. All payments to plaintiffs were net of taxes. He didn't bother to press Vanadium's hand around the

weapon. There wasn't going to be a wealth of evidence for the Scientific Investigation Division to sift through, anyway, when the fire was finally put out: just enough charred clues to allow them an easy conclusion..Besides, he couldn't any longer afford to spend endless hours either learning a new language or attending the opera. His life was too full, leaving him insufficient time for the Bartholomew search..In abject misery, Junior lay waiting to go under the knife, more eager to be cut than he would have thought possible only a few hours before. The mere promise of this surgery thrilled him more than all the sex that he'd ever enjoyed between the age of thirteen and the Thursday just past..On the lawn, Koko, their four-year-old golden retriever, was lying on her back, all paws in the air, presenting the great gift of her furry belly for the rubbing pleasure of young Mistress Mary..Kathleen Klerkle, Mrs. Wulfstan, sitting on the edge of Nolly's desk, looked diagonally across it at the visitor in the client's chair. Actually, Nolly had two chairs for clients. Kathleen could have sat in the second; however, this seemed to be a more appropriate pose for a hawkshaw's dame. Not that she was trying to look cheap; she was thinking Myrna Loy as Nora Charles in *The Thin Man*-worldly but elegant, tough but amused..NOLLY SAT BEHIND his desk, suit jacket draped over the back of the chair, porkpie hat still squarely on his head, where it remained at virtually all times except when he was sleeping, showering, dining in a restaurant, or making love.."No, no. But being around him so much, inevitably I absorb some details. He's a compelling speaker when the subject interests him." Reverend White's murder received significant coverage throughout the nation, especially in West Coast papers, because of its perceived racial motivation and because it involved the burning of a parsonage..One of the paramedics had stooped beside him to press a cool hand against the nape of his neck. Now this man said urgently, "Kenny!.Odder yet, the pianist had studied him with a keen interest that was inexplicable, since they were essentially strangers. When caught staring, he'd appeared rattled, turning away quickly, eager to avoid further contact..That every mortal semblance took,.Copyright (c) 1997 by Ursula K. Le Guin..He preferred to venture inside the house while some lights remained on. He didn't want to be reduced to creeping stealthily in the dark through strange rooms: The very idea filled his guts with shiver chasing shiver..Then he looked up at the massive limbs overhead, and the mood changed: A sense of impending insight at once gave way to the fear that an unsuspected fissure in a huge limb might crack through at this precise moment, crushing him under a ton of wood, or that the Big One, striking now, would topple the entire oak..Coughing, spitting saliva that was bitter with toxic chemicals, Paul followed her, slapping frantically at his clothes when fire singed his shirt..Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Le Guin, Ursula K., 1929-."He'll just think I'm an incompetent detective. If he comes around wanting his five hundred bucks back, I'll give it to him." What good was she to anybody, what good could she ever hope to be, if she couldn't even save her little sister?.He closed his eyes to know the kitchen as Barty knew it. The fine aromas, the musical clink of spoons, the tinny rattle of pans, the liquid swish of a stirring whisk, the heat from the ovens, the women's voices: Gradually, denying himself sight, he was aware of his other senses sharpening.

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