

THE NEGROES OF ATHENS GEORGIA ISSUES 1 10

To his surprise, when Naomi expressed an interest in romance, Junior was a bull again. He would have thought he had left his best stuff at Reverend Harrison White's parsonage..Worrying is what mothers do best. Celestina was her mother, as far as Angel was concerned, and the child was not yet of an age to be told, and to understand, that she had been blessed with two mothers: the one who gave birth to her, and the one who raised her..He yearned for a new heart mate. He was wise enough to know that no amount of yearning could transform the wrong woman into the right one. Love couldn't be demanded, planned, or manufactured. Love always came as a surprise, snuck up on you when you were least expecting it, like Anthony Perkins in a dress..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 kept 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.."Shifting the Suburban out of park, Wally said, "I didn't know Baptists indulged in wagering"..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.."I really am sorry about this," Junior said, regretting the necessity to deny her the right to look good at her own funeral, "but it's got to appear to be a crime of passion"..The diarrhea was over, finished, part of the past. Long ago he had learned never to dwell on the past, never to be overly concerned about the worries of the present, but to be focused entirely on the future. He was a man of the future..Eye to eye with Tom, Celestina herself did some clear-seeing. "You're special, too, in lots of obvious ways. But like Angel, you're special in some secret way ... aren't you?".Five days later, on Barty's birthday morning, when Agnes and Edom were in the kitchen, making preparations for the visits that had earned her the affectionate title of Pie Lady, Barty was in his highchair, eating a vanilla wafer lightly dampened with milk. Each time a crumb fell from the cookie, the boy plucked it off the tray and neatly conveyed it to his tongue..Having anticipated a problem of one kind or another, Junior withdrew a packet of crisp new hundred-dollar bills from an inside jacket pocket. The bank band still wrapped the stack, and on it was printed \$10,000..She asked Edom to stay in the main house, so Barty wouldn't be alone while she visited Maria Gonzalez for an hour or two. He was pleased to oblige, settling down to watch a television documentary about volcanoes, which promised to include stories about the 1902 eruption of Mont Pelee, on Martinique, which killed 28,000 people within minutes, and other disasters of colossal proportions..Why Cain, even if he was the father, should be interested in the little girl was a mystery to Tom Vanadium. This totally self-involved, spookily hollow man held nothing sacred; fatherhood would have no appeal for him, and he certainly wouldn't feel any obligation to the child that had resulted from his assault on Phimie.."I love you, Daddy," she said, and put the palms of her hands flat against his temples..Wally's own house was in the same neighborhood, a block and a half away, a three-story Victorian gem that he entirely occupied..Moving out of the doorway, into the bedroom, he said, "What book would that be?".When the subject shifted to card tricks and fortune-telling, Maria admitted to practicing divination with standard playing cards..To the right first. Kick the door open, simultaneously firing two rounds, because maybe this was her bedroom, where she kept a gun. Mirrors shattered: a tintinnabulation of falling glass on porcelain, glass on ceramic tile, a lot more noise than the shots themselves..Golden lamplight gilded the front windows downstairs. He would sit with Victoria on the living-room sofa, sipping wine as they got to know each other. She might tell him to call her Vicky, and maybe he'd ask her to call him Eenie, the affectionate name Naomi had given him when he wouldn't tolerate Enoch. Soon, they would be necking like two crazy kids. Junior would disrobe her on the sofa, caressing her smooth pliant body, her skin buttery in the lamplight, and then he would carry her, naked, to the dark bedroom upstairs..To be fair, with her exceptional beauty, she would have been the center of attention even in a gathering of real artists. Junior had little chance of getting at Seraphim's bastard boy without going through this woman and killing her as well; but if his luck held and he could eliminate Bartholomew without Celestina realizing who had done the deed, then he might yet have a chance to discover if she was as lubricious as her sister and if she was his heart mate..Getting out of the stuffy car into air much chillier than it had been when he'd left this place, Junior stood unsteadily as the police and the paramedics gathered around him. Then he led them through the wild grass to Naomi, moving haltingly, stumbling on small stones that the others navigated with ease.."If you ranted at him about earthquakes, tornadoes, erupting volcanoes, and all that stuff, how could he mistake you for me?".He switched on his flashlight. In the beam, on the blacktop, a silver disc. Like a full moon in a night sky..Having been a volunteer instructor of English to twenty adult students over the years, having taught Maria Elena Gonzalez to speak impeccable English without a significant accent, Agnes was little needed as a teacher by her son. Even more than other children, he asked why with numbing regularity, why this and why that, but never the same question twice; and as often as not, he already knew the answer that he sought from her and was only confirming the accuracy of his deduction. He was such an effective autodidact, he schooled himself better than any college of professors that could have been assigned to him..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..The lunatic lawman was not at any of the tables. Junior was sure of that, because indulging his appreciation for lovely women, he had roamed the room repeatedly with his gaze..Unquestionably, if he hadn't killed Vanadium, the maniac cop would have blown him away. That was clearly an act of self-defense..Each page comprised four columns of names and numbers, most with addresses. Approximately one hundred names filled each column, four hundred to a page..Neither of them needed to confirm their mutual attraction with even so much as an additional nod or a smile. Victoria knew, as he did, that

their time would come, when all this current unpleasantness was I behind them, when Vanadium had been thwarted, when all suspicion had been forever laid to rest..She whispered then: "You are my little lampion, Barty. You light the way for me.".She shook her head. "No way back." She pointed to the sketch pad on the floor. "I pushed him there.".The deejay announced song number four for the week: the Beatles' "She's a Woman." The Fab Four filled the Studebaker with music..He didn't bother to press Vanadium's hand around the weapon. There wasn't going to be a wealth of evidence for the Scientific Investigation Division to sift through, anyway, when the fire was finally put out: just enough charred clues to allow them an easy conclusion..In spite of the ravages of illness and age, beauty remained in the old woman's face. Her bone structure was superb. In youth, she must have been stunning..Eventually Agnes came to suspect that for all the pleasure the boy took in math and for all his aptitude with numbers, his greatest gift and his deepest passion lay elsewhere. He was finding his way toward a destiny both more astonishing and stranger than the lives of any of the many prodigies about whom she'd read..Reading the dates on the headstone, he saw that the minister's daughter had died on the seventh of January, the day after Naomi had fallen from the fire tower. If ever asked, Junior would have no trouble accounting for his whereabouts on that day..As if he'd been presented with many previous photos under these circumstances, Jonas Salk accepted the picture. "Your daughter?".Wally-Dr. Walter Lipscomb, who delivered Angel and who became her godfather-never worried when the girl seemed to be developing too slowly, counseling that every child was an individual, with his or her particular learning pace. Wally's double specialty--obstetrics and pediatrics-gave him credibility, of course, but Celestina had worried, anyway..On this occasion, however, he couldn't have focused on a book even if he'd had the strength to hold it. The fierce paroxysms that clenched his guts also destroyed his ability to concentrate..The 9-mm pistol rested in the complementary shoulder holster, under Junior's leather coat. But the sound-suppressor hadn't been attached; it was in one of his coat pockets. The extended barrel, too long to lay comfortably against his left side, would most likely have hung up on the holster when drawn..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..Ordinarily, she would have returned to the first of the candles and offered a second fragment to Saint Peter. In this case, however, she entrusted it to the least known of the apostles, because she was sure that he must have special significance in this matter..Currently, the rental market was extremely tight. The first day of his search resulted only in the discovery that he was going to have to pay more than he expected even for modest quarters.. "If her blood pressure stabilizes through the night," Dr. Daines continued, "I want her to undergo a cesarean at seven in the morning. The danger of eclampsia passes entirely after birth. I'd like to refer Phimie to Dr. Aaron Kaltenbach. He's a superb obstetrician." ".64 just a little bit ago," the girl said. "I was sitting on the porch, having a Popsicle, and I just figured it out."..Oblivious that she and Barty had become the center of attention, Angel said, "Does he ever get the quarters back?".Urgency gripped the paramedics. The rescuers' equipment and the pieces of the car door were dragged out of the way to make a path for a gurney, its wheels clattering across pavement littered with debris..He either detected their well-concealed surprise or assumed they would be curious as to why, in spite of extensive surgery, he still wore this Boris Karloff face.. "I don't know anyone named Bartholomew." He decided that the truth, in this instance, could not harm him..Occasionally he woke in the night and heard himself murmuring the mantra aloud, which apparently he had been repeating ceaselessly in his sleep. "Find the father, kill the son." In April, Junior discovered three Bartholomews. Investigating these targets, prepared to commit homicide, he learned that none had a son named Bartholomew or had ever adopted a child..Bartholomew's genius might have been intimidating, even off-putting, if he'd not been as much child as child genius. Likewise, he would have been wearisome if impressed by his own gifts..--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."..than the left: slack yet with a pulled look. The left eyelid drooped. That side of her..RED SKY IN THE morning, sailors take warning; red sky at night, sailors delight..A plate-size piece of the door had been blasted away. Because of the light shining through from the room beyond, Junior could see that no part of the lock remained intact. In fact, he peered through the hole in the door to the back of a piece of furniture that was jammed against it, whereupon the nature of the problem became clear to him..She bent down and kissed his cheek, his right eye, his left, his brow, his dry cracked lips. "I love you so much. I wanted to die when I thought you weren't with me anymore..By November 1967, the Father Brown detective stories, written for mystery-loving adults by G. K. Chesterton, thrilled Barty. This series of books would retain a special place in his heart for the rest of his life-as would Robert Heinlein's The Star Beast, which was among his Christmas gifts that year..Perhaps a lot of suspects were rattled and ultimately unnerved by this behavior. Junior wouldn't be easily trapped. He was smart..get his hackles up if we, at the state level, still want to poke around a little..On the drive home, Junior dropped the knife down a storm drain in Larkspur. He tossed the gloves in a Dumpster in Corte Madera..Matching his mother's whisper, taking obvious delight in their conspiracy, he said, "Our own secret society."..Pain again, but not a mere contraction. Such an excruciation, unendurable. The hobnailed wheels ground through her once more, as though she were being broken on a medieval torture device..He assumed that she hadn't phoned the police to make a formal report. No need to go out of her way to slander Junior when Thomas Vanadium had been prowling the hospital at all hours of the day and night, ready to lend an ear to any falsehood about him, as long as it made him appear to be a sleazeball and a wife killer..He was a man of medicine and science, who had been served well by hard logic and by an unwavering commitment to reason. He wasn't prepared easily to accept the notion that logic and reason, while essential tools to anyone hoping to lead a full and happy life, were nevertheless sufficient to describe either the physical world or the human experience..This ended any hope of romance, and he was disappointed. A less self-controlled man might have seized a nearby bronze vase-fashioned to resemble dinosaur stool-and stuffed her into it or vice

versa..there in more genteel and gilded ages, and her flights of imagination sometimes acquired such vivid detail that they were eerily like memories..Junior intended to add one stocky ghost to the party. Perhaps on a summer night in years to come, at the edge of the light fall from his Coleman lantern, a fisherman would see a semitransparent Vanadium providing entertainment with an ethereal quarter..He capped the bottle, pocketed it, and then kicked the dead man, kicked him again, and spat on him..He surprised himself by sitting up in bed and shouting, "Shut up, shut up, shut up!"..So many stops, too little time at each, a dazzle of Christmas trees decorated every one to a different taste, offers of butter cookies and hot chocolate or lemon crisps and eggnog, morning chats in bright kitchens steeped in wonderful cooking odors and-in the chillier afternoon good wishes exchanged in front of hearth fires, gifts accepted as well as given, cookies taken in trade for pecan cakes, "Silver Bells" and "Hark How the Bells" and "Jingle-Bell Rock" on the radio: Therewith they arrived at three o'clock in the afternoon, Christmas Eve, their deliveries completed before Santa's had begun..A cast-bronze figure, fixed to lacquered walnut in want of raw dogwood, suffered above the bed. This crucifix, contrasting starkly with the white walls, reinforced the impression of monastic economy..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..Every distorted shape, every smear of color, every swath of light and shudder of shadows resisted her attempts to relate them to the world she knew, as if shimmering before her were the landscape of a dream..She appeared to be in her early thirties, perhaps six years older than Junior, but he didn't hold that against her. He wasn't any more prejudiced against older people than he was against people of other races and ethnic origins..By eleven months, his vocabulary had expanded to nineteen words, by Agnes's count: an age when even a precocious child usually spoke three or four at most..He had been warned about this accuracy issue by the thumbless young thug who delivered the weapon in a bag of Chinese takeout, in Old St. Mary's Church. Junior tended to believe the warning, because he figured the eight-fingered felon might have been deprived of his thumbs as punishment for having forgotten to relay the same or an equally important message to a customer in the past, thus assuring his current conscientious attention to detail.. "All under here's worked out long since" Licky said. And Otter had begun to be aware of the strange country under his feet: empty shafts and rooms of dark air in the dark earth, a vertical labyrinth, the deepest pits filled with unmoving water. "Never was much silver, and the watermetal's long gone. Listen, young'un, do you even know what cinnabar is?"..A stab of horror punctured Celestina as she failed to repress a mental image of a carnival-sideshow monster, half dragon and half insect, coiled in her sister's womb. She hated the rapist's child but was appalled by her hatred, for the baby was blameless..The rough massage had only just begun to bring a little relief to Junior's legs when Sparky returned with six stoppered rubber bags full of ice. "This was all the bags they had down at the drugstore."..Hackachaks to browbeat him into a despairing, exhausted, disgusted compliance with their greed..In his room, he settled on the bed with his constipating snacks and the county telephone book. Because he had packed the directory with the Zedd collection, the thief hadn't gotten it..And although Simon would have denied it, would even have joked that a conscience was a liability for an attorney, he possessed a moral compass. When he traveled too far along the wrong trail, that magnetized needle in his soul led him back from the land of the lost..Sitting at the desk, Celestina phoned her parents again. She shook uncontrollably, but her voice was steady.. "Retinoblastoma is usually unilateral," Dr. Chan continued, "occurring in one eye. Bartholomew has tumors in both."..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..Two teenage boys and one elderly woman scrambled across the sidewalk, grabbing at the ringing rain of quarters. They caught some, but others bounced and twirled through their grasping fingers, rolling-spinning away into the gutter..The quarter, surely. The one that had not been in his robe pocket where it should have been, the previous Friday.. "You should've seen this, Kathleen. He's dodging people on the sidewalk, shoving them out of his way when he can't dodge them. Three long blocks, Jimmy and I watched the creep, till he turned the corner, three long blocks all uphill, and it's a hill that would kill an Olympic athlete, but he doesn't slow down once."..He had time to think of quite a few, because he drove five miles per hour below the posted speed limit. He couldn't risk being stopped for a traffic violation when Thomas Vanadium, the human stump, was dead and bundled in the back..The heavy hand would come down on his shoulder, he would be spun around against his will, and there before him would be those nailhead eyes, the port-wine stain, facial bones crushed by a bludgeon....With some sharp instrument, probably a knife, Cain had stabbed and gouged the red letters, working on the wall with such fury that two of the Bartholomews were barely readable anymore. The Sheetrock was marked by hundreds of scores and punctures..Stepping into her digs was like passing through a time machine into another century, traveling in space, as well, to the Europe of Louis XIV. The expansive, high-ceilinged rooms overwhelmed the eye with the rich somber colors and the heavy forms of Baroque art and furniture. Shells, acanthus leaves, volutes, garlands, and scrolls-often gilded decorated the museum-quality antique Bombay chests, chairs, tables, massive mirrors, cabinets, and etageres..He slept outdoors rarely and otherwise stayed in inexpensive motels, boardinghouses, and YMCAs..Murmuring reassurances, Celestina put a hand on the girl's head and smoothed her brow, her hair, until the sour dream was sweetened by the touch..The baby felt too light to be real. She weighed five pounds fourteen ounces, but she seemed lighter than air, as though she might float up and out of her aunt's arms..On Joey's side, there was no family to provide help. His mother had died of leukemia when he was four. His dad, fond of beer and brawling--like father not like son--was killed in a bar fight five years later. Without close relatives willing to take him in, Joey went to an orphanage. At nine he wasn't prime adoption material--babies were what was wanted--and he'd been raised in the institution..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. He intended to mash the sole of Victoria's right shoe in the pat of butter and leave a long smear on the floor, as though she slipped on it and fell toward the ovens. Paul recalled the letter he had written to Reverend Harrison White a couple weeks after the death of Joey Lampion. He'd carried it home from the pharmacy on the day that Perri died, to ask for her opinion of it. The letter had never been mailed. With the salt and pepper shakers, Tom walked them through the why-I'm-not-sad-about-my-face explanation that he'd given to Angel ten days previously. Only two explanations occurred to him. First, bureaucracies slavishly follow the rules even when the rules make no sense. Second, the Ugliest Private Detective in the World, Nolly Wulfstan, was an incompetent dunce. Beseechingly, with no intention of intimacy, he took Celestina's hands in his. "For years, as an obstetrician, I brought life into the world, but I didn't know what life was, didn't grasp the meaning of it, that it even had meaning. Before Rowena, Harry, and Danny went down in that airplane, I was already ... empty. After losing them, I was worse than empty. Celestina, I was dead inside. Phimie gave me hope. I can't repay her, but I can do something for her daughter and for you, if you'll let me." able to reconcile these opposed forces, she was all but paralyzed by indecision. He could have killed someone named Henry or Larry, without risk of creating a Bartholomew pattern that would prickle like a pungent scent in the hound-dog nostrils of Bay Area homicide detectives. But he restrained himself. This Monday morning in Oregon was bleak, with the swollen, dark bellies of rain clouds swagging low over the cemetery, a dreary send-off for Naomi, even though rain was not yet falling. "I'll do your share of the housework for a month. If I'm closer to the date, you clean up all my pie-baking and other kitchen messes for a month—the bowls and pans and mixers, everything." The round table seated six, but they required only three chairs, because the two brainless friends were a pair of Angel's dolls. Beyond the windows, the winter night sifted sootily down through the twinkling city, as he sat in his living room with a glass of Dry Sack in one hand and the picture of Celestina White in the other. A sofa and one armchair provided the seating in the living room. No coffee table. A small table beside the chair. A wall unit held a fine stereo system and a few hundred record albums. The two men introduced themselves. The physician was Dr. Jim Parkhurst. His manner was easy and affable, and his soothing voice, either by nature or by calculation, was as healing as balm. The funeral was at two o'clock, after which family and friends of the deceased would gather here in the parsonage for a social, to break bread together and to share their memories of the loved one lost. As he said cards, the magician turned a knowing look toward Edom, eliciting from him a responding frown of puzzlement. 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. "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." Only a small group of mourners gathered for this service. Junior and Naomi had been so intensely involved with each other that, unlike many young married couples, they had made few friends. AT ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL, where Wally had brought Angel into this world three years ago, he was now fighting for his life, for a chance to see the girl grow and to be the father she needed. He'd been taken to surgery already when Celestina and Angel arrived a few minutes behind the ambulance. "I ALWAYS EAT CAV-EE-JAR FOR BREAKFAST," said Velveeta Cheese in her stuffed-bear voice. Junior had walked along the big show windows, studying the two White paintings displayed to passersby, appalled by their beauty, when suddenly the door had opened and a gallery employee had invited him to come in. No printed invitation needed, no cool test to pass, no bouncers keeping the gate. Such easy accessibility served as proof, if you needed it, that this was not real art. Six captain's chairs encircled the big round table, one for everybody, including Agnes, but only Paul and Barty stayed seated. Uncle Jacob, cook and baby-sitter and connoisseur of watery death, cleaned off the table and washed the dishes while Barty patiently endured a rambling postbreakfast conversation with Pixie Lee and with Miss Velveeta Cheese, whose name wasn't an honorary tide earned by winning a beauty contest sponsored by Kraft Foods, as he had first thought, but who, according to Angel, was the "good" sister to the rotten lying cheese man in the television commercials. Agnes met them, pulling Grace and Angel to her side. Her eyes were bright with excitement. "Tom, you're a man of faith, even if you've sometimes been troubled in it. Tell me what you make of all this." Celestina extended her left hand, which shook so badly that she nearly knocked over both their wineglasses. "I will." "Supposing he's senile, wouldn't he possibly think you were his long-lost brother or someone?" By air from San Francisco south to Orange County Airport, then farther south along the coast by rental car, one week in the wake of Paul Damascus and his three charges, following directions provided by Paul, Tom Vanadium brought Wally Lipscomb to the Lampion house. Instead, he focused on the hand in the flashlight beam: four long, thin, chalk-white digits bent to the heel; thumb thrust up stiffly, as though Neddy hoped to hitchhike out of the Dumpster, out of death, and back to his piano in the cocktail lounge on Nob Hill. "Will I love you tomorrow, you mean, and the day after tomorrow, and on forever? Of course, forever, Wally, always." Then came the Year of the Tiger, 1974. Gasoline shortages, panic buying, mile-long lines at service stations. Patty Hearst kidnapped. Nixon gone in disgrace. Hank Aaron toppled Babe Ruth's longstanding home-run record, and the inflation rate topped fifteen percent, and the legendary Muhammad Ali defeated George Foreman to regain his world-heavyweight title. "You must be thinking of someone else," she said, pushing a wad of bills into his hand. "Me, I'm a jellyfish in high heels." "Toes," he repeated immediately in his sweet, piping voice. This was a new word for him. Vanadium was surely unaware of any connection between Junior and Seraphim White. And now the girl could never talk. Junior felt a little lightheaded. He felt strange.

He hoped he wasn't coming down with the flu.

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