

## RIN NE VOL 23

Having ridden from the church to the cemetery with Hanna, his housekeeper, Paul chose to walk home. The distance between Perri's new bed and her old was only three miles, and the afternoon mild. This seemed to be a statement of great mystery and beauty, and Agnes was still contemplating it when the last of the ice melted on her tongue. Instead of more ice, sleep was spooned into her, as dark and rich as baker's chocolate. For a while, Celestina had worried that the girl was slower to walk than other children, slower to talk, and slower to develop her vocabulary, even though Celestina read aloud to her from storybooks every day. Then, during the past six months, Angel had caught up in a rush though she traveled a road somewhat different from what the childrearing books described. Her first word was mama, which was fairly standard, but her second was blue, which for a while came out "boo." At three, an average child would be doing exceptionally well to identify four colors; Angel could name eleven, including black and white, because she was able routinely to differentiate pink from red, and purple from blue. The container-eye-level at the top, battered, rust-streaked, beaded with condensation-was larger than some in the alleyway, with a bifurcated lid. Both halves of the lid were already raised. 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. When the subject shifted to card tricks and fortune-telling, Maria admitted to practicing divination with standard playing cards. He went upstairs to change out of his dark blue suit and badly scuffed black shoes. An SFPD patrol car swept past, its siren silent, the rack of emergency beacons flashing on its roof. She was not going to be as forthright with Barty as she had insisted that Joshua Nunn be with her, in part because she was too shaken to risk forthrightness. Junior took one of the boxed guns, a 9-mm semiautomatic. Months would probably pass before she noticed the pistol missing from the back of her closet, and by then she wouldn't know who had taken it. She got up from the chair, went to the window, and raised the venetian blind rather than look out between its slats. Junior suspected that no one other than this man's mother called him Tom. He was probably "Detective" to some and "Vanadium" to most who knew him. WHEN A GLASS OF chilled apple juice at dawn stayed on his stomach, Junior Cain was allowed a second glass, though he was admonished He was also given three saltines. efficiency of a nurse, but as a courtesan might perform the task: smiling enticingly, a flirtatious glimmer in. Junior hadn't suffered a paranormal experience since the early- morning hours of October 18, when he'd drifted up from a vile dream of worms and beetles to hear the ghostly singer's faint a cappella serenade. Shouting at her to shut up, he had awakened neighbors. judging by the evidence, the nurse was home alone, but Junior raised his voice above the music and called out, "Hello? Is anyone here?". Turning in Celestina's lap, Angel said, "Smell," and held the index finger of her right hand under her mother's nose. The adoption records on Seraphim White's baby weren't sealed by law, because custody of the child was being retained by family. Beyond the window, Barty failed to do any of the things that Agnes expected of a boy not fully enough part of the day to share its rain: He didn't flicker like an image on a static-peppered TV screen; he didn't shimmer like a phantom figure in Sahara heat or blur like a reflection in a steam-clouded mirror. By the time the family was ushered out, protesting, at the end of evening visiting hours, Junior hadn't succumbed to their pressure. If his conversion was to appear convincingly reluctant, he would have to resist them for at least another few days. Spacious, the living room was furnished for two purposes: as a parlor in which to receive visiting friends, but also with two beds, because here Paul and Perri slept every night. Vanadium continued in his characteristic drone, a tone at odds with the colorful content of his speech: "A man takes one look at his wife's body, starts to sweat harder than a copulating hog, spews like a frat boy at the end of a long beer-chugging contest, and chucks till he chucks up blood-that's not the response of your average murderer." "Nick," he suggested, as though any reason existed for her to be on a first-name basis with the man who killed her husband. "I wasn't drinking." Shivering, Junior slammed the trunk lid and warily surveyed the lonely landscape. Black pines spread bristled arms through the charry night, and the moon cast down a jaundiced light that seemed to obscure more than it illuminated. Kathleen and Nolly shifted their attention to Tom's clenched left hand, although the quarter could not possibly have traveled from one fist to the other. Wally switched off the engine and killed the headlights. "Home, where the heart is." He doubted that the singer had been Victoria Bressler, dead nurse, but he believed this was the same voice he'd heard on the telephone, back on the twenty-fifth of June, when someone purporting to be Victoria had called with an urgent warning for Bartholomew. Nolly, telling the story of his day's work, paused as the waiter delivered two orders of the crab-cake appetizer with mustard sauce. "Nolly, Mrs. Wulfstan--enjoy!". If their relationship had not been limited to a single evening of passion, if they had not been of two worlds, if she had not been underage and therefore jailbait, they might have had an open romance, and then her death would have touched him more deeply. Opening the directory to the marker, he found a card tucked between the pages. A joker, with BARTHOLOMEW in red block letters. "Sometimes she wrote little paragraphs to God, very touching and humble notes of gratitude, thanking Him for bringing you into her life." Stepping forward, Agnes said, "When Barty holds my hand and walks me through the rain, I get wet even while he stays dry. The same for all the rest of us here ... except Angel." They were each down to one last sip of wine, studying dessert menus, when Celestina began to wonder if, in spite of all instincts and indications, she might be wrong about the state of Wally's heart. The signs seemed clear, and if his radiance wasn't love, then he must be dangerously radioactive-yet she might be wrong. She was a woman of some insight, quite sophisticated in many ways, with the raw-nerve perceptions of an artist; however, in matters of romance, she was an innocent, perhaps even more pitifully naive than she realized. As she perused the list of cakes and tarts and homemade ice creams, she allowed doubt to feed upon her, and as the thought grew that Wally might not love her that way, after all, she became desperate to know, to end the

suspense, because if she didn't mean to him what he meant to her, then Daddy was just going to have to accept her conversion from Baptist to Catholic, because she and Angel would have to spend some serious heart-recovery time in a nunnery..His patience exhausted, the pianist wrenched his hand out of Junior's grip. He glanced around nervously, certain that they must be the center of attention, but of course the reception guests were lost in their witless conversations, or they were gaga over the maudlin paintings, and no one was aware of this quiet little drama..He had considered tracking down Celestina-and the bastard boy--prior to her exhibition. The alumni office of her college might be one route to her. And further inquiries in the city's fine-arts community would no doubt eventually provide him with her address..Taking her mother's advice to heart, Celestina sighed. "All right. Let's just pray they catch him. But if they don't ... two weeks, and then the rest of the plan, the way you said, Tom. Except that I can't tolerate two weeks-in a hotel, cooped up, afraid to go into the streets, no sun, no fresh air."By "all of that," he meant the groceries that she and Joey often sent along with the pies, the occasional mortgage payment they made for someone down on his luck, and the other quiet philanthropies..under the spoon to catch drips, she conveyed the shimmering sliver to Agnes's mouth..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..Jolene started to refill his coffee mug-then thought better of it. "Maybe you don't need more caffeine, Edom."His silent tears accomplished what his words could not: Nork, Knacker, and Hisscus retreated, urging him to speak to his attorney, promising to return, once more expressing their deepest condolences, perhaps as abashed as attorneys and political appointees could get, but certainly confused and unsure how to proceed when dealing with a man so untouched by greed, so free of anger, so forgiving as the widower Cain..Deciding that he didn't need an exit line, Junior headed toward the service road and his Suburban..Jacob had been born with the requisite dexterity and more than sufficient memory function. His personality disorder-which made him unemployable and guaranteed that his social life would never involve endless rounds of parties-ensured that he would have the free time needed to practice the most difficult techniques of card manipulation until he mastered them.."If I ever have trots, you'll know." And then in the Cheese voice: "CAN WE LISTEN TO THE BOOK TALK IN YOUR ROOM?" A nurse in surgical greens appeared. "Pull up the sleeves of your scrub nearly to your elbows. Scrub hard. I'll tell you when to stop."Three years ago, in St. Mary's Hospital, with Phimie's warning fresh in her mind, Celestina swore that she would be ready when the beast came, but here he came, and she was as not ready as possible. Time passes, the perception of a threat fades, life becomes busier, you work your butt off as a waitress, you graduate college, your little girl grows to be so vital, so vivid, so alive that you know she just has to live forever, and after all, you are the daughter of a minister, a believer in the power of compassion, in the Prince of Peace, confident that the meek shall inherit the earth, so in three long years, you don't buy a gun, nor do you take any training in self-defense, and somehow you forget that the meek who will one day inherit the earth are those who forego aggression but are not those so pathetically meek that they won't even defend themselves, because a failure to resist evil is a sin, and the willful refusal to defend your life is the mortal sin of passive suicide, and the failure to protect a little yellow M&M girl will surely buy you a ticket to Hell on the same express train on which the slave traders rode to their own eternal enslavement, on which the masters of Dachau and old Joe Stalin traveled from power to punishment, so here, now, as the beast throws himself against the door, as he shoves aside the barricade, with what precious little time you have left, fight. Junior shoved through the blocked door, into the bedroom, and the bitch hit him with a chair. A small, slat-back side chair with a tie-on seat cushion. She swung it like a baseball bat, and there must have been some Jackie Robinson blood in the White family line, because she had the power to knock a fastball from Brooklyn to the Bronx..The little hands, so weak now but someday strong: Would they eventually be capable of savagery, as were the father's hands? Misbegotten offspring. This seed of a demonic man whom Phimie herself had called sick and evil. However innocent-looking now, what pain might she eventually in-- on others? What outrages might she commit in years to come? Although Celestina searched intently, she could not glimpse the father's evil in the child..Academy of Art College and might have met Celestina White. The critiques of her paintings.They knew no one named Bartholomew, and she had never heard the name from him before, but she knew what he wanted. He was speaking of the son he would never see..Eventually he approached the door between the dining room and the kitchen. He paused there, listening..Focus. Get Ichabod all the way inside. Act now, think later. No, no, proper focus requires an understanding of the need to ize: scrutinize, analyze, and prioritize. Get the bitch, get the bitch! Slow deep breaths. Channel the beautiful rage. A fully evolved man is self-controlled and calm. Move, move, move!.At dawn, he and his mother went down to the sea, to watch the rolling waves filigreed with foam and gilded with the molten gold of morning sun, to see the kiting gulls and to scatter bread that brought the winged multitudes to earth..Into Barty's darkness came light that he had not sought. He saw his smiling Mary on his lap as she lowered her hands from his temples, saw the faces of his family, the table set with Christmas decorations and many candles flickering..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..Tom was alone. The place should be silent. Hanna Rey, the housekeeper, wasn't scheduled to arrive until ten o'clock..Celestina, surprised by Lipscomb's arrival, was still mentally numb from Neddy's harangue. "Doctor, I didn't know you were coming."He hurried into the bedroom and switched on the nightstand lamp, without concern for whether the light might be seen from the street..The chest respirator, which Joshua had evidently applied, lay discarded on the bedclothes beside her. She seldom required this apparatus to assist her breathing, and then only at night..He repressed the scream, however, because he sensed that if he gave voice to it, he wouldn't be able to silence himself for a long long time..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..Instruction in Braille wasn't recommended for three-year-olds, but an exception was made in this case. Agnes arranged to have Barty receive a series of lessons, although she suspected that he'd absorb the system and learn to use it in one or two sessions..Though they had expected the cause of the explosion, both Paul and Harrison were halted by shock at the sight of all this ruination. They had expected to find the car jammed into the wall of the house, never this far inside. The speed required to penetrate this distance into the structure beggared Paul's skills of calculation and made him wonder if even recklessness and alcohol were sufficient to produce, such a catastrophe..During the past few years, he had discovered that a lousy few million could buy even more freedom than he had thought when he'd shoved Naomi off the fire tower. Great wealth, fifty or a hundred million, would purchase not only greater freedom, and not just the ability to pursue even more ambitious self-improvement, but also power..When he woke in- the morning, he raised his head from the pillow to look at the alarm clock-and saw the twenty-five cents on his nightstand. Two dimes and a nickel..Not many men wore hats these days. Since his teenage years, Nolly had favored a porkpie model. San Francisco was often chilly, and he began losing his hair when still young..It wasn't as if this was Junior's first encounter with a dead body. In the past few years, he'd become as comfortable with the deceased as any mortician might be. They were as unremarkable to him as cupcakes were to a baker..Trembling, she sat beside the bassinet and gazed at her baby with such love that the force of it ought to have rocked him awake..Besides, he didn't want the police in San Francisco to know that he'd been suspected, by at least one of their kind, of having killed his wife in Oregon. What if one of the locals was curious enough to request a copy of the case file on Naomi's death, and what if in that file, Vanadium had made reference to Junior waking from a nightmare, fearfully repeating Bartholomew? And then what if Junior eventually located the right Bartholomew and eliminated the little bastard, and then what if the local cop who'd read the case file connected one Bartholomew to the other and started asking questions? Admittedly, that was a stretch. Nevertheless, he hoped to fade from the SFPD's awareness as soon as possible and live henceforth beyond their ken..Between new women and needlepoint pillows, he participated in s?ances, attended lectures given by ghost hunters, visited haunted houses, and read more strange books. He even sat for the camera of a famous medium whose photographs sometimes revealed the auras of benign or malevolent presences hovering in the vicinity of her subject, though in his case she could discern no telltale sign of a spirit..The previous day, Jacob and Edom had driven back to Bright Beach, to prepare for Barty's arrival. Now they hurried down the back porch steps and across the lawn, as Maria followed the driveway past the house and parked near the detached garage at the rear of the deep property..She hadn't looked up from her sketching. Although Junior thought she hadn't seen him, she'd apparently been aware of him all along..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." "Doesn't look so spooky to me." She turned the knave of spades so the baby could see it. "Does he scare you, Barty?" Excessive insurance, Agnes believed, was a temptation to fate. "A reasonable policy, yes, that's fine. But a big one ... it's like betting on death." The hum, the buzz, the rattle, the grinding of machinery, power tools. Sheet steel and tougher structural steel snarling against the teeth of a metal-cutting saw..Paul knelt on one knee beside her wheelchair. "This momentous day, Agnes. This momentous day, with all of its beginnings. Hmmm?" 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..Nolly's gums were in great shape, too: firm, pink, no sign of recession, snug to the neck of each tooth..From a distance and through a scattering of trees, Junior wasn't able to discern much about the other funeral, but he was pretty sure many if not most of that crowd were Negroes. He surmised, therefore, that the person being buried was a Negro, too..quiet pool, sweet with the fragrance of jasmine. Under the huge spreading oak. Grass oiled to a glossy green by the."Some places, it has to be like that." some places it has to be that your eyes are okay?" Maria, puzzled but cooperative, left the room as instructed, and Barty removed the correct book from the stack on the table, without anyone's guidance. He sat in the armchair at his mother's side and began to read:..Again, he cast his line of memory into murky waters nearly four years in the past, to the night of passion that he had shared with Seraphim in the parsonage. As before, he could recall nothing she'd said, only the exquisite look of her, the nubile perfection of her body..Tom Vanadium was too unnerved by the Cain scare to be interested in the newspaper anymore. The strong black coffee, superb before, tasted bitter now..The sole male guest in whom he took an interest-a big interest was Sklent, the one-name painter whose three canvases were the only art on the walls of Junior's apartment..Clearly, she had learned nothing from her reading. No sincere and thoughtful student of Zedd would be as sorely lacking in self-control as Frieda Bliss..The various flavors of canned soda were always racked in the same order, allowing Barty to select what he wanted without error. He got orange for Angel, root beer for himself, and closed the refrigerator..One of his favorite gifts for Christmas 1967 was a twelve-hole chromatic harmonica with forty-eight reeds providing a full three-octave range. Even in his little hands, and with the limitations of his small mouth, this more sophisticated instrument enabled him to produce full-bodied versions of any song that appealed to him..Wally Lipscomb parked in his garage, switched off the engine, and started to get out of the Buick before he saw that Celestina had left her purse in the car..He swept the immediate area with the flashlight, and shadows spun with shadows, waltzing spirits in the ballroom of the night..She slept for a while, waking to a prayer spoken softly but fervently in Spanish.. "Oh, sure, I know," Mary said. "But when it's a bad place, you feel it before you go in. So you just go around to the next place that isn't bad. No big deal." After an interminable silence, the detective said, "Do you know what believe about life, Enoch?" by the ferocity of the beating and by years of fear and humiliation. So he opens his mouth, just to end it, just to be.Of course, Seraphim's child would not have a telephone. He was just a baby, dangerous to Junior in a way that was not clear, but a baby nonetheless..Halfway home, he

heard sirens and saw the beacons of approaching emergency vehicles. He pulled the Suburban to the side of the road and watched as two fire trucks passed, followed by an ambulance..Sometimes he thought he walked for Perri, using the steps she had stored up and never taken, giving expression to her unfulfilled yearning to travel. At other times, he thought he walked for the solitude that allowed him to remember their life in fine detail-or to forget. To find peace--or seek adventure. To gain understanding through contemplation---or to scrub all thought from his mind. To see the world or to be rid of it. Perhaps he hoped that coyotes would stalk him through a bleak twilight or a mountain lion set upon him on a hungry dawn, or a drunk driver run him down.. "When you cut Naomi's string, you put an end to the effects that I her music would have on the lives of others and on the shape of the future. YOU struck a discord that can be heard, however faintly, all the way to the farthest end of the universe." Furthermore, fear of the unknown is a weakness also because it humbles us. Humility, Caesar Zedd declares, is strictly for losers. For the purpose of social and financial advancement, we must pretend to be humble-shuffle our feet and duck our heads and make self-deprecating remarks-because deceit is the currency of civilization. But if ever we wallow in genuine humility, we will be no different from the mass of humanity, which Zedd calls "a sentimental sludge in love with failure and the prospect of its own doom." "The girl's baby," said Nolly, "was placed with Catholic Family Services for adoption." Fear clotted in Junior's veins, and he stood like an impacted embolism in the busy flow of pedestrians, certain that he himself would at any moment succumb to a stroke..He reached toward the dead man's closed hand, but he couldn't find the courage to touch it. He was afraid that if he pried open the stiff fingers, he would discover a quarter inside..The rain was colder than it had been earlier, almost as icy as sleet. Or perhaps she was far hotter than before and felt the chill more keenly on her fevered skin. Each droplet seemed to hiss against her face, to sizzle against her hands, with which she tightly gripped her swollen abdomen as if she could deny Death the baby that it had come to collect..Playing with fire was fun when you didn't have to attempt to conceal the fact that it was arson..Angel was lying on a towel on the convertible sofa, where Grace had just changed her diaper.. "She's got preeclampsia. It's a condition that occurs in about five percent of pregnancies, virtually always after the twenty-fourth week, and usually it can be treated successfully. But I'm not going to sugarcoat this, Celestina. In her case, it's more serious. She hasn't been seeing a doctor, no prenatal care, and here she is in the middle of her thirtyeighth week, about ten days from delivery." This time, he vowed never to kill again, except in self-defense, regardless of the provocation. This tougher condition pleased him. No one achieved significant self-improvement by setting low standards for himself.Fortunately, he recognized his vulnerability. Until the evening reception for Celestina White, he must spend every hour of the day in calming activities, soothing himself in order to ensure that he would be cool and effective when the time came to act..Her voice was flat and a little hard. Another man might have mistaken her tone for disapproval, for impatience, even for quiet anger..He followed an alleyway to the building's service entrance, for which he possessed a key that wasn't provided to other tenants. He unlocked the steel door and stepped into a small, dimly lighted receiving room with gray walls and a speckled blue linoleum floor..The universe was vast and Barty small, yet the boy's immortal soul made him as important as galaxies, as important as anything in Creation. This Agnes believed. She couldn't tolerate life without the conviction that it had meaning and design, though sometimes she felt that she was a sparrow whose fall had gone unnoticed. Barty sat on the edge of the doctor's desk, legs dangling, holding Red Planet, his place marked by an inserted finger..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..Only one member of the distant funeral party did not disperse toward the line of cars on the service road. A man in a dark suit headed downhill, between the headstones and the monuments, directly toward Naomi's grave..She twisted her sweat-drenched face in what might have been frustration, closed her.Neddy possessed all the musical talent, but Junior had the muscle. Pinned against the wall, his throat in the vise of Junior's hands, Neddy needed a miracle if he were ever again to sweep another glissando from a keyboard..Your deeds ... will return to you, magnified beyond imagining ... the spirit of Bartholomew ... will find you ... and mete out the terrible judgment that you deserve..In the dark woods of the dream, still the presence: faceless and silent, radiating a merciless intent..He would never allow himself to be bankrupted and made poor again. Never. His fortune had been won at enormous risk, with great fortitude and determination. He must defend it at any cost..Their apartment was in a four-story Victorian house that dripped gingerbread, in the exclusive Pacific Heights district. It had been converted to apartments with deep respect for the architecture, years before Wally bought it..Holding on to the jamb with one hand, Barty leaned across the threshold, listening to the day. Birds. Softly rustling leaves. Nobody on the porch. Even trying hard to be quiet, people always made some little noise..The window was French with small panes, so Celestina couldn't simply break the glass and climb out..Grace, Celestina, and Paul expressed amusement and amazement at Angel's critical judgment.. "I'm sure you would be, yes, but I'm afraid I don't have the patience to teach, I'm a performer, not an instructor. I suppose I could give you the name of a good teacher." When his search of the desk drawers was only half completed, the telephone rang-not the usual strident bell, but a modulated electronic brrrrr. He had no intention of answering it..The ghost cop was forty feet behind him, beyond ranks of other pedestrians, every one of whom might as well have been faceless now, smooth and featureless from brow to chin, because suddenly Junior could see no countenance other than that of the walking dead man. The haunting visage bobbed up and down as the grim spirit strode along, vanishing and reappearing and then vanishing again among all the bobbing and swaying heads of the intervening multitudes..To see his newborn baby girl, Barty shared the sight of other Bartys, and he so adored this little wrinkled Mary that he sustained his vision all day, until a thunderous migraine became too much to bear and a sudden frightening slurring of speech drove him back to the comfort of

blindness..An outrageously sexy redhead hit on him as he selected from an array of bomb-shaped canapes on a tray held by a waiter dressed as a ragged and soot-smearred blast survivor. Myrtle, the redhead, preferred to be called Scamp, which Junior entirely understood. She wore a DayGlo green miniskirt, a spray-on white sweater, and a green beret..A pathologically suspicious cop, aware of Junior's acute.; emesis following Naomi's death, might imagine a connection between this epic bout of diarrhea and Victoria's murder, and Vanadium's disappearance Here was an avenue of speculation that he did not want to encourage..With Angel at breakfast, instead of just Uncle Jacob, at least Barty had someone to talk to, even if she did insist on speaking more often through her dolls than directly. Apparently, the dolls were on the table, propped up with bowls. The first, Miss Pixie Lee, had a high-pitched, squeaky voice. The second, Miss Velveeta Cheese, spoke in a three year-old's idea of what a throaty-voiced, sophisticated woman sounded like, although to Barty's ear, this was more suitable to a stuffed bear..By ones and twos, the festive crowd eventually deconstructed, but for Celestina, an excitement lingered in the usual gallery hush that rebuilt in their wake.

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