

CROWS CRICKETS FLIES

He and the homicide detective had been friends for almost thirty years, since Max had been a uniformed rookie on the SFPD and Vanadium had been a young priest freshly assigned to St. Anselmo's Orphanage here in the city. Before choosing police work, Max had contemplated the priesthood, and perhaps back then he had sensed the cop-to-be in Tom Vanadium..Celestina wanted nothing to do with it, was offended by the very sight of it, and she..Drawing from a well of inspiration deeper than instinct, Junior knew that if ever he crossed paths with a man named Bartholomew, he must be prepared to deal with him as aggressively as he had dealt with Naomi. And without delay..He was Father Tom again, having recommitted to his vows three years previous. At his request, the Church had assigned him as the chaplain of Pie Lady Services..Now the hole was revealed. Damp earthen walls. In the shadow of the casket, the bottom of the grave was dark and hidden from view..His request felt like an assault. Agnes almost rocked backward as though struck..Now, on his kitchenette table, two nights after Maria's reading, Jacob finished integrating the four decks as he had done Friday in the dining room of the main house. His work completed, he sat for a while, staring at the stack of cards, hesitant to proceed..So smoothly did the waiter move, that three martinis on a corklined mahogany tray seemed to float across the room in front of him and then hover beside their table while he served the cocktails to the lady first, the guest second, and the host third..He didn't rely, either, on a sixth sense to detect obstacles or open spaces, which some blind people claimed to have. Sometimes instinct told him that in his path was an object that ordinarily would not have been there; but as often as not, it went undetected, and unless he was using his cane, he tripped over it. The sixth sense was greatly overrated..In reality, it had been a homely device, a mere box. In memory, it seemed ominous, charged with the evil portent of a nuclear bomb..just as the smile curved to completion, however, an awful thing happened. The humiliation began with a loud gurgle in his gut.. "You might as well beat a cloud for raining," said Otter's mother..He got everything he ordered-full value, and more. When he lifted off the top of the bun to squeeze mustard onto the burger, he discovered a shiny quarter pressed into the half-melted cheese..With a nimbleness and an alacrity that a lemur would have admired, the girl ascended to the first crotch..A shock-haired, bright-eyed woman with a candle bound to her forehead set down her pick to show Otter a little cinnabar in a bucket, brownish red clots and crumbs. Shadows leapt across the earth face at which the miners worked. Old timbers creaked, dirt sifted down. Though the air ran cool through the darkness, the drifts and levels were so low and narrow the miners had to stoop and squeeze their way. In places the ceilings had collapsed. Ladders were shaky. The mine was a terrifying place; yet Otter felt a sense of shelter in it. He was half sorry to go back up into the burning day.. "In a way, he does," Vanadium said. "When you're as hollow as Enoch Cain, the emptiness aches. He's desperate to fill it, but he doesn't have the patience or the commitment to fill it with anything worthwhile. Love, charity, faith, wisdom-those virtues and others are hard won, with commitment and patience, and we acquire them one spoonful at a time. Cain wants to be filled quickly. He wants the emptiness inside poured full, in quick great gushes, and right now. ".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..lawn before they knew that the prodigy's invisible cloak wouldn't accommodate him as it did the girl. Cool, drenching rain pounded Tom at once, and he scooped Barty off the steps as Grace had gathered up..The quarter, surely. The one that had not been in his robe pocket where it should have been, the previous Friday.. "Forget Barty's tree for a second and imagine that all these many worlds are like stacked slices of Swiss cheese. Through some holes, you can see only the next slice. Through others, you see through two or three or five slices before holes stop overlapping. There are little holes between stacked worlds, too, but they're constantly shifting, changing, second by second. And I can't see them, really, but I have an uncanny feel for them. Watch closely..".Like a disc fish with silvery scales, the coin lay in the cup of Junior's palm. Directly over his life line.. "You should call San Francisco police, have them put your place under surveillance and nail him if he turns up..".He found it difficult to make a painful personal revelation sound sincere when delivered in a shout, but he managed well enough to bring a shine of tears to her eyes: "Part of my left foot was shot off in this upcountry sweep we did..".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..".Junior could only imagine how flattered Victoria would be to receive the attentions of a twenty-three-year-old stud, flattered and grateful. When he contemplated all the ways she could express that gratitude, there was barely enough room behind the wheel of the Suburban for him and his manhood..Junior had expected these singular creatures, and he needed them to be as monstrous as they had always been in the past. Nonetheless, he shrank back against his pillows in dismay when they exploded into the hospital room. Their faces were as fierce as those of painted cannibals coming off a fast. They gestured emphatically, spitting expletives along with tiny bits of lunch dislodged from their teeth by the force of their condemnations..Flanked by Dumpsters and trash cans, through steam rising out of grates in the pavement, past parked delivery trucks, here came the dead cop. Running..The boy wasn't translucent, as his father's ghost had been on that drizzly January night almost three years ago. The same drowned light of this gray afternoon that revealed the gravestones and the dripping.. "We were about to order dinner from room service," Tom said, handing a menu to Paul..Finally sleeping, he had anxiety dreams of being in a public rest room, overcome by urgent need, only to find that every stall was occupied by someone he had killed, all of them vengefully determined to deny

him a chance for dignified relief..She left him sore in places that had never been sore before. Yet he was more stressed out on Thursday than he'd been on Wednesday..They were driven to St. Mary's by Detective Bellini in a police sedan. Tom Vanadium-a friend of her father's whom she had met a few times in Spruce Hills, but whom she didn't know well--literally rode shotgun, tensed to react, wary of the occupants of other vehicles on."Bartholomew, huh?" asked Wally as he piloted them through banks of earthbound clouds..Think, think. A three-minute drive to the Lampion place. Maybe two minutes, running stop signs, cutting comers..AFTER UNDERGOING TESTS for brain tumors or lesions, to ascertain whether his seizure of violent emesis might, in fact, have a physical cause, Junior was returned to his hospital room shortly before noon.."Tragic. Her string's been cut too soon. Her music's ended prematurely," Junior said, feeling confident enough to dish a serving of the maniac cop's half-baked theory of life back to him. "There's a discord in he universe now, Detective. No one can know how the vibrations of that discord will come to affect you, me, all of us."..He possessed vast files on tragic fires, and most of them were committed to memory. In Vienna's magnificent Ring Theater, December 8, a blaze claimed 850 lives. On May 25, 1887, 200 dead at the Opera Comique, Paris. November 28, 1942, in the Coconut Grove nightclub in Boston-when Jacob was only fourteen years old and already.to believe that any man with such a hard gut slung over his belt, with a bull neck.As the unwanted change pinged against the concrete at his feet, Junior-snap, snap-saw the source of the next two rounds. They spat out of the vertical pay slot on a newspaper-vending machine; one hit his nose, and the other rang off his teeth..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.."--and we're from different worlds, which I respect. I respect you and your wonderful family ... your centeredness, your certainty. I want to do this only because it's what I owe you."..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..The hospital was eerily quiet, except for the occasional squeak of rubber-soled shoes on the vinyl floor of the corridor..Breath held, Celestina confirmed what she had suspected about the child since the quick glimpse she'd had in the surgery. Its skin was cafe au lait with a warming touch of caramel..Celestina nodded, unable to respond to the aide's kindness. Sometimes kindness can shatter as easily as soothe..guarantee against self-incrimination, a slap in the face of justice, a violation of the rights of man.."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."..Soon he realized this was a mistaken assumption, because when the instructor began trying to unknot him from his lotus position, a defensive numbness deserted Junior, and he became aware of pain. Excruciating..Prudence required that they strategize as though Enoch Cain were Satan himself, as though every fly and beetle and rat provided eyes and ears for the killer, as though ordinary precautions could never foil him..Junior was pleasantly surprised by his flexibility and by his audacity. He was, indeed, a new man, a daring adventurer, and by the day he grew more formidable..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..The mound of earth beside the grave had been disguised by piles of flowers and cut ferns. The suspended casket was skirted with black material to conceal the yawning grave beneath it..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..When Celestina first entered his ICU cubicle, the sight of his face scared her in spite of the surgeon's assurances. Gray, he was, and sunken-cheeked-as though this were the eighteenth century and so many medicinal leeches had been applied to him that too much of his essential substance had been sucked out..This wasn't a new sensation. He had experienced it before. In the night just passed, when he awakened from an unremembered dream and saw the bright quarter dancing across Vanadium's knuckles..By dawn, when the intestinal paroxysms finally passed, this bold new man of adventure felt as flat and limp as road kill..Junior raised his voice even further: "In those old movies, the Little Rascals."..After a long time the door opened and several men came in. He could do nothing against them as they gagged him and bound his arms behind him. "Now you won't weave charms nor speak spells, young'un," said a broad, strong man with a furrowed face, "but you can nod your head well enough, right? They sent you here as a dowser. If you're a good dowser you'll feed well and sleep easy. Cinnabar, that's what you're to nod for. The King's wizard says it's still here somewhere about these old mines. And he wants it. So it's best for us that we find it. Now I'll walk you out. It's like I'm the water finder and you're my wand, see? You lead on. And if you want to go this way or that way you dip your head, so. And when you know there's ore underfoot, you stamp on the place, so. Now that's the bargain, right? And if you play fair I will."..She worried that he would need to go to the bathroom during the night and that, half asleep, he might turn the wrong way, toward the stairs, and fall. Three times they paced off the route from the doorway of his room to the hall bath. She would have walked it a hundred times and still not been satisfied, but Barty said, "Okay, I've got it."..The beetle-green Pontiac waited in the driveway, with a shine that tempted nature to throw around some bad weather. Joey always kept a spotless car, and he probably wouldn't have had time to earn a living if he had resided in some shine-spoiling climate rather than in southern California..As though Amelia Earhart, the long-lost aviatrix, had reached out of her twilight zone and snared the two bits, no tumbling coin glinted in the air above the desk..As nimble as a geriatric cat, crying out with pain, Junior nevertheless sprang onto the deep windowsill and shoved against

the twin panes of the window. They were already partly open-but they were also stuck. Crouched on the deep sill, pushing against the parted casement panes of the tall French window, using not just muscle but the entire weight of his body, leaning into them, the maniac tried to force his way out of the bedroom..Grace, Celestina, and Paul expressed amusement and amazement at Angel's critical judgment.."Yeah, but I've been thinking about that. If he feels some kind of responsibility ... then why did he ever represent Cain in the first place? ".might be grumpy and would certainly be torpid, bleary-eyed, and uncommunicative. Angel awake was always fully awake, soaking up color texture-mood, marveling in the baroque detail of Creation, and generally lending support to the apperception--test prediction that she might be an art prodigy..As home tours went, this one was notably less interesting than most. The accountant appeared to have no secret life, no perverse interests that he hid from the world..If the directory proved to be of no help, Junior would proceed next to the registry office at the county courthouse, to review the records of births going back to the turn of the century if necessary. Bartholomew, of course, might not have been born in the county, might have moved here as a child or an adult. If he owned property, he'd show up on the register of deeds. Whether a landowner or not, if he did his civic duty every two years, he would appear on the voter rolls..No one had actually been here. And he still didn't believe in ghosts, so he didn't think that a spirit had been wandering his home in his absence..Kid's room. Bartholomew's room. Furniture in cheerful primary colors. Pooh posters on the wall..Devil mountains, sacred islands, sacramental rivers and cities, Jesuits: These spiritual references at every turn made Junior uneasy. This was a haunted night, no doubt about that. He wouldn't have been greatly surprised if he had glanced at his rearview mirror and seen Thomas Vanadium's blue Studebaker Lark Regal closely tailing him, not the real car raised from Quarry Lake, but a ghostly version, with the filthy-scabby-monkey spirit of the cop at the wheel, an ectoplasmic Naomi at his side, Victoria Bressler and Ichabod and Bartholomew Prosser and Neddy Gnathic in the backseat: the Studebaker packed full of spirits like a bozo-stuffed clown car in a circus, though there would be nothing funny about these revenge-minded spooks when the doors flew open and they came tumbling out..A residual tension drained out of Junior. He was somewhat surprised that he had still been concerned about the song..The boy-wonder physician turned to Junior again and assumed an expression of compassion so inauthentic that if he'd been playing a doctor on even the cheesiest daytime soap opera, he'd have been stripped of his actor's-union card, fired, and possibly horsewhipped on a live television special. "We'll be doing the procedure this afternoon, so I wouldn't want to give you anything much for the pain just prior to anesthesia and sedation. But don't you worry, Mr. Pinchbeck. Once we've lanced these boils, when you wake up, ninety percent of the pain will be gone.".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..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..On the drive home, Junior dropped the knife down a storm drain in Larkspur. He tossed the gloves in a Dumpster in Corte Madera..Against the backdrop of granite monuments, Kaitlin hulked like a moldering presence from Beyond, risen out of a rotting box to take vengeance on the living..As Tom reached Celestina, she said, "Shots." She said, "Gunshots." She held the receiver in one hand and pulled at her hair with the other, as if with the administration of a little pain, she might wake up from this nightmare. She said, "He's in Oregon.".She removed a temporary cap from the second bicuspid on the lower left side and replaced it with the porcelain cap that had been delivered by the lab that morning.."I can't.".Startled, he snatched his hand back. The object fell, ringing faintly against the pavement..A speeding truck passed, stirring the fog, and the white broth churned past the car windows, a disorienting swirl..must either change her mind or commit herself to a more difficult and challenging life than any she had envisioned only this morning..-Dumpsters and delivery trucks hulked against the building walls. Steam billowed out of street grates. The gray shadows were no longer disturbed by a running shade in a tweed sports jacket.. "And, listen, if you leave too soon behind me, I've got a guy watching, and he'll put a hollow-point thirty-eight in your ass.".FOLLOWING A SECOND NIGHT at the Sleepie Tyme Inne, waking at dawn, Junior felt rested, refreshed-and in control of his bowels.. "Last time I looked, Miss Galloway lived to the south of us. Retired. Never married. No children.".Wednesday morning, January 10, he wired one and a half million dollars from the Gammoner account to Pinchbeck in Switzerland. Then he closed out the account in the Grand Cayman bank..After two years of rehabilitation, Tom had been pronounced as fit as ever, a miracle of modem medicine and willpower. But right now he seemed to have been put back together with spit and string and Scotch tape. Arms pumping, legs stretching, he felt every one of those eight months of coma in his withered-and-rebuilt muscles, in his calcium depleted-and-rebuilt bones..Tom Vanadium, on the other hand, was certain that Cain, having prepared for the possibility that something would go wrong during his assault on Celestina, wouldn't be easy to locate or to apprehend. In Vanadium's view, the maniac either had a bolt-hole waiting in the city or was already out of the SFPD's jurisdiction..At the bottom, the killer had pushed the cedar chest aside and clambered to his feet. From out of his raveled Tutankhamen windings, he peered up at Paul and fired one shot without taking aim, almost halfheartedly, before disappearing into the living room..Junior knew that he must remain vigilant. Vigilant and focused until January 12 had come and gone. Eight days to go..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..Edom drove, happy to assist Agnes. He was happier still that he didn't have to make the pie deliveries alone..He was astonished that adoption records would be sealed and so

closely guarded when a child was being placed with a member of its immediate family, with its mother's sister..Edom, who had never made it big, medium, or little, watched his sister blur before him. He strove to contain the shimmering hotness in his eyes. His love was not for magic, and his pride was not in any skill he possessed, for he possessed none worth noting. His love was for his good sister; she was his pride, too, and he felt that his small life had precious meaning as long as he was able to drive her on days like this, carry her pies, and occasionally make her smile..An exceptionally attractive woman, alone at the bar, stirred his desire. Glossy black hair: the tresses of night itself, shorn from the sky.The previously flat, monotonous voice had in it now a subtle but undeniable new roundness of tone: "And every human being, every living thing, is a string on that instrument.".Holding his precious face between her hands, she kissed him. She met his gaze, and furiously she blinked away her tears, for she wanted to be clear-sighted, to be looking into his eyes, to see him, the truest part of him in there beyond his eyes, until that very last moment when she could not have him anymore.. "Yes, but it's a Catholic hospital, and they offer this option to all unwed mothers-doesn't matter what their religion." Paul shook his head. "Oh, no. People look at our marriage, and they think I gave up so much, but I got back a lot more than I gave.".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.. "Well, Uncle Jacob doesn't understand kids. Anyway, this is pretty good stuff." He had bribed a parking attendant to keep his Mercedes at the curb in a valet zone, in front of a nearby restaurant, so it would be instantly available when needed. He could also leave the car and follow Celestina on foot if she chose to stroll home from here..The paramedic, fingers pressed to the radial artery in Junior's right wrist, must have felt a rocket-quick acceleration in his pulse rate.. "That's right," Celestina told Wally. "This isn't wagering. What's wrong with you?".As shaken as she had been at Phimie's side, she couldn't trust her memory. Perhaps she hadn't seen what she thought she'd seen.. "Maria is coming by with Francesca and Bonita," Agnes said. "We might as well put all the extensions in the table. Barty, call Uncle Jacob and Uncle Edom and invite them for dinner."

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