

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF MOLECULAR TESTING FOR THE DIAGNOSIS AND**

The aging, fugitive Nazi had been replaced at the front desk by a woman with messily chopped blond hair, a brutish face, and arms that would dissuade Charles Atlas from challenging her. She changed a five-dollar bill into coins for the vending machines and snarled at him only once in strangely accented English..JUNIOR CAIN WANDERED among the Philistines, in the gray land of conformity, seeking one-just one-refreshingly repellent canvas, finding only images that welcomed and even charmed, yearning for real art and the vicious emotional whirlpool of despair and disgust that it evoked, finding instead only themes of uplift and images of hope, surrounded by people who seemed to like everything from the paintings to the canapes to the cold January night, people who probably hadn't spent even one day of their lives brooding about the inevitability of nuclear annihilation before the end of this decade, people who smiled too much to be genuine intellectuals, and he felt more alone and threatened than eyeless Samson chained in Gaza..He had sworn this vow before. An argument could be made that he had broken it..A few gasps and exclamations. A sweet giggle and applause from Angel. The reactions were surprisingly mild..Then he curled up in one of the big armchairs in the living room and began the book again. This was the first time he had ever reread a novel-and he finished it at midnight..Her case of polio had been so severe that braces and crutches were never an option. Muscle rehabilitation had been ineffective..She shook her head. "No way back." She pointed to the sketch pad on the floor. "I pushed him there."..Sparky Vox-with less training in theology and philosophy than his guest, but with a spiritual insight that any overeducated Jesuit would have to admire, even if grudgingly-had settled Vanadium's uneasy conscience. "The problem with movies and books is they make evil look glamorous, exciting, when it's no such thing. It's boring and it's depressing and it's stupid. Criminals are all after cheap thrills and easy money, and when they get them, all they want is more of the same, over and over. They're shallow, empty, boring people who couldn't give you five minutes of interesting conversation if you had the piss-poor luck to be at a party full of them. Maybe some can be monkey-clever some of the time, but they aren't hardly ever smart. God must surely want us to laugh at these fools, because if we don't laugh at 'em, then one way or another, we give 'em respect. If you don't mock a bastard like Cain, if you fear him too much or even if you just look at him in an all-solemn sort of way, then you're paying him more respect than I ever intend to. Another glass of wine?".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..The poor girl's blood pressure soared in spite of the medication. She suffered a violent seizure..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..In case someone was waiting in the hallway, he flushed the john for authenticity, though binding foods and paregoric still gave him the sturdy bowels of any brave knight in battle.. "That's just ... an old joke," she heard herself saying, as from a distance. "You didn't really walk between the drops?".He stared I out at the congregated ghosts of fog, white multitudes that entirely obscured the bay, as if all the sailors ever lost at sea had gathered here, pressing at the window, eyeless forms that nevertheless saw everything..In the main room, on his way toward the front door, Junior saw Celestina White surrounded by adoring fatheads, nattering ninnies, dithering dolts, saps and boneheads, oafs and gawks and simpletons. She was still as gorgeous as her shamelessly beautiful paintings. If the opportunity arose, Junior would have more use for her than for her so called art..Shopping for fashion accessories relaxed Junior. He spent a few hours browsing for tie chains, silk pocket squares, and unusual belts. Riding the up escalator in a department store, between the second and..Friday brought Scamp again, all of Scamp, all day, every way, wall-to-wall Scamp, so on Saturday he hadn't enough energy to do more than shower..Junior jammed on the brakes, slammed the gearshift into park, threw open the door, and plunged from the car. He spun around to face the menace, loose gravel shifting treacherously underfoot..Earlier, he had placed an open fifth of vodka on the table, in front of Victoria. The nurse, no longer in the chair, sprawled on the floor as if she had emptied another bottle before this one..He hurt too much to recover quickly and take advantage of the woman's brief vulnerability. Clambering to his feet, he backed away from her and fumbled in a pocket for spare cartridges..He was able to play peekaboo in his fifth month instead of his eighth, stand while holding on to something in his sixth instead of eighth..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..Thanks to his intelligence and his personality, Barty's presence was so great for his age that Agnes tended to think of him as being physically larger and stronger than he actually was. As the scent of grass grew more complex and even more appealing, she saw her son more clearly than she'd seen him in a while: quite small, fatherless yet brave, burdened with a gift that was a blessing but that also made a normal boyhood impossible, forced to grow up at a up faster pace than any child should be required to endure. Barty was achingly delicate, so vulnerable that when Agnes looked at him, she felt a little of the awful sense of helplessness that burdened Edom and Jacob..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..Agnes remained mystified by this talk, but a week before, in the rain-swept cemetery, she had learned there was substance to it..At the head of the line, Paul waved a red handkerchief out of the window of the station wagon..He tried to lean back as he dropped, with the hope that he would fall under her, providing cushion if they met with sidewalk instead of lawn..He bought cracker sandwiches, some filled with cheese and some with peanut butter, redskin peanuts, chocolate bars, and Coca-Cola. Although this was an unhealthy meal, cheese and peanut butter and chocolate shared a virtue: they were all binding..In a sudden desperate burst of action, Junior tore at the dead man's closed hand, sprang open the trap of fingers and palm-and did not find a quarter. Nor two dimes and a nickel. Nor five nickels. Nothing. Zip. Zero..When Victoria finally calmed her racing heart, she returned the spoon to the tray on the nightstand, stoppered the carafe, and said, "That's enough for now, Mr. Cain. In your condition, even too much I melted ice might trigger renewed vomiting."..As Barty stepped across the threshold into the upstairs hall, Miss Pixie Lee said, "You're sweet, Barty..Waking from a bad dream, he sometimes thought he heard the ratcheting of gear-wheel feet. The scrape and creak of rusted iron joints. The clink of rake-tine fingers rattling against one another..He nervously fingered the fabric of his slacks, outlining the quarter in his pocket. Still there..The cheerful tides of friends and neighbors, over the years, had washed away nearly all the stains that the dark rage of Agnes's father had impressed on these rooms. She hoped her brothers might eventually see that hatred and anger are only scars upon a beach, while love is the rolling surf that ceaselessly smooths the sand..Because the tower stood on a ridgeline that marked the divide between county and state property, most of the attending constabulary were county deputies, but two state troopers were present, as well..During the course of this momentous day, he had employed Zedd learned techniques to channel his hot anger into a red-hot rage. Now, without any conscious effort on his part, rage grew into molten-white fury.."Maybe." In truth, Tom didn't believe that any of this could be learned even by one adept taking instruction from another adept. They were born with the same special perception, but with different and strictly limited abilities to interact with the multiplicity of worlds that they could detect. He wasn't able to explain even to himself how he could send a coin or other small object Elsewhere; it was something he just felt, and each time that the coin vanished, the authenticity of the feeling was proved. He suspected that when Barty walked where the rain wasn't, the boy employed no conscious techniques; he simply decided to walk in a dry world while otherwise remaining in this wet one-and then he did. Woefully incomplete wizards, sorcerers with just a trick or two each, they had no secret tome of enchantments and spells to teach to an apprentice..If the ace of diamonds, in quartet, must be taken seriously, then why not the rest of the draw?.."If they always go there, smooosh--smooosh, then you're going to wind up with one really fat finger." \*..The house was empty, silent. Hanna worked only days. Nellie Oatis, Perri's companion, was not employed here anymore..In the kitchen, he sat her in a chair and let her slump forward over the breakfast table. With her arms folded, with her head on her arms and turned to one side, she appeared to be resting..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..At last, as the sun slowly set, he arrived at the highest of the high redoubts, beyond which the branches were too young and too weak to support him farther. Against a sky red enough to delight the most sullen sailors, he rose and stood in a final crook of limbs, pressing his left hand against a balancing branch, right hand planted cockily on his hip, lord of his domain, having kicked off the trammels of darkness and fashioned from them a ladder..RED SKY IN THE morning, sailors take warning; red sky at night, sailors delight..Handing Angel to Grace, Lipscomb said, "I own some investment properties. There's a two-bedroom unit available in one of them."..By the time his ferocious in-laws had finished with him, Junior would have won the sympathy of Knacker, Hisscus, Nork, and everyone else who might have harbored doubts about his role in Naomi's demise. Perhaps even Thomas Vanadium would find his suspicion worn away..daughter's existence. Angel, if that's what she were eventually to be named, lived under a threat as surely as had all the children of Bethlehem, who'd been slain according to the decree of King Herod. The baby curled one small hand around her aunt's index finger. So tiny, fragile, she nonetheless gripped with surprising tenacity..A cause now apparent, the fear explained, Agnes held her baby more tightly. So new to the world, he seemed already to be slipping away from her, captured by the whirlpool of a demanding destiny..With the earth still tenuously stable beneath them, they arrived at their fifth destination, a new address on Agnes's mercy list..The revolving beacons dwindled, casting off blue-and-red pulses of light that shimmered-swooped through the diffusing fog, as if they were disembodied spirits seeking someone to possess..A supply of ammunition lined the bottom of all the dresser and bureau drawers, concealed by underwear and other garments. Junior appropriated a box of 9-mm. cartridges..The Bones of the Earth..The police. The stupid police. Ringing the bell when they knew he'd been shot. Ringing the damn doorbell when he lay here helpless, the Industrial Woman lurching toward him, his toe on the other side of the kitchen, ringing the doorbell when he was losing enough blood to give transfusions to an entire ward of wounded hemophiliacs. The stupid bastards were probably expecting him to serve tea and a plate of butter cookies, little paper doilies between each cup and saucer..Now Barty peered at the card, smacked his lips, smiled, and said, "Ga." With a flatulent squawk of the butt trumpet, he soiled his diaper..He traveled prairies and mountains and valleys, passed fields rich in every imaginable crop, crossed great forests and wide rivers. He walked in fierce storms when thunder crushed the sky and lightning tore it, walked in wind that skinned the bare earth and sheared green tresses from trees, and walked also in sun-scrubbed days as blue and clean as ever there had been in Eden..In her arms, little Barty burred contentedly, unaware that his destiny supposedly included epic love, fabulous riches, and violence..wickedly sharp silver scimitar suspended by a filament more fragile than a human hair..One nurse and one nun brought Celestina into the creche behind the viewing window.."December 1, 1958, in Chicago, Illinois, a parochial-school fire killed ninety-five."..As Sklent so insightfully put it: Some of us live on after death, survive in spirit, because we are just too

stubborn, selfish, greedy, grubbing, vicious, psychotic, and evil to accept our demise. None of those qualities described sweet Naomi, who had been far too kind and loving and meek to live on in spirit, after her lovely flesh failed. Now at one with the earth, Naomi was no threat to Junior, and the state had paid for its negligence in her death, and the whole matter should have been brought to closure. There were only two barriers to full and final resolution: first, the stubborn, selfish, greedy, grubbing, vicious, psychotic, evil spirit of Thomas Vanadium; and second, Seraphim's bastard baby--little Bartholomew..One of the hardest things that she had ever done was to leave him then, alone in his room, with the hateful something still quietly growing in his eye. She wanted to move the armchair close to his bed and watch over him throughout the night..When she went upstairs at 2:10 in the morning, she found the boy fast asleep in the soft lamplight, Tunnel in the Sky at his side..Because the upper part of the hospital bed was somewhat raised, he didn't have to lift his head from the pillow to study the corner where the phantom waited. He peered beyond the IV rack, past the foot of the..The infant's smile was so captivating and his puzzlement so comically earnest that both expressions worked on Agnes's misery as surely as yeast leavens dough. Her bitter tears turned sweet..Initially, when told that his patient was a Negro, Junior had been reluctant to serve as her physical therapist. Her program of rehab required mostly structured exercise to restore flexibility and to gain strength in the affected limb, but some massage would be involved, as well, which made him uncomfortable..Onto its roof now, the Pontiac spun as it slid, grinding loudly against the blacktop, and regardless of how determinedly Agnes held on, she was being pulled out of her seat, toward the inverted ceiling and also backward. Her forehead knocked hard into the thin overhead padding, and her back wrenched against the headrest..He had been thankful that during the long trance, he hadn't wet himself. Now he would gladly have accepted any amount of humiliation rather than suffer these vicious cramps..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..To the waiter, Nolly was Nolly, Kathleen was Mrs. Wulfstan, and Tom Vanadium was sir--though not the usual perfunctorily polite sir, but sir with deferential emphasis. Tom was unknown to the waiter, but his shattered face gave him gravitas; besides, he possessed a quality, quite separate from carriage and demeanor and attitude, an ineffable something, that inspired respect and even trust..of fists, hard blows, and his father's heavy breathing as he deals out the punishment. Edom himself lies face down in."Wrong about what, sugarpie smooosh--smooosh?" Celestina asked as Wally pulled to the curb again and parked..Surprisingly, he received a lot of gratification from voicing this insult, even though Vanadium was too dead to hear it..After wiping her floury hands, Agnes took the book from him and, examining it, could find nothing wrong. She flipped back a few pages, then a few forward, but the lines of type were crisp and clear. "Show me where, honey..".Evidently, Jacob had made a quick trip to his apartment over the garage and, with no thought for mice and dust, had not closed the back door. Junior said, "You've caused me a lot of trouble, you know." He'd been building a beautiful rage all night, thinking about what he'd been through because of the girl's temptress mother, whom he saw so clearly in this pint-size bitch. "So much trouble..".Agnes dropped to one knee before the boy and held him gently by the shoulders. "Let me look..". "It's an uncommon reaction," the physician acknowledged, "but not so uncommon as to be rare..".MONDAY MORNING, far above Joe Lampion's grave, the translucent blue California sky shed a rain of light so pure and clear that the world seemed to have been washed clean of all its stains.. "I thought so," Angel said, dubiosity squinching her face. "Mrs. Orwall made me cheese..".Angel moved her hand to Barty's right eye, and again he didn't twitch with surprise when her fingers lightly touched his closed and sagging lid. "I won't let you forget..".Junior strove to appear properly mortified. "Thought I heard something. Searched the apartment..".Although this was perhaps the happiest evening of Celestina's life, it wasn't without a note of melancholy. She couldn't avoid thinking about Phimie..In fact, although weak and achy, Junior felt mentally refreshed and wonderfully alert..He planned, as soon as they took him out of his cell, to use the old Changers spell of self-transformation and so escape. Surely his life was in danger, and it would be all right to use the spell? Only he couldn't decide what to turn himself into--a bird, or a wisp of smoke, what would be safest? But while he was thinking about it, Losen's men, used to wizard's tricks, drugged his food and he ceased to think of anything at all. They dumped him into a mule-cart like a sack of oats. When he showed signs of reviving during the journey, one of them bashed him on the head, remarking that he wanted to make sure he got his rest..Because of his blindness and his intellectual gifts, Barty was home schooled; besides, no teacher was a match for his autodidactic skills, nor could anyone possibly inspire in him a greater thirst for knowledge than the one with which he had been born. Angel went to this same informal classroom, and her sole fellow student was also her teacher. They aced the periodic equivalency tests that the law required. Their constant companionship seemed to be all play, yet was filled with constant learning, too..Although she had acutely felt the loss of Joey during the past three years, she had never missed him as much as she missed him now. Marriage is an expression of love and respect and trust and faith in the future, but the union of husband and wife is also an alliance against the challenges and tragedies of life, a promise that with me in your corner, you will never stand alone..Simon Magusson, lacking family, had left his estate to Tom. This came as a surprise. The sum was so considerable that even though Tom was on a dispensation from his vows, which included his vow of property, he was uncomfortable with his fortune. His comfort was quickly restored by contributing the entire inheritance to Pie Lady Services. They had been brought together by two extraordinary children, by the conviction that Barty and Angel were part of some design of enormous consequence. But more often than not, God weaves patterns that become perceptible to us only over long periods of time, if at all. After the past three eventful years, there were now no weekly miracles, no signs in the earth or sky, no revelations from burning bushes or from more mundane forms of communication. Neither Barty nor Angel revealed any new

astounding talents, and in fact they were as ordinary as any two young prodigies can be, except that he was blind and she served as his eyes upon the world..A flicker of complacency showed in Otters tired, battered young face. "No," he said. "I don't think anybody can."..So runs the water away, away,Done with dolls for now, Barty and Angel went upstairs to his room, where the book that talked waited patiently in silence. With her colored pencils and a large pad of drawing paper, she clambered onto the cushioned window seat. Barty sat up in bed and switched on the tape player that stood on the nightstand..He would come. She knew. She had always known, but had half forgotten. There was something special about Angel, and because of that specialness, she lived under a threat as surely as the newborns of Bethlehem under King Herod's death decree. Long ago, Celestina glimpsed a complex and mysterious pattern in this, and to the eye of the artist, the symmetry of the design required that the father would sooner or later come..Happy weekend. His attitude amazed her, and his strength in the face of darkness gave her courage..Wally Lipscomb's face, as long and narrow as ever, seemed not at all like the dour visage of an undertaker, as once it had, but rather like the rubbery mug of one of those circus clowns who can make you laugh as easily by striking an exaggeratedly sad frown as by putting on a goofy grin. She saw a warmth of spirit where once she had seen spiritual indifference, vulnerability where once she had seen an armored heart, great expectations where once she had seen withered hope; she saw kindness and gentleness where they had always been but now in more generous measure than before. She loved this long, narrow, homely, wonderful face, and she loved the man who wore it..The moonlight had faded and the gentle waves had ebbed out of his mind's eye. He concentrated, trying to force the phantom sea to flow back into view, but this was one of those rare occasions when a Zedd technique failed him". "Angel," Phimie said thickly, searching her sister's eyes for a sign of understanding..Before Celestina probed and perhaps touched upon a sore tooth of truth, Tom launched into the story of King Obadiah, Pharaoh of the Fantastic, who had taught him all he knew about sleight of hand..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..Slowly rotating his raised hands before his eyes, as if he saw them young and supple-fingered, the magician described the amazing manipulations that a master card mechanic could perform. Though he spoke without flash or filigree, he made these feats of skill sound more sorcerous than hares from hats, doves from scarves, and blondes bisected by buzz saws..Last night, in the superintendent's basement apartment, as they shared a bottle of wine, Sparky had told Vanadium numerous weird tales about Cain: The Night He Shot Off His Toe, The Day He Was Saved from a Meditative Trance and Paralytic Bladder, The Day the Psychotic Girlfriend Brought a Vietnamese Potbellied Pig to His Apartment When He Was Out and Fed It Laxatives and Penned It in His Bedroom ....In the faraway, at the limits of night and fog, the dog bit off his bark in expectation..Evidently, last evening, prior to keeping a dinner date with Victoria, when the taunting detective had illegally entered Junior's house and placed another quarter on the nightstand, he had seen the directory open on the kitchen table. Deducing the meaning of the red check marks, he inserted this card and closed the book: another small assault in the psychological warfare that he'd been waging..The dying-dove hands fluttered down Junior's arms, plucking feebly at his leather coat, and at last hung limp at Neddy's sides..Apparently Maria wished that she'd brought a rosary to dinner. With the fingers of her right hand, she pinched the knuckles of her left, one after the other, as if they were beads..Vanadium hadn't seen the man who had clubbed him from behind and who had smashed his face with a pewter candlestick, but when~ he spoke the name Enoch Cain, the quality in his eyes was not compassion. No fingerprints had been left, no evidence in the aftermath of the fire at the Bressler house or in the Studebaker hauled from Quarry Lake..He knew that he needed to get a grip on himself. But he could not keep his breathing slow and deep, couldn't remember any of Zedd's other foolproof methods of self-control, couldn't recall a single useful meditative technique..around a long time yet, but women outlive men by several years. Actuarial tables aren't wrong."..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..In a few instances, when his suspicions were aroused in spite of their denials, Junior tracked down their residences. He observed them in the flesh and made additional-and subtle-inquiries of their neighbors until he was satisfied that his quarry was elsewhere..This venerable old building, as solidly constructed as a castle, was well-insulated; noises in other apartments rarely penetrated to Junior's. Never before had he heard a neighbor's voice distinctly enough to comprehend the words spoken-or, in this case, sung.."I'm wondering," Nolly said, "if you're not an officer of the law anymore, in what capacity are you going to pursue Cain?". "Well," Kathleen said, "even if the money wasn't so nice, I'd be sorry to see this case end.".."You're all right, we've got you now." His soft yet reverberant voice was so unearthly that his words seemed to convey an assurance more profound and more comforting than their surface meaning..Perhaps this particular worry was not ordinary maternal concern. If a sixth sense is at work in all of us, then perhaps subconsciously Apes was aware of the tragedy to come: the tumors, the surgery, the blindness..Standing over the body, he squeezed off the last three shots. Finished, he detested guns more than ever..In the execution, he was likewise scrupulous, for he didn't want the grownups to see what Angel saw; he preferred they believe it was sleight of hand-or magic. After the usual moves, he briefly closed his right hand around the coin, then with a snap of his wrist, flung it at Angel, simultaneously distracting with flourishes aplenty..excited, shrieking. Branch to branch, the flapping of wings is leathery, demonic. The only other sounds are the thud..she was buoyant, unrestrained, floating up from the padded

stretcher, until she was. "Sure. That's how it works with everything. Everything that can happen does happen, and each different way of happening makes a whole new place." He was filled with bitter remorse for having suspected Naomi of poisoning his cheese sandwich or his apricots. She had in fact adored him, as he had always believed. She would never have lifted a hand against him, never. Dear Naomi would have died for him. In fact, she had. In spite of the thousands of hours that Paul was afoot, he seldom thought about why he walked. He met people along the way who asked, and he had answers for them, but he never knew if any answer might be the truth. Leaving three of the pats in the container, he carefully placed the fourth on the vinyl-tile floor. Junior was glad for the chance to eavesdrop, not only because he hoped to learn the nature and depth of Vanadium's suspicions, but also because he was curious-and concerned-about the cause of the disgusting and embarrassing episode that had landed him here. Nothing he had learned about the supernatural had led him closer to a belief in ghosts and in all that ghosts implied. His faith still reposed entirely in Enoch Cain Jr., and he refused to make room on his altar for anyone or anything other than himself. 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..after he is rolled onto his back by his father, now, here, roses by the fistful jammed in his face, crushed and ground. Evidently, either Frank Sinatra was an enthusiasm that Victoria and the detective shared, or the nurse purchased some of the crooner's records expressly for their dinner engagement. "Jacob scares people," Agnes said. "No one would eat a pie that Jacob delivered without having it tested at a lab." As Junior was about to knock again, the door flew inward, and over Sinatra having fun with "When My Sugar Walks Down the Street," Victoria said, "You're early, I didn't hear your car--" She was speaking as she pulled the door open, and she cut herself off in midsentence. When she stepped up to the threshold and saw who stood before her. After the stupid bastards read a newspaper or smoked a few cigarettes, they finally broke down the door. Satisfyingly dramatic: the crack of splintering wood, the crash. Shadows still perched throughout most of the room. They no longer reminded her of roosting birds, but of a featherless flock, leathery of wing and red of eye, with a taste for unspeakable feasts. Looking toward the nearest window, where the wet night kissed the glass, he said, "Lawn sprinklers?" By the time Junior passed the three offices and found the men's room, Neddy had occupied it. The door was locked, which must mean this was a single-occupant john. From his first birthday to his third, Barty made worthless all the child-care and child-development books that a first-time mother relied on to know what to expect of her offspring, and when. Barty grew and coped and learned according to his own clock. Junior didn't slow as he passed the house, but circled the block and drove by the place again. Barty grinned mischievously. "One of the places we visited today. Some big kids. They saw this scary movie, said they had to wash their shorts after." The hilly streets of the city, ignoring all traffic lights and stop signs, pegging the speedometer needle at its highest mark, as though he might eventually be air-cooled by sufficient speed. He wanted to slam through unwary pedestrians, crack their bones, and send them tumbling. Frowning, Agnes said. "Yes, those stories. Sweetie, when Uncle Edom and Uncle Jacob go on about big storms blowing people away and explosions blowing people up ... that's not what life's about." The three adults exclaimed at the disappearance of the quarter, applauded again, and looked knowingly at Tom's hands, which had closed at the sudden conclusion of all the flourishes. Junior forgot all about seduction. "And she--what?--She adopted her sister's baby?" Lord, help me here. Give me this one, just this one, and I'll follow thereafter where I'm led. I'll always thereafter be your instrument, but please, please, GIVE ME THIS CRAZY EVIL SON OF A BITCH!. He was a pretty good detective, but as regarded the minutiae of daily life, he wasn't as organized as he would like to be. He never remembered to set aside his holey socks for darning; and once he had worn a hat with a bullet hole in it for nearly a year before he'd at last thought to buy a new one. 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. When he closed his eyes, he saw a bowling pin, a leftover image from his with-seed days. In less than a minute, he was able to make the pin dematerialize, filling his mind with featureless, soundless, soothing, white nothingness. His request felt like an assault. Agnes almost rocked backward as though struck. Although he harbored no fear of coming under suspicion for the murder of Victoria Bressler, he intended to leave Spruce Hills this very night. No future existed for him in such a sleepy backwater. A wider world awaited, and he had earned the right to enjoy all that it could offer him. Nolly, Kathleen, and Sparky had prepared him for Industrial Woman, but when the flashlight beam flared off her fork-and-fan-blade face, Vanadium twitched in fright. Without fully realizing what he was doing, he crossed himself. "Oil and natural-gas pipelines will fracture, explode. A sea of fire will wash cities, killing hundreds of thousands more."

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