

SICK IN THE HEAD

No hesitation preceded Grace's response. "That's very generous of you, Paul. And I, for one, accept. Is this the house where you lived with your Perri?". The hall was deserted. Then a woman came out of one of the offices and walked toward the gallery, without glancing at him. On December 18, as the Beatles' "Hello Goodbye" rocketed up the charts, Junior boiled over with frustration at his inability to find either love or Seraphim's baby, so he drove across the Golden Gate Bridge, to Marin County and all the way to the town of Terra Linda, where he killed Bartholomew Prosser. The 9-mm pistol and the ammunition were on the foyer table. With trembling hands, Junior tore open the boxes and loaded the gun. In the park, rocketing along on the roller coaster, Barty had an experience, a reaction to more than the canted turns and steep plunges. He grew excited in much the way that Agnes had seen him excited when grasping a new and arcane mathematical theory. At the end of the ride, he wanted to get back on immediately, and so they did. There are no long waits for the blind at amusement parks: always to the head of the line. Agnes rode twice again with him, and then Paul twice, and finally Angel accompanied him three times. This roller-coaster obsession wasn't about thrills or even amusement. His exuberance gave way to a thoughtful silence, especially after a seagull flew within inches of his face, feathers thrumming, startling him, on the next-to-last rollick along the tracks. Thereafter, the park held little interest for him, and all he would say was that he'd thought of a new way to feel things-by which he meant all the ways things are-a fresh angle of approach to that mystery. Barty had never been instructed in the rules of grammar, but had absorbed them as the roots of Edom's roses absorbed nutrients. "Sure. Does and is." Antihypertensive drugs were administered intravenously, and Phimie was confined to bed, attached to a heart monitor. At last: the humiliating backless gown, the precious drugs, even a pretty nurse who seemed to like him, and then oblivion. Maria's mother, visiting from Mexico, was babysitting, so Maria came without her children, as a guest, joining Agnes and the laugh-a-minute Isaacson twins, chroniclers of destruction. They ate in the dining room, rather than at the kitchen dinette, with a lace-trimmed tablecloth, the good china, crystal wineglasses, and fresh flowers. Eventually, dinner over, cleanup finished, when Maria and the uncles had gone, Agnes and Barty faced the stairs together. She followed, holding his cane, which he said he preferred not to use in the house, prepared to catch him if he stumbled. 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. The odds against drawing a jack of spades four times in a row out of four combined and randomly shuffled decks were forbidding. Jacob didn't have the knowledge necessary to calculate those odds, but he knew they were astronomical. "The doctors," he continued, "needed to repair damage to the left frontal sinus, the sphenoidal sinus, and the sinus cavernous, which had all been partially crushed by that pewter candlestick. Frontal, malar, ethmoid, maxillary, sphenoid, and palatine bones had to be rebuilt to properly contain my right eye, because it sort of ... well, it dangled. That was just for starters, and there was considerable essential dental work, as well. I elected not to have any cosmetic surgery." Not many men wore hats these days. Since his teenage years, Nolly had favored a porkpie model. San Francisco was often chilly, and he began losing his hair when still young. Otter was reluctant to answer. He had to like Hound, but didn't have to trust him. "Shape-changing," he mumbled at last. "Uncle Edom. Uncle Jacob. Aunt Maria. So I can remember faces after ... you know." dropping on the conversation between Dr. Parkhurst and Vanadium, and later failing and respond to Vanadium's pointed accusations, his deception would inevitably be read as an admission of guilt in the murder. Near midnight, she returned to her apartment. Lights out, in bed, staring at the ceiling, she was unable to sleep. When she tried to speak to him, she could no more easily raise her voice than she could extend a hand to him. She hadn't looked up from her sketching. Although Junior thought she hadn't seen him, she'd apparently been aware of him all along. ONWARD THROUGH THIS Monday, January 17, this momentous day, when the ending of one thing is the beginning of another. Not every coincidence, however, has meaning. Toss a quarter one million times, roughly half a million heads will turn up, roughly the same number of tails. In the process, there will be instances when heads turn up thirty, forty, a hundred times in a row. This does not mean that destiny is at work or that God-choosing to be not merely his usual mysterious self but utterly inscrutable-is warning of Armageddon through the medium of the quarter; it means the laws of probability hold true only in the long run, and that short-run anomalies are meaningful solely to the gullible. Posing as a counselor with Catholic Family Services, he phoned each listed Bartholomew, with a question related to his or her recent adoption. Those who expressed bafflement, and who claimed not to have adopted a child, were generally stricken from his list. demons: hypodermoclysis ... intravenous oxytocin ... maintain perfect asepsis, and I mean perfect, at all times ... a few oral preparations of ergot as soon as it's safe to give her anything by mouth. "If I had a wife, she wouldn't feel too lucky. I'm not of the persuasion that wants a wife, dear." Maria, however, lived comfortably with both the Catholicism and the occultism in which she had been raised. In Hermosillo, Mexico, the latter had been nearly as important to the spiritual life of her family as had been the former. Nothing in life was risk free, so he hesitated only a moment: at the foot of the porch steps before climbing them and knocking on the door. He considered calling her, but he didn't know what he would say if she answered. "Here we are," said the driver, braking to a stop at the curb in front of the gallery. For breakfast, he avoided sugar. He ate cold roast beef and drank milk laced with a double shot of brandy. Reluctantly, Jacob finally returned the cards to the packs and admitted to himself that superstition had seized him and would not let go. Somewhere in the world was a knave, a human monster-even worse, according to Maria, a man as fearsome as the devil himself-and for reasons unknown, this beast wanted to harm little Barty, an innocent baby. By some grace that Jacob could not understand, they had been warned, through the cards, that the knave was coming. They had been warned. Kathleen Klerkle, Mrs. Wulfstan, sitting on the edge of Nolly's desk, looked

diagonally across it at the visitor in the client's chair. Actually, Nolly had two chairs for clients. Kathleen could have sat in the second; however, this seemed to be a more appropriate pose for a hawkshaw's dame. Not that she was trying to look cheap; she was thinking Myrna Loy as Nora Charles in *The Thin Man*-worldly but elegant, tough but amused..As it turned out, Seraphim was a virgin. This thrilled Junior. He was inflamed also by the thought of ravishing her in her parents' house ... an by the kinky fact that their house was a parsonage.. "No, no. But being around him so much, inevitably I absorb some details. He's a compelling speaker when the subject interests him."..than the left: slack yet with a pulled look. The left eyelid drooped. That side of her..When pale light came to her eyes again, she heard the paramedic and the cop talking anxiously as they worked on her, but she couldn't understand their words. They seemed to be speaking not just a foreign tongue but an ancient language unheard on earth for a thousand years..Eleven years later, a few months after marrying Agnes, Joey mysteriously invited Edom to accompany him on "a little drive," and took his bewildered brother-in-law to a nursery. They returned home with fifty pound bags of special mulch, jars of plant food, and an array of new tools. Together, they stripped the sod from the side yard, turned the soil, and prepared the ground for the rich variety of hybrid starter plants that were delivered the following week..He had already reviewed twenty-four thousand names, finding no Bartholomew, putting red checks beside entries with the initial B instead of a first name. A slip of yellow paper marked his place..The Bones of the Earth..cocktail lounge to be her personal pickup spot. Naturally, people who worked the lounge knew her, were friendly with her. They would remember any man who accompanied the heiress to her penthouse..He nodded. "You do. Yes. But you don't need to know right now. Later, when you're calmer, when you're clearer. It's too important to rush you through it now.".. "So do I," said the visitor, and Junior almost frowned at this peculiar response, wondering what was meant in addition to what was merely said..At the far end of the table, Agnes shot up from her chair as her son said rain, and as he said wet, she spoke warningly: "Barty!"..The striking resemblance between this artist and Seraphim, as well as the facts in the biographical sketch under the photo, argued that the two were sisters..Dragonfly..As the afternoon waned toward a portentous dusk and toward the gallery reception for Celestina White, Junior prepared his knives and guns..Currently, Jacob was far removed from the embalming chamber and intended never to set foot there, alive. With Walter Panglo as his guide, he toured the casket selection in the funeral-planning room.. "Oh, yes. When he phoned, Reverend Collins told me all about you and Bartholomew. At the front door, when I asked the boy's name, I already knew it and was just setting up this little trick for you."..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..In the front wall of the living room, where once had been a fine bay window, the parsonage lay open to the sunny day. Tom shrubbery, carried in from outside, marked the path of destruction. In the very middle of the room, plowed against a toppled sofa and a thick drift of broken furniture, a battered red Pontiac sagged to the left on broken springs and blown tires. A portion of the crazed windshield quivered and collapsed inward, while plumes of steam hissed from under the buckled hood.. "It's even worse," Junior rasped, convinced that he was losing some indefinable advantage if the cop left without playing out this moment as it would usually unfold in an intellectual television crime drama like *Perry Mason* or *Peter Gunn*..Ordinarily, when Celestina was troubled, her art was a perfect sanctuary from all woes. When she was planning, composing, and rendering, time had no meaning for her, and life had no sting..But first, in early July, he stopped taking French lessons. It was an impossible language. Difficult to pronounce. Ridiculous sentence constructions. Anyway, none of the good-looking women he met spoke French or cared whether he did..After a day of work, the pencil portrait of Nella Lombardi was finished. The second piece in the series-an extrapolation of her appearance at age sixty-was begun..Then Junior saw the blood on the right cuff of Vanadium's shirt. Blood dripping from his hand, too..When he killed the Bartholomew, this haunting would finally end, too. In Junior's mind, Vanadium and Bartholomew were inextricably linked, because it was the maniac cop who first heard Junior calling out Bartholomew in his sleep. Did that make sense? Well, it made more sense at some times than at others, but it always made a lot more sense than anything else. To be rid of the dead-but-persistent detective, he must eliminate Bartholomew..She had lighted one candle for each of eleven apostles, none for the twelfth, Judas, the betrayer. Consequently, after burning a fragment of the cards in each votive glass, she was left with one piece..Given a child-size harmonica, he extemporized simplified versions of songs he heard on the radio. The Beatles' "All You Need Is Love." The Box Tops' "The Letter." Stevie Wonder's "I Was Made to Love Her." After hearing a tune once, Barty could play a recognizable rendition..Having arrived at this same astonishing but nonetheless obvious conclusion, Harrison said, "Someone has to've been hurt." He hurried out of the kitchen, through the dining room, with Paul close behind him..The possibility that he'd left a clear fingerprint on the watch crystal had to be judged remote. And the band had been too textured to take a print useful to the police..Her brothers' solemnity irritated Agnes. They appeared to be taking this reading seriously, as though it were far more than just a little after-dinner entertainment..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..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..The subcontractor who built the quarter-spitting coin boxes was James Hunnicolt, but everyone called him Jimmy Gadget. He specialized in electronic eavesdropping, building cameras and recorders into the most unlikely objects, but he could do just about anything requiring inventive mechanical design and construction.. "Mr. Magusson, you once told me that if Detective Vanadium ever bothered me again, you'd have his choke chain yanked. Well, I think you need to talk to someone about that."..Head lowered, as if his visit to Jacob were a weight that

bowed him, his attention was on the ground. Otherwise, he might not have noticed, might not have been halted by, the intricate and beautiful pattern of sunlight and shadow over which he walked..Her strength was the strength of stones only in the sense that she felt as immovable as rock, yet she found the resources to raise one arm, to place her left hand over Maria's bead-tangled fingers. "But the baby's dead.".Round of face and round of body, Vinnie didn't walk like other men; he seemed to bounce lightly along, as if inflated with a mixture of gases that included enough helium to make him buoyant, though not so much that he was in danger of sailing up and away like a birthday balloon. His smooth cheeks and merry eyes left a boyish impression, but he was a good attorney, and shrewd..He didn't want to lean inside and peer over the front seat. He had no weapon. He would be unbalanced, vulnerable..With his sister's financial backing, Edom purchased a flower shop in '71, after ascertaining that the strip mall in which it was located had been even more soundly constructed than the earthquake code required, that it didn't stand on slide-prone land, that it did not lie in a flood plain, and that in fact its altitude above sea level ensured that it would survive all but a tidal wave of such towering enormity that nothing less than an asteroid impact in the Pacific could be the cause. In '73, he married Maria Elena (that boy-girl thing, after all), whereupon she became Agnes's sister-in-law in addition to having long been a full sister in her heart. They bought the house on the other side of the original Lampion homestead, and another fence was torn down.. "I don't want an attorney." He closed his eyes, lowered his head to the pillow, and sighed. "I just want ... peace."..Agnes got out of bed, switched on the lamp, and tucked Barty in once more. "Say your silent prayers.".. "No. Rowena dropped those names after the twins' first year. She and I were the only ones who ever used them. Our private little joke. Even the boys wouldn't have remembered."..He sat on the edge of the bed and held her right hand. She had passed away such a short time ago that her skin was still warm.. "Oh, it doesn't mean you're nervous in that sense. Nervous in this case means psychologically induced. Grief, Enoch. brief and shock and horror-they can have profound physical effects."..Finding nothing more of interest in the study, he considered searching the rest of the house..Then Agnes said, "Well, it's clear to me that you won't be able to talk out your life in just one year. Should be a two-year grant."..Dressed entirely in a shade of pink that darkened to rouge when wet, Angel squealed and deserted Barty. Spotted-streaked-splashed, with false tears on her cheeks, with a darkly glimmering crown of rain jewels in her hair, she raced up the steps as though she were a princess abandoned by her coachman, and allowed herself to be scooped into her grandmother's arms..On this momentous day, however, drawing provided no solace. Frequently, her hands shook, and she could not control the pencil..He was immensely weary, limp. He felt oppressed, as though a great weight were piled on him. Even keeping his eyes open was tiring..Widening his eyes in calculated surprise, Junior said, "Are you a police officer?"..In answer, Wally came running with his heavy medical bag, as he was vow doctor to some people on the pie route. "The weather's a lot better than I expected, so I went back to change into lighter clothes."..In Room 724, standing alone at her sister's bedside, watching the girl sleep, Celestina told herself that she was coping well. She could handle this unnerving development without calling in either of her parents..He slid his plate aside. From a pocket, he withdrew a quarter, which always served him as well with children as with murderers..Junior would have liked to pursue spiritual matters with Sklent, but numerous other partyers wanted their time with the great man. In parting, sure that he would give the artist a laugh, Junior withdrew the brochure for "This Momentous Day" from his jacket and coyly asked for an opinion of Celestina White's paintings..The two men detached and rolled up the pleated green skirt that hung from the rectangular frame of the graveyard winch on which the casket was suspended. Green, rather than black, because Naomi loved nature: Junior had been thoughtful about the details of the service..Magusson was a small man behind a huge desk. His head appeared too large for his body, but his ears seemed no bigger than a pair of silver dollars. Large protuberant eyes, bulging with shrewdness and feverish with ambition, marked him as one who'd be hungry a minute after standing up from a daylong feast. A button nose too severely turned up at the tip, an upper lip long enough to rival that of an orangutan, and a mean slash of a mouth completed a portrait sure to repel any woman with eyesight; but if you wanted an attorney who was angry at the world for having been cursed with ugliness and who could convert that anger into the energy and ruthlessness of a pit bull in the courtroom, even while using his unfortunate looks to gain the jurors' sympathy, then Simon Magusson was the counselor for you..Then her breath caught repeatedly in her breast as her throat tightened against the influx of air. One particularly difficult inhalation dissolved into a sob, and she wept..From childhood, Celestina was encouraged to be confident that life had meaning, and when she'd needed to share that belief with Dr. Lipscomb as he struggled to come to terms with his experience in the operating room, she'd done so without hesitation. Strangely, however, she herself was having difficulty absorbing these two small miracles..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..Nor could she begin to imagine the nature of the disaster that had befallen him, leaving his face looking blasted and loose at all its hinges. She had last seen him at Phimie's funeral. A few minutes ago at her doorstep, she'd recognized him only because of his port-wine birthmark..One of the paramedics had stooped beside him to press a cool hand against the nape of his neck. Now this man said urgently, "Kenny!..He left by the back door, to avoid the aftermath seeping across the foyer floor. Fog enveloped him, cool and refreshing..He continued until four aces of hearts and four aces of diamonds were on the table in front of him. These eight draws he had prepared, and this effect was his intention..And as he grew, the boy seemed content with his own company and that of his mother and his uncles. Yet Agnes worried that no children his age lived in their neighborhood. She thought he would be happier if he had a playmate or two..The voice continued, issuing from a device that stood on the desk beside the phone. "Please don't bang up. This is a telephone answering machine Leave a message after you hear the tone, and I will return your call later ".you greater strength and determination than any other motive. But you should know this much.... You need

to keep her safe for another reason. She's special. I don't want to explain why she's special or how I know that she is, because this isn't the time or place, not with your dad's death and Wally in the hospital and you still shaky from the attack." Agnes wasn't able to interpret his expression, not because he was in the least difficult to read, but because her perceptions were skewed by sudden fear and a flood of adrenaline. Her heart seemed to spin like a flywheel in her breast. As luck would have it," the nun said, "Dr. Lipscomb was in the when it happened. He'd just delivered another baby under." Well," Kathleen said, "even if the money wasn't so nice, I'd be sorry to see this case end." Junior wanted to kill her. Kill him. Whatever. But he sensed that Renee knew more than a little about dirty fighting and that the outcome of a violent confrontation would not be easy to predict. Tom Vanadium liked this man at once. Cop instinct told him that Damascus was honest and reliable. Priestly insight suggested even more impressive qualities. A trickster, this detective. Full of taunts and feints and sly stratagems. Psychological-warfare artist. Prosser-fifty-six, a widower, an accountant-had a thirty-year-old daughter, Zelda, who was an attorney in San Francisco. Junior had driven to Terra Linda previously, to research the accountant; he already knew Prosser had no connection to Seraphim's fateful child. "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." Their evenings together were comfortable bliss, though usually they just watched television, or he read to her. She enjoyed being read to: mostly historical novels and occasional mysteries. "64 just a little bit ago," the girl said. "I was sitting on the porch, having a Popsicle, and I just figured it out." 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. 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. The expectation with which Tom had been greeted on his arrival was as thin as the air at Himalayan heights compared to the rich stew of anticipation now aboil. 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. The physician saw the look and understood it. A blush pinked his long, pale face. "Celestina, you're quite beautiful, and I'm sure you've learned to be wary of men, but I swear that my intentions are entirely honorable."

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