

THE LEMONADE BROTHERS

"Wally gave her tests. She's got an exceptional understanding of color, spatial relationships, and geometric forms for a child her age. She may be a visual prodigy." "I wouldn't just whack anyone, not even a worm bucket like Cain, any more than I would commit suicide. Remember, I believe in eternal consequences." A forgetful client had left the bumbershoot in the office six months ago. Otherwise, Nolly wouldn't have had any umbrella at all. She figured that she could stay home, devoting herself to Barty, for perhaps three years before she would be wise to find work. The slamming of Junior's heart sounded as loud to him as mortar rounds. He stepped back and sideways, out of the vending machine's line of fire. The crazy bitch wielded it with such ferocity that the force of the impact with the floor, rebounding upon her, must have numbed her arms. She stumbled backward, dragging the chair, temporarily unable to lift it. "Then you only have to wait eighteen years," he said, opening the apartment door and stepping aside once more, allowing Celestina to precede him. "That was five years ago. After more surgeries than I care to remember, I was left with these." He raised his goblin hands again. "There's pain in humid weather, less when it's dry. I can take care of myself, but I'll never be a card mechanic again ... or a magician." The Hackachaks were present, of course. Junior had not yet agreed to join them in their pursuit of blood money. They would give him little privacy or rest until they had what they wanted. Convinced that the house was playing tricks on him, Barty went downstairs, step by measured step, to the foyer and the ground-floor hall. More likely than not, Victoria spoke directly to the maniac detective. Even if she reported her sordid fabrications to another officer, it would have gotten back to Vanadium, and the cop would have sought her out at once to hear her filth firsthand, whereupon she would have enhanced her story until it sounded as though Junior had grabbed her knockers and had tried to shove his tongue down her throat. He felt so happy, he was improving every day in every way, life just got better-but then something happened that was worse than the shooting. It ruined his day, his week, the rest of his year. Dr. Lipscomb inclined his head slightly toward the pianist, in the manner of a stem headmaster about to emphasize a lesson with a sharp twist of the offending boy's ear. "Miss White and the baby will have vacated these premises by the end of the week-unless you insist on bothering them with your chatter. For every minute you harass them, their departure will be extended one day." Adoption records would have been kept as secret from Celestina as from everyone else. But perhaps she knew something about the fate of her sister's bastard son that Junior didn't know, a small detail that would seem insignificant to her but that might put him on the right trail at last. He suspected the blame lay with his exceptional sensitivity to violence, death, and loss. Previously it manifested as an explosive emptying of the stomach, this time as a purging of lower realms. She sat on the end of the table, where Barty had sat, now at eye level with the standing physician. 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. Just as the smile curved to completion, however, an awful thing happened. The humiliation began with a loud gurgle in his gut. Junior was paying his dinner check and calculating the tip when the pianist launched into "Someone to Watch over Me." Although he'd expected it all evening, he twitched when he recognized the tune. Dr. Leland Daines, Celestina's internist, arrived directly from dinner at the Ritz-Carlton. Although Dairies had receding white hair and a seamed face, time had been kind enough to make him look not so much old as dignified. Long in practice, he was nevertheless free of arrogance, soft-spoken and with a bottomless supply of patience. I. In the Dark Time. "I guess so, but it's not that. I was thinking of something my little girl said." Raising his revolver, Tom squeezed off two shots, but the gun didn't discharge. Since he knew where Celestina would be on January 12, there was no point in taking risks to find her sooner. He had plenty of time to prepare for their encounter, time to savor the sweet anticipation. The roses filling the countersunk vases in the corners of Joey's gravestone were not Edom-grown, but they were Edom-bought. He had visited the florist himself, personally selecting each bloom from the inventory in the cooler; but he didn't have the courage to accompany Agnes and Barty to the grave. The pair of sliding doors at the living-room archway stood half open. Beyond, voices drew Paul against his will. Besides, he'd noticed a tendency among dopers to get maudlin, whereupon they sank into a confessional mood, seeking peace through rambling self-analysis and self-revelation. Junior was too private a person to behave in such a fashion. Furthermore, if drugs ever put him in a confessional mood, the consequence might be electrocution or poison gas, or lethal injection, depending on the jurisdiction and the year in which he fell into an unbosoming frame of mind. FOR JUNIOR CAIN, the Year of the Horse (1966) and the Year of the Sheep (1967) offered many opportunities for personal growth and self-improvement. Even if by Christmas Eve, '67, Junior would not be able to take a dry walk in the rain, this nevertheless was a period of great achievement and much pleasure for him. For breakfast, he avoided sugar. He ate cold roast beef and drank milk laced with a double shot of brandy. "Periodic violent emesis without an apparent cause can be one indication of locomotor ataxia, but you've no other symptoms of it. I wouldn't worry about that unless this happens again." The hall was deserted. Then a woman came out of one of the offices and walked toward the gallery, without glancing at him. Again he fired into the lock, squeezed the trigger a second time, and discovered that no rounds remained in the magazine. Extra cartridges were distributed in his pockets. Prepared for any contingency, Junior listened to the house until he was certain that he needed the knife for no one else. 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. 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. "Most tornadoes stay on the ground twenty miles or less," Edom explained, "but this one kept its funnel to the earth for

two hundred nineteen miles! And it was one mile wide. Everything in its path--torn, smashed to bits. Houses, factories, churches, schools--all pulverized. Murphysboro, Illinois, was wiped off the map, erased, hundreds killed in that one town." He almost opened the paper atop the quarter before seeing it. Shiny. Liberty curved across the top of the coin, above the head of the patriot, and under the patriot's chin were stamped the words In God We Trust. The musician's behavior required explanation. After wending through the crowd, Junior located the man in front of a painting so egregiously beautiful that any connoisseur of real art could hardly resist the urge to slash the canvas to ribbons. The car shuddered, wrenched steel screamed, and a cry of triumph rose from the rescuers. "Bet I could, and sell it, too," she said. "I might not be as good at it as I am at teeth, but I'd be better than some I've read." Beyond the window, behind veils of rain and fog, the metropolis appeared to be more enigmatic than Stonehenge, as unknowable as any city in our dreams. Paul realized that the kitchen had fallen silent, that the women had turned to the two children and now stood as motionless as figures in a waxworks tableau. find reason to celebrate every development in life, including the cruelest catastrophe, by discovering the bright side to even the darkest hour. That saving smile once more returned lost harmony to the scarred and broken face. "Not me. From my perspective, psychology is just one more of those easy sources of false meaning--like sex, money, and drugs. But I will admit to knowing a thing or two about evil." 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. For forty-eight hours, he pumped himself full of prescription antihistamines, immersed himself in bathtubs brimming with numbingly cold water, and lathered himself with soothing lotions. In misery, gripped by self-pity, he dared not think about the 9-mm pistol that he had stolen from Frieda Bliss. He must be careful in his approach to her. He dared not rush into this. Think it through. Devise a strategy. This valuable opportunity must not be wasted. Darker than water, another stain spread across the lap and down the legs of the pants. It was the color of port wine when filtered through the gray fabric of the jogging suit, but even in her semi-delirious state, she knew that she was not the vessel for a miracle birth, was not bringing forth a baby in a flush of wine, but in a gush of blood. The hateful window. The hateful, frozen window. Celestina wrenched on the crank with all of her strength, and felt something give a little, wrenched, but then the crank popped out of the socket and rapped against the sill. Maria arranged five place settings instead of four. The fifth--complete with silverware, waterglass, and wineglass--was at the head of the table, in memoriam of Joey. These Spartan arrangements were good enough for Vanadium. He had arrived from Oregon the previous night with three suitcases full of his clothes and personal effects. He expected that his unique combination of detective work and psychological warfare would enable him to entrap Cain in a month, before these accommodations began to feel too austere even for one to whom anything fancier than a monk's cell could seem baroque. A flicker of complacency showed in Otters' tired, battered young face. "No," he said. "I don't think anybody can." "I can do this with just a very little Novocain," she said, "so your mouth won't be numb for dinner." All the way to the nightstand, he expected to discover that the revolver had been taken from the drawer. Yet here it was. Loaded. Finally he switched on the light, and illuminated Neddy at ease, silent in death as never in life: lying on his back, head turned to the right, swollen tongue lolling obscenely. Shortly before ten o'clock, Junior returned to the cemetery and left his Suburban where the Negro mourners had parked earlier in the day. His was the only vehicle on the service road. The girl sucked in deep lungfuls of the weary clouds. "Better hold tight, Mommy, I'm gonna float." Tom Vanadium liked this man at once. Cop instinct told him that Damascus was honest and reliable. Priestly insight suggested even more impressive qualities. "So where he threw the quarter," Barty said, as Angel listened intently and nodded her head, "wasn't really into Gunsmoke, 'cause that's not a place, it's just a show. See, maybe he threw it into a place where I'm not blind, or into a place where he doesn't have that messed-up face, or a place where for some reason you never came here today. There's more places than anybody could ever count, even me, and I can count pretty good. That's what you feel, right--all the ways things are?" Startled, he snatched his hand back. The object fell, ringing faintly against the pavement. As hard of head as she was hard of heart, Victoria had not sustained serious brain damage, only a concussion. Vanadium's wounds were too grievous to pass for accidental injuries. Even if there were some way to disguise them through clever staging, no one would believe that Victoria had died in a freak fall and that Vanadium, rushing to her side, had slipped and tumbled and sustained mortal head injuries, as well. Such a strong whiff of slapstick would put even the Spruce Hills police on to the scent of murder. During Barty's hospitalization, they had graduated from the young adult novels by Robert Heinlein to some of the same author's science fiction for general audiences. Now, pajamaed and in bed, with his sunglasses on the nightstand but his padded eye patches still in place, Barty listened, rapt, to the beginning of Double Star. Celestina hadn't noticed the infant being taken away. She had wanted to see it once more, even though she was sickened by the sight of it. Glorifying in the cloudless day and the warmer than usual weather, he drove seventy miles north, through phalanxes of evergreens that marched down the steep hills to the scenic coast. All the way, he monitored the traffic in his rearview mirror. No one followed him. Although she would have felt ridiculous phrasing this question in these words to any other three-year-old, no better way existed to ask it of her special son: "Kiddo ... do you realize you're speaking of your dad in the present tense?" Besides, Junior was reluctant to kill Vanadium, for real this time, and risk discovering--that the detective's filthy-scabby-monkey spirit would in fact prove to be a relentless haunting presence that gave him no peace. He paused, giving them a chance to ask the obvious question--and then smiled at their reticence. Wild exhilaration burst through him like pyrotechnics blazing in a night sky, reminiscent of the rush of excitement that followed his bold action on the fire tower. Happily, Junior had no emotional connection to Prosser, as he'd had to beloved Naomi; therefore, the purity of his. "Blood tests should reveal whether the child's

yours or not. That also might explain all this." 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.. "Oh, Wally, I am worried. I'm deeply worried. My mama is going to buy herself a first-class ticket to the fiery pit if she doesn't stop this prevaricatin'." The candlestick was dry. Holding this pewter bludgeon with a paper towel, Junior replaced it on the table as he had found it. He picked up the candle from the floor and married it to the stick.. "And how about this," he continued. "Every point in the universe is directly connected to every other point, regardless of distance, so any point on Mars is, in some mysterious way, as close to me as is any of you. Which means it's possible for information-and objects, even people-to move instantly between here and London without wires or microwave transmission. In fact, between here and a distant star, instantly. We just haven't figured out how to make it happen. Indeed, on a deep structural level, every point in the universe is the same point. This interconnectedness is so complete that a great flock of birds taking flight in Tokyo, disturbing the air with their wings, contributes to weather changes in Chicago." And so at the age of thirty-one, after more than twenty-eight years of blindness with a few short reprieves, Barty Lampion received the gift of sight from his ten-year-old daughter. 1996 through 2000: Day after day, the work was done in memory of Agnes Lampion, Joey Lampion, Harrison White, Seraphim White, Jacob Isaacson, Simon Magusson, Tom Vanadium, Grace White, and most recently Wally Lipscomb, in memory of all those who had given so much and, though perhaps still alive in other places, were gone from here.. Lowering his surgical mask, Dr. Lipscomb approached Celestina, where she stood with her back pressed to the wall.. 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." Rhythmic breathing. Slow and deep. Slow and deep. Per Zedd, the route to tranquility is through the lungs.. "Why should I care whether you have any peace?" she asked, and she seemed to be listening to a woman other than herself.. Agnes returned home from a pie run with the usual team-grown to five vehicles, including paid employees-to find a gathering in the yard and Barty halfway up the oak.. Grace, having just finished washing a sinkful of dishes, stood monitoring the application of the icing and drying her hands, when the telephone rang. She picked it up, and as she said, "Hello," the front of the house exploded.. Everywhere in the fabled city, calves and knees and magnificent expanses of taut thighs were on display. This brought out the dreamy romantic in Junior, and more than ever he yearned desperately for the perfect woman, the ideal lover, the matching half of his incomplete heart.. The end of his quest was near, so near, the right Bartholomew almost within 'mullet range. He was furious with Neddy Gnathic for possibly screwing this up.. Barefoot, in midnight-blue silk pajamas, he walked through his rooms turning on lights in a considered pattern, which he had settled upon after much thought and planning.. 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.. Lifted from his despair by this exhilarating wrath, Junior turned away from the mirror, looking for the bright side once more. Perhaps it was the bathroom window.. Returning his attention to his own shoes, Jacob said, "So ... what am I supposed to do about this?" "There's lots of places where I don't have bad eyes at all. And then lots of places where I have it worse or don't have it as bad, but still have it some." The man, whom the others called Licky, led him out into a hot, bright morning that dazzled his eyes. Leaving his cell he had felt the spellbonds loosen and fall away, but there were other spells woven about other buildings of the place, especially around a tall stone tower, filling the air with sticky lines of resistance and repulsion. If he tried to push forward into them his face and belly stung with jabs of agony, so that he looked at his body in horror for the wound; but there was no wound. Gagged and bound, without his voice and hands to work magic, he could do nothing against these spells. Licky had tied one end of a braided leather cord around his neck and held the other end, following him. He let Otter walk into a couple of the spells, and after that Otter avoided them. Where they were was plain enough: the dusty pathways bent to miss them.. "Did they rush you straight in here or did you arrange all the insurance matters at reception, Mr. Pinchbeck?" "Oh? Do they rent their house out to pirates with little pirate children, clowns with little clown children?" The nurse raised her eyes from Agnes to this other person. "Yes a chip of ice would be all right." "Your father denies the rape ever occurred, apparently out of what I'd call a misguided willingness to trust in divine justice." "I'll put you in a twilight sleep, you babbling cretin. Where'd you earn your medical degree, you nattering nitwit? Botswana? The Kingdom of Tonga?. Spinning off the stool, the bun cap in one hand and the mustard dispenser clutched in the other, Junior surveyed the long narrow diner. Looking for the maniac cop. The dead maniac cop. He half expected to see Thomas Vanadium: head crusted in blood, face bashed to pulp, caked in quarry silt, and dripping water as though he'd climbed out of his Studebaker coffin just minutes ago.. To buy as much time as possible while Enoch Cain's assault was still fresh in Celestina's mind, Tom proposed that they remain hidden away for another two weeks, unless the killer was apprehended sooner. "Then if you go to Wally's house from here, you'll want to install the best alarm system you can get, and you should lead a restricted life for quite a while, even hire security if you can afford it. The smartest thing would be to move out of San Francisco as soon as Wally's recovered. He retired young, right? And a painter can paint anywhere. Sell the properties here, start over somewhere else, and make the move in such a way that you can't be easily traced. I can help you work that out." Not that she ever gave any indication that her brothers were other than a source of pride for her. She treated them always with respect, tenderness, and love-as if unaware of their shortcomings.. Agnes wanted to reach out and touch him, but

she found that she didn't have the strength to raise her arm. She was no longer holding her belly, either. Both hands lay at her sides, palms up, and even the simple act of curling her fingers required surprising effort and concentration. This is, of course, the purpose of art: to disturb you, to leave you uneasy with yourself and wary of the world, to undermine your sense of reality in order to make you reconsider all that you think you know. The finest art should shatter you emotionally, devastate you intellectually, leave you physically ill, and fill you with loathing for those cultural traditions that bind us and weigh us down and drown us in a sea of conformity. Junior had learned this much, already, from his art appreciation course.. "And after Phimie was gone ... he still hoped to learn the rapist's name, put him in prison. But then something changed his mind ... oh, maybe two years ago. Suddenly, he wanted to let it go, leave judgment to God. He said if the rapist was as twisted as Phimie claimed, then Angel and I might be in danger if we ever learned a name and went to the police. Don't stir a hornet's nest, let sleeping dogs be, and all that. I don't know what changed his mind."

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