

HIS LAST BOW A REMINISCENCE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

"Maybe I won't have to try as hard as I think, because you make it so easy, Barty." He didn't pause to lock the house behind them. Bright Beach, in 1965, was as free of criminals as it was untroubled by lumbering brontosaurus..Although she knew how, and although she knew the pointlessness of asking why, Agnes asked, "Why? Oh, Lord, why must a blind boy climb a tree?".IMPLODE To burst inward under pressure. Like the hull of a submarine at too great a depth..The symptoms that terrified Phimie-the headache, crippling abdominal pain, dizziness, vision problems-had entirely relented. Possibly they had been more psychological than physical in nature..The full nature of the nightmare continued to elude him, but he became convinced that good reason for his fear existed, that the dream had been more than a dream. He had a nemesis named Bartholomew not merely in dreams, but in the real world, and this Bartholomew had something to do with ... babies..Junior realized he was on the verge of babbling, and with an effort, he silenced himself..With one tiny hand, Barty reached up for his mother. She gave him her forefinger, to which the sugar-bag boy clung tenaciously..The masterpiece that Junior purchased was small, a sixteen-inch-square canvas, but it cost twenty-seven hundred dollars. The entire picture-titled *The Cancer Lurks Unseen, Version 1*-was flat black, except for a small gnarled mass, bile-green and pus-yellow, in the upper-right quadrant. Worth every penny..He was so innocent. This sweet boy, this pure and stainless infant, couldn't possibly have an enemy in the world, and she could not imagine any son of hers earning enemies, not if she raised him well. This was just a silly card reading..Junior couldn't imagine why some Negro stranger would want to intrude. He hoped there wouldn't be trouble..Startled, Celestina said, "Good grief, you're spooky. How could you know what I'm thinking?".-though this Tom now has a rhinoceros-smacked face, this other Tom, in his own world, has an ordinary face. Poor him, so ordinary..Another thought: The young gallery employee would remember that Junior had asked after Neddy and had followed him toward the men's room. He would provide a description, and because he was an art connoisseur, therefore visually oriented, he'd most likely provide a good description, and what the police artist drew wouldn't be some cubist vision in the Picasso mode or a blurry impressionistic sketch, but a portrait filled with vivid and realistic detail, like a Norman Rockwell painting, ensuring apprehension..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..If Agnes knew that Jacob had been helping her game, she might never play cards with him again. She would not approve of what he had done. Consequently, his great skill as a card mechanic must be forever his secret..Highly impressed by the spot-on hyena scream with which Frieda had purged herself of the childhood emotional trauma inflicted by an authoritarian grandmother, Junior asked her to go out with him..During the following ten days, he withdrew money from several accounts. He converted selected paper assets into cash, as well..She worried that her anxiety would prove contagious, that when her fear infected her boy, he would be less able to fight whatever hateful thing had taken seed in his right eye..Foreword.With a tenderness that surprises and moves Celestina, the tall nurse closes the dead girl's eyes. She opens a fresh, clean sheet and places it over the body, from the feet up, covering the precious face last of all..An emergency kit in the trunk of his car contained a flashlight. He fetched it and sweetened the bribe to the valet..Airborne, Phimie complained of ringing in her ears, which might have been related to the flight. She also suffered an episode of double vision and, in the airport after landing, a nosebleed, which appeared to be related to her previous symptoms..Barty rounded the tree and returned to the porch. He climbed the steps and stood before Tom..Drawn one after the other, two knaves of spades didn't signify two deadly enemies, but meant that the enemy already predicted by the first would be unusually powerful, exceptionally dangerous..Junior closed his eyes at once and let his jaw sag, breathing through his mouth, feigning sleep..In the late-afternoon light, on this Christmas Eve, Barty was no ghost, no illusion.."We don't sell no pizza," Angel said, because lately they had received a few calls for a new pizzeria with a phone number one digit different from theirs.."It's a boy," Joey assured her, as though he had been given a vision. Thick blood sluiced across his lower lip, down his chin, bright arterial blood. "Baby, no," she pleaded..a deeply troubled John Wayne while the delightful David Niven floated along overhead in a basket suspended from a huge, colorful hot-air balloon..Angel raised her attention from the salt shaker to Tom's face, studied his scars for a moment, and said, "No..".Rapt, frightened yet wonderstruck, Agnes leaned forward, squinting between the whisking wipers..He woke several times that night, instantly alert for a ghostly serenade, but he heard no otherworldly crooning..He hesitated, because until the limited explanations he'd made to Celestina in San Francisco, he had never discussed his special perception with anyone except two priest counselors in the seminary. At first he felt uneasy, talking of these matters to strangers-as if he were making a confession to laity who held no authority to provide absolution but as he spoke to this hushed and intense gathering, his doubts fell away, and revelation seemed as natural as talk of the weather..A man with beautiful celadon eyes, his face beaded with jewels of rain, reached through the cut-away door and removed the blanket from Agnes..Each page comprised four columns of names and numbers, most with addresses. Approximately one hundred names filled each column, four hundred to a page..No longer able to judge the boy's degree of sleepiness by his eyes, she relied on him to tell her when to stop reading. At his request, she closed the book after forty-seven pages, at the end of Chapter 2..This baffled Junior. To the best of his recollection, during the weeks that Seraphim had come to him for physical therapy, she had never mentioned an older sister or any sister at all..Meanwhile, as attorneys met on Tuesday afternoon, Junior, having taken leave from work, phoned a locksmith to change the locks at his house. As a cop, Vanadium might have access to a lock-release gun that..Into the autumn of 1967, Junior reviewed hundreds of

thousands of phone listings, and occasionally he located a rare Bartholomew. In San Rafael or Marinwood. In Greenbrae or San Anselmo. Located and investigated and cleared them of any connection with Seraphim White's bastard baby..The boy fell and rolled even as he pitched the can, anticipating the shots that Cain fired, which cracked into the doorframe inches from Tom's knees..Letting go of Maria, lowering her hand to her heart, Agnes said, "I want to see him." After making the sign of the cross, Maria said, "They must to have kepted him in the eggubator until he is not dangerous. When the nurse comes, I will make her to tell me when the baby is to be safe. But I can't be leave you. I watch. I watch over."..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..He left the party and stood in the street for a while, taking slow deep breaths, letting the brisk night air clean the pot smoke out of his lungs, slow deep breaths, suddenly sober in spite of the beer he'd drunk, slow deep breaths, as chilled as a slab of beef in a meat locker, but not because of the cold night..Vanadium was dead. Pounded with pewter and sunk in a flooded quarry. Gone forever.. "Why should I care whether you have any peace?" she asked, and she seemed to be listening to a woman other than herself..At last Maria answered Jacob's question in a murmur, making the f sign of the cross once more as she spoke. "Never saw four. Never even just I see three. But four ... is to be the devil himself."..The search for Cain was secondary. Getting to the revolver took Priority. Regain the gun and then proceed room by haunted room to hunt him down. Hunt him down, if he was here. And if Cain didn't do the hunting first..The following April, when he proposed to her, she wouldn't have him. "You're sweet, Paul, but I can't let you throw your life away on me. You're this ... this beautiful ship that will sail a long way, to fascinating places, and I'd only be your anchor.".. "This will stay with you," Mary said. "It's shared sight from all the other yous in all the other places, but you won't have to make any effort to hold on to it. No headaches. No problems ever. Merry Christmas, Daddy."..The paramedic snatched the oxygen feed from his patient's nose and quickly elevated his head, providing a purge towel to catch the thin ejecta..They came to her, picked up the luggage that she had put down, and Edom said, "I'll drive."..Tossing the knave onto the table, Agnes said, "Barty doesn't seem too impressed with this devil."..Rising from the chair and approaching the bed, the detective kept turning the quarter without hesitation. "She was a very sweet girl. Very romantic. Her diary's full of rhapsodies about married life, about you. She thought you were the finest man she'd ever known and the perfect husband."..Edom had turned away from the box of groceries that he was packing. Frowning at the pies, he said, "You don't think. . .Not cheerful, life-loving, high-spirited, churchgoing Naomi. She saw every day through a golden haze that came from the sun in her heart..So after waiting two months for the superhot Harrison White case to cool down, Junior returned instead to Spruce Hills, traveled bald and pocked and passing as Pinchbeck, under the cover of night..As long as Junior continued to fake sleep, the cop couldn't be absolutely sure that any deception was taking place..to prayer instead, asking for the wisdom to understand why this was happening to her and for the strength to cope with her pain and with her loss..When Agnes crunched the ice, the nurse said, "No, no. Don't swallow it all at once. Let it melt.".. "Fear?" Kathleen asked, more interested in Vanadium's words than in his prestidigitation. "You said you're offering fear to Cain ... as if that was something he would want."..Vanadium owned so few clothes that the two bags had sufficient capacity to accommodate half the contents of the closet and dresser..That would not be a productive use of his time. Satisfying, but not prudent. Zedd tells us that time is the most precious thing we have, because we're born with so little of it..And now she didn't need him anymore. He gazed at her face, held her cooling hand; his anchor was slipping away from him, leaving him adrift..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..Artificial eyes were on order. He would soon return to Newport Beach for a third fitting before implant. They weren't glass, as commonly believed, but thin plastic shells that fit neatly behind the eyelids in the cavities left after surgery. On the inner surface of the transparent artificial cornea, the artificial iris would be skillfully hand-painted, and movement of the ocular prosthesis could be achieved by attaching the eye-moving muscles to the conjunctiva.".. "But before you leave St. Mary's," the physician said, "I'd like a few mutes of your time. It's very important to me. Personally."..Three times, Mary vanished, and three times she reappeared, before she led the bamboozled Koko to her mother and father. "Neat, huh?"..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 bands on a sizable pan of his fortune, in the form of child support..get his hackles up if we, at the state level, still want to poke around a little..Sklent proved to be angry, suspicious, volatile, but also a man of tremendous intellectual power. A profound and dazzling conversationalist, he rattled off breathtaking insights into the human condition, astonishing yet unarguable opinions about art, and revolutionary philosophical concepts. Later, except in the matter of ghosts, Junior would not be able to remember a single word of what Sklent had said, only that it had all been brilliant and really cool..Raising his revolver, Tom squeezed off two shots, but the gun didn't discharge..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..Any reasonable person would agree that the line between legitimate and harassment was hair-thin..out of hand. "Well ... yes, I suppose so." Spineless, unethical quack bastard, Junior thought bitterly.. "Well, the lab could detect abnormally high salt levels, but that wouldn't matter in court. He could say he ate a lot of salty foods."..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..The subtle distortions in his vision, which caused lines of type to twist, didn't appear to trouble Barty much otherwise. He moved as quickly and as surely as ever, with his special grace..Two staff members were at the front desk, when last he'd seen them, out of sight now and too far away to hear the crooning. Junior had been waiting at the doors when the library opened, and thus far he'd encountered no other

patrons. He fished the sound-suppressor from a jacket pocket, drew the pistol from his shoulder holster, and began to screw the former to the latter. He misthreaded it at first because his hands had begun to shake. Footsteps in the hall drew their attention to the open door, where the surgeon appeared in his loose cotton greens. Escorting her home didn't require either a car or a long walk, because she lived upstairs in the hotel where he'd had dinner. The top three floors of the building featured enormous owner-occupied apartments. Agnes had the craziest notion that he was counting them, when at his age, Of course, he would have no concept of numbers. Maria fished another chip from the sweating carafe, rejected it, and scooped out a larger piece. She hesitated, staring at it for a moment, and then spooned it between Agnes's lips. "Water can be broken if it will be first made into ice." 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. He hadn't seen Thomas Vanadium since Monday, at the cemetery, and Vanadium hadn't pulled any tricks since leaving twenty-five cents at his bedside that same night. Almost four days undisturbed by the hectoring detective. In matters Vanadium, however, Junior had learned to be wary, prudent. Judging by the evidence, the nurse was home alone, but Junior raised his voice above the music and called out, "Hello? Is anyone here?" Academy of Art College and might have met Celestina White. The critiques of her paintings. "Does my dad like Christmas?" Barty asked, sitting on the grave grass in front of the headstone. No. Ridiculous. Naomi wasn't slumped across him. He wasn't sharing his bed with a corpse. That was E.C. Comics stuff, something from a yellowed issue of Tales from the Crypt. He summoned enough courage to approach the nightstand. His hand trembled. He half expected the quarter to be illusory; to disappear between his pinching fingers, but it was real. "I know you, kid. You can handle anything from here on, whether it's a sold-out show or it's not, whether you're going to be famous or just another nobody." The spectral singer didn't exhibit her blood-and-bone sisters' reluctance to pursue her man. If blood tests revealed that Junior wasn't the father, Vanadium would have a motive. It wouldn't be the right motive, because Junior truly hadn't known either that his wife was pregnant or that she was possibly screwing around with another man. But the detective would be able to sell it to a prosecutor, and the prosecutor would convince at least a few jurors. With a smudge of flour on one cheek, wiping her hands on a red-and-white checkered dishtowel, Agnes answered the door, saw the car in the driveway, and said, "Paul! You're not walking?" He already had the pistol he had taken from Frieda Bliss's collection, but it didn't come with a sound-suppressor. He was preparing for all contingencies. Focus. So here it came again, the hateful past, returning when Junior thought he was shed of it. This tall, lanky, Celestina-humping son of a bitch, guardian of Bartholomew, had driven away, gone home, but he couldn't stay in the past where he belonged, and he was opening his mouth to say Who are you or maybe to shout an alarm, so Junior shot him three times. No one was surprised by his proposal, her acceptance, and the wedding. Barty and Angel were both eighteen when they were married in June of 1983. Similarities between Naomi and her mom- ended with appearances. Sheena was loud, crass, self-absorbed, and had the vocabulary of a brothel owner specializing in service to sailors with Tourette's syndrome. Caution discarded, Junior went inside, for the same reason that a dedicated opera aesthete might once a decade attend a country-music concert: to confirm the superiority of his taste and to be amused by what passed for music among the great unwashed. Some might call it slumming. A spirit-shredding bleakness clawed at her, but she couldn't permit it to leave her in tatters. If she traded hope for despair, as her brothers had done, Bartholomew would be finished before he'd begun. She owed him optimism, lessons in the joy of life. before used. Boeotian. A dull, obtuse, stupid person. He felt very Boeotian all of a sudden. Now he shuffled the first of the four decks precisely as he had shuffled the first deck on Friday evening, and he set it aside. This humble house wasn't where you expected to hear an elaborate custom doorbell-or even any doorbell at all, since knuckles on wood were the cheapest announcement of a visitor. His first year in San Francisco was an eventful one for the nation and the world. Winston Churchill, arguably the greatest man of the century thus far, died. The United States launched the first air strikes against North Vietnam, and Lyndon Johnson raised troop levels to 150,000 in that conflict. A Soviet cosmonaut was the first to take a space walk outside an orbiting craft. Race riots raged in Watts for five fiery days. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law. Sandy Koufax, a Los Angeles Dodger, pitched a perfect game, in which no hitter reached first base. T. S. Eliot died, and Junior purchased one of the poet's works through the Book-of-the-Month Club. Other famous people passed away: Stan Laurel, Nat King Cole, Le Corbusier, Albert Schweitzer, Somerset Maugham.... Indira Gandhi became the first woman prime minister of India, and the Beatles' inexplicable and annoying success rolled on and on. 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. The Beatles began singing the number-one song, "I Feel Fine," as Junior turned off the county highway and followed the lake road northeast around the oil-black water. They had two titles in the American top five. In disgust, he switched off the radio. Candle flames blurred into bright smears, and the faces of her good parents shimmered like the half-seen countenances of angels in dreams. From her reading, she knew that amniotic fluid should be clear. A few traces of blood in it should not necessarily be alarming, but here were more than traces. Here were thick red-black streams. Edom felt uneasy in this kingdom of a strange god. The god that his brother feared was humanity, its dark compulsions, its arrogance. Edom, on the other hand, trembled before Nature, whose wrath was so great that one day she would destroy all things, when the universe collapsed into a super dense nugget of matter the size of a pea. Magusson considered the assaults on Victoria and on Vanadium to be hideous crimes, of course, but he also viewed them as affronts to his own dignity and reputation. He expected a felonious client, rewarded with four and a quarter million instead of jail time, to be grateful and thereafter to walk a straight line. "Having spent most of the last twenty years in this apartment, not being the one who has a car, how would I meet a Negro magician?" Ghosts. Sklent was an atheist, and yet he believed in spirits. Here's how that

works: Heaven, Hell, and God do not exist, but human beings are as much energy as flesh, and when the flesh gives out, the energy goes on. "We're the most stubborn, selfish, greedy, grubbing, vicious, psychotic, evil species in the universe," Sklent explained, "and some of us just refuse to die, we're too hardass to die. The spirit is a prickly bur of energy that sometimes clings to places and people that were once important to us, so then you get haunted houses, poor bastards still tormented by their dead wives, and crap like that. And sometimes, the bur attaches itself to the embryo in some slut who's just been knocked up, so you get reincarnation. You don't need a god for all this. It's just the way things are. Life and the afterlife are the same place, right here, right now, and we're all just a bunch of filthy, scabby monkeys tumbling through an endless damn series of barrels." .ready to hear me. However long you need. But something ... something extraordinary happened here before you arrived." .Junior hurried out of the kitchen and along the hallway to the front door. He ran silently, landing on his toes like a dancer. His natural athletic grace was one of the things that drew so many women to him..Mrs. Lombardi had no visitors. She was alone in the world, her two children and her husband having passed away long ago.. "You're one to talk," Celestina said. "Who was it told us they were sitting hand in hand on the front-porch swing." .This was tedious work and might cot bear fruit. He needed to begin somewhere, however, and the telephone directory was the most logical starting point..By dawn, when the intestinal paroxysms finally passed, this bold new man of adventure felt as flat and limp as road kill.. "It isn't that, Daddy. You remember, when we were all together the day before yesterday, how afraid Phimie was of this man. Not just for herself ... for the baby." .Raised by a father to whom any form of amusement was blasphemy, Agnes had never seen a magician perform until she was nineteen, when Joey Lampion, then her suitor, had taken her to a stage show. Rabbits plucked out of top hats, doves conjured from sudden plumes of smoke, assistants sawn in half and mended to walk again; every illusion that had been old even in Houdini's time was a jaw-dropping amazement to her that evening. Now she remembered a trick in which the magician had poured a pitcher of milk into a funnel fashioned from a few pages of a newspaper, causing the milk to vanish when the funnel, still dry, was unrolled to reveal ordinary newsprint. The thrill that had quivered through her that evening measured I on the Richter scale compared to the full 10-point sense of wonder quaking through her at the sight of Barty as dry as if he'd spent the afternoon perched fireside..He wondered what it would be like to make love to Renee and kill her. Only once had he killed without good reason. And that had been one of the infuriating Bartholomews. Prosser in Terra Linda. A man. On that occasion, no erotic element had been involved. This would be a first..With Naomi, sex had been glorious, because they were bonded on multiple levels, all deeper than the mere physical. They had been so close, so emotionally and intellectually entwined, that in making love to her, he'd been making love to himself; and he would never experience a greater intimacy than that..He kept the house, for it was a shrine to his life with Perri. He returned to it from time to time, to refresh his spirit..The white padded eye patches rebuffed her, and she realized how profoundly the boy's double enucleation would affect how easily she could read his moods and know his mind. Here was a littler loss until now shadowed by the greater destruction. Denied the evidence of his eyes, she would need to be better at noting and interpreting nuances of his body language-also changed by blindness-and his voice, for there would be no soul revealed by hand-painted, plastic implants..A sense of fellowship in extraordinary times drew everyone closer, to hug, to touch, to share the wonder. For a long moment, even in the symphony of the storm, in spite of all the plink-tink-hiss-plop-rattle that arose from every rain-beaten work of man and nature, they seemed to stand here in a hush as deep as Tom had ever heard..By Friday morning, September 10, little more than forty-eight hours after the shooting, he felt good and was in fine spirits..Thus far, there were only two unexpected developments, the first being his explosive vomiting. He hoped he would never have to endure another such episode..Assisted by Edom and Jacob, Agnes-in a wheelchair-was rolled across the grass, between the headstones, to her husband's final resting place. Although no longer in danger of renewed hemorrhaging, she was under doctor's orders to avoid strain..By his twelfth month, he was toilet-trained, and every time that he had the need to use his colorful little bathroom chair, he proudly and repeatedly announced to everyone, "Barty potty." .As Sinatra began to sing "I'll Be Seeing You," Junior stepped around the bloom and the Merlot. He cautiously peeled back two inches of the curtain at one of the sidelights..it to the granite-topped secretary, and sat in front of the telephone. Previously,.Because she'd enjoyed some limited use of her right arm, it was less wasted than her left, although not normal. Paul pulled down that sleeve of her pajamas.

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