



# I

THE LAST OF the three boxes just seemed to contain litter—a dozen cigarette-butts and a dusting of ash scattered across the middle-pages of an old issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle* and a 1957 copy of *TV Guide* with a very youthful-looking Pat Boone on the cover.

Blanzac sat back, tapping the ash off his own cigarette onto the old carpet under his chair, and took off his reading glasses to peer past the narrow glow of the desk lamp



at the sunlit bougainvillea vines outside the window. The first two boxes had yielded up a first edition of Ginsberg's *Howl*, inscribed by the author to Sophia Greenwald, and several TLS—typed letters signed—to the same person from Jack Kerouac...and a few lesser but still remarkable items. That was treasure enough, but still he wished he'd opened this unexciting box first.

He sighed and slid his glasses on again, and lifted out the *TV Guide* and the newspaper, and then his hopes brightened again. Under an old science fiction paperback below them lay a disordered stack of handwritten manuscript.

There was no name or title on the top sheet, and the handwriting looked feminine to him. Perhaps it was something of Sophia Greenwald's—he seemed to remember that she had been a minor poet in San Francisco in the '50s, though her niece, who had given him the boxes on consignment, had seemed unaware of that and he hadn't mentioned

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the vague recollection to her. Were there any Sophia Greenwald collectors?

He turned to his computer and called up the Google screen and typed in her name. According to Wikipedia she'd been born in 1926, lived in San Francisco, had two books of poetry published, in 1953 and 1955, left San Francisco in 1957 and died of cholera in Mexico in 1969 at the age of forty-three.

He picked up the top sheets of the manuscript. It did appear to be poetry—many of the lines ended well short of the right-hand edge of the paper.

He puzzled out a few lines from the middle of the page—

*...And, slick with juice, it slipped, but quick  
his hand*

*Caught firm a hold, and brought it to his  
face—*

*To hesitate a heartbeat—God's command  
Still seemed to echo in this sylvan place;*



## Tim Powers



*And Adam saw before him stretch two lives:  
One to move in God's shadow, acquiesce  
In all responses, reflexes and drives;  
The other...ah, the other! To express  
His own will, print himself upon this world!  
He chose—and bit—and dimmed each  
future dawn—*

*As helplessly as shadows fall unfurled  
To west instead of east as dusk come on,  
As fated as the phases of the moon...*

He read through several pages of it, pausing sometimes to puzzle out a word, and the narrative gradually shifted from a distorted re-telling of Genesis to an oddly compelling view of the old Ptolemaic earth-centered universe, with the sun and planets fixed on crystal spheres that spun like clockwork inside a vast ultimate sphere... then the focus returned to Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, and their vividly detailed sacrifices and crimes were made to seem as mechanical as the motions of the spheres.

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He forgot about the other items in the boxes, absorbed in the fluid narrative of the poem, but after a few minutes he jumped at a cold tap on the back of his neck, and then drops of water were pattering on his desk.

He lunged out of his chair and spread his corduroy jacket to cover the Kerouac letters and the Ginsberg book, and as he cursed and fumbled them into the last box and hugged it against his shirt he squinted over his shoulder, certain that the window was open and a sprinkler had come on—

But even before he snatched off his glasses to see clearly across the room, he was aware of the dry-white-wine smell of rain on pavement, and a whiff of chocolate; and he caught a familiar melody, and a hissing like tires on a wet street, growing more audible and then fading.

A moment later the falling water had stopped, the music was gone, and the room once again smelled only of cigarette smoke and coffee and old book paper.

