

MANUSCRIT REVELATEUR PAR LE PETIT FILS DE RETIF DE LA BRETONNE TOME PREMIER

As though Amelia Earhart, the long-lost aviatrix, had reached out of her twilight zone and snared the two bits, no tumbling coin glinted in the air above the desk..STILL WEARING HIS white pharmacy smock over a white shirt and black slacks, striding purposefully along the streets of Bright Beach, under a malignant-gray twilight sky worthy of a Weird Tales cover, with ominous accompanying rhythm provided by wind-clattered palm fronds overhead, Paul Damascus headed home for the day..He had considered tracking down Celestina-and the bastard boy--prior to her exhibition. The alumni office of her college might be one route to her. And further inquiries in the city's fine-arts community would no doubt eventually provide him with her address..The ninth piece was not art, certainly not a work by Griskin, and could disturb no one half as much as it rattled Junior. Upon a black pedestal stood a pewter candlestick identical to the one that had cracked the skull of Thomas Vanadium and had added dimension to the cop's previously pan-flat face..The Finder.Oblivious that she and Barty had become the center of attention, Angel said, "Does he ever get the quarters back?".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..playing cards, Agnes fixated on Deed's blond bangs, which curled across his broad brow..For more than twenty-three years, he'd given his big toe little consideration, had taken it for granted, had treated it with shameful neglect. Now this lower digit seemed precious, a comparatively small fixture of flesh, but as important to his image of himself as his nose or either of his eyes..By comparison, the strip club-neon aglow, theater lights twinkling----looked warm, cozy. Welcoming..She loosened her hair and brushed it out, and Nolly took her to dinner at their favorite place, which had the decor of a classy saloon and a bay view suitable for God's table. They came here often enough that the maitre d' greeted them by name, as did their waiter..able to reconcile these opposed forces, she was all but paralyzed by indecision..Abruptly alert, sitting up on the edge of the bed, Celestina knew the caller could not be the comatose old woman, so she said angrily, "Who the hell is this?".Swinging toward the open door, he saw that the dead detective was true to his word: He wasn't here..If Vanadium was watching, however, he would interpret the pitch of the coin to mean that his unconventional strategy was working, that Junior's nerves were frayed to the breaking point. With an adversary as indefatigable as this cuckoo cop, you dared never show weakness..The busboy swept the empty appetizer plates away as the waiter arrived simultaneously with small salads. Fresh martinis followed..The fact that Barty saw twisty spots with either eye closed had prepared Agnes for this bleak news. Yet in spite of the defense that foreknowledge provided her, the teeth of sorrow bit deep..Settling onto the empty stool beside this beauty, Junior offered to buy her a drink, and she accepted..He nervously fingered the fabric of his slacks, outlining the quarter in his pocket. Still there..Your deeds ... will return to you, magnified beyond imagining ... the spirit of Bartholomew ... will find you ... and mete out the terrible judgment that you deserve..To the windows, then, drawing all the blinds securely down. And still, irrationally, she felt watched..Occasionally, when Junior returned home from a day of gallery hopping or an evening at a restaurant, Industrial Woman-the artist's title-scared away his mellow mood. More than once, he'd cried out in alarm before realizing this was just his prized Poriferan..greatest fright of his life. He jumped inside his skin, and his heart knocked, knocked, and he half expected to hear his bones rattle one against another, like those of a dangling skeleton in a funhouse..He slipped behind the door and raised the pewter candlestick over his head. Weighing perhaps five pounds, the object made a formidable bludgeon, almost as good as a hammer..When Agnes had asked him to deliver the pies, before she had set out with Joey for the hospital the previous day, Edom had wanted to beg off, but he had agreed without hesitation. He was prepared to suffer every viciousness that nature could throw at him in this life, but he could not endure seeing disappointment in his sister's eyes..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.. "No," Otter said, and hesitated. He felt he owed this man an explanation. "See, it's not so much won't as can't. I thought of making plugs in the planking of that galley, near the keel-you know what I mean by plugs? They'd work out as the timbers work when she gets in a heavy sea." Hound nodded. "But I couldn't do it. I'm a shipbuilder. I can't build a ship to sink. With the men aboard her. My hands wouldn't do it. So I did what I could. I made her go her own way. Not his way..".Her eyes, lustrous pools, brimmed with the need to know, but she respected the deal. "I only half understood all that, and I don't even know which half, but in some strange way, it feels true. Thank you. I will think about it tonight, when I can't sleep." She stepped close and kissed him on the cheek. "Who are you, Tom Vanadium?".She found the switch and clicked off the lamp again. "Good-night, young prince..".Clutching the blanket, she thought of the funerary lap robes that red the legs of the deceased in their caskets, for she felt sometimes cove half dead. Both feet in this world-yet walking beside Joey on a strange road Beyond..Celestina succumbed to a fit of giggles. Before she could control them, she used up two Kleenex to blow her nose and to blot the laughter from her eyes..He felt remarkably well when he arrived home: calm, proud of his quick thinking and stalwart action, pleasantly tired. He hadn't chosen to kill again; this obligation had been thrust on him by fate. Yet he had proven that the boldness he'd shown on the fire tower, rather than being a transient strength, was a deeply rooted quality.. "You figure all this," Jolene asked, "because Mother Nature gives us a nice warm day in January?".From the chair in the corner, where Agnes sat, it seemed that Joshua took an inordinately long time on what was usually a quick examination. Worry so weighed on her that the physician's customary thoroughness seemed, this time, to be filled with dire meaning..Yet in her heart, she wouldn't relinquish hope for a miracle. This was an amazing boy, a prodigy, a boy who could walk where the rain

wasn't, already himself a miracle, and it seemed that anything might happen, that Dr. Chan might suddenly rush into the waiting room, surgical mask dangling from his neck, face aglow, with news of a spontaneous rejection of the cancer..A dumpster and a dead musician had humbled him as thoroughly as he had ever been humbled before, as completely as violent nervous emesis and volcanic diarrhea had humbled him, and he had no tolerance for being humbled. Humility is for losers..When the two vertical panes of the casement window were still less than seven inches apart, they stuttered. The mechanism produced a dismal grinding rasp that sounded like a guttural pronunciation of the problem itself, c-c-c-corrosion, and seized up..Vanadium nodded. "And I'd like to hear about Cain's reactions in more detail. I've read your reports, of course, and they've been thorough, but necessarily condensed. There'll be lots of subtleties that only reveal themselves in conversation. Often, the apparently insignificant details are the most important to me when I'm devising strategy."..Although the only light on the back porch came from the pale beams that filtered out through the curtains on the kitchen windows, all these faces seemed luminous, almost preternaturally aglow, like the kiln-fired countenances of saints in a dark church, lit solely by the flames of votive candles. The rain-a music of sorts, and the jasmine and incense, and the moment sacred..As the fragrances of wet wool and sodden denim rose from her sweater and jeans, Agnes switched on the heater and angled the vanes of the middle vent toward Barty. "Honey, turn that other vent toward yourself."..He still had a sour taste in his mouth, although it was not as disgusting as it had been. All the odors were wonderfully clean and bracing--antiseptics, floor wax, freshly laundered bedsheets-without a whiff of..A few minutes after dawn, in excellent weather, they flew out of Sacramento, bound for Eugene. Junior would have enjoyed the scenery if his face hadn't felt as if it were gripped by a score of white-hot pliers in the hands of the same evil trolls that had peopled all the fairy tales that his mother had ever told him when he was little..He let go of the girl's chin, and at once she scrunched into the corner of the window seat, as far away from him as she could get. The knowing look in her eye wasn't that of an ordinary child, not that of a child at all. Not his imagination, either. Terror, yes, but also defiance, and this knowing expression, as though she could see right through him, knew things about him that she had no way of knowing..As best he could, he examined his clothes. They were better pressed than he expected, and not noticeably soiled..His exceptional sensitivity remained a curse. He had been more profoundly affected by Victoria's and Vanadium's tragic deaths than he had realized. Wrenched, he was..The wedding reception-big, noisy, and joyous-spread across the three properties without fences. His mother's name was so often mentioned, her presence so strongly felt in all the lives that she had touched, that sometimes it seemed that she was actually there with them..Dinner was cooking in the upper of the two ovens. He switched the bottom oven, setting it at warm, and dropped open the door..Aside from purchasing the T S. Eliot book, which he hadn't found time to read, Junior was only peripherally aware of current events, because they were, after all, current, while he tried always to focus on the future. The news of the day was but a faint background music to him, like a song on a radio in another apartment..As shaken as she had been at Phimie's side, she couldn't trust her memory. Perhaps she hadn't seen what she thought she'd seen..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..His in-laws' chances of receiving compensation for their pain and suffering over Naomi's death were seriously compromised if her husband did not hold the state or county responsible. In this, as in nothing previously, they felt the need to stand united as a family.. "And in some of them, maybe I died the night you were born, and you live alone with your dad."..Although the mummifying fog wound white mysteries around even the most ordinary objects and wrapped every citizen in anonymity, Vanadium preferred to approach the apartment building with utmost discretion. Whatever the length of his stay in this place, he would never arrive or depart through the front door or even through the basement level garage-until perhaps his last day..Writing came with reading, and in a notebook, he began to make entries about points of interest in the stories that he enjoyed. His *Diary of a Book Reader*, as he titled it, fascinated Agnes, who read it with his permission; these notes to himself were enthusiastic, earnest, and charming-but literally month by month, Agnes noticed that they grew less naive, more complex, more contemplative.. "No, no. But being around him so much, inevitably I absorb some details. He's a compelling speaker when the subject interests him."..Glorying 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..Disbelieving his eyes, Junior reached across his body with his left hand and picked up the quarter. Although it had been lying in his right palm, it was cold. Icy..This was better than taking slow deep breaths. Periodically, on the way to Vanadium's house, Junior spat out a string of insults, punctuated by obscenities.. "You feel remorse, though," said Agnes. "I can see you do. And not just because of what happened to your hands."..Even as this news pleased Junior, it also saddened him. He was not merely interring a lovely wife, but also his first child. He was burying his family.. "Each life," Barty Lampion said, "is like our oak tree in the backyard but lots bigger. One trunk to start with, and then all the branches, millions of branches, and every branch is the same life going in a new direction."..The blessing of Nellie's silence lasted only until Hanna, cursed with speech if not with sufficient strength to stand, said, "We tried to reach you, Mr. Damascus, but you'd already left the pharmacy."..Backing off, trying to feel his way to the foyer and front door, afraid that if he stumbled over a chair, she'd descend upon him like a screaming hawk upon a mouse, Junior denied her accusation. "You're crazy. How could I know? Look at you! How could I possibly know?"..As Edom crossed the threshold, moving outside to the landing at the top of the stairs, Jacob followed, proselytizing for his faith: "Christmas Eve, 1940, St. Anselmo's Orphanage, San Francisco. Josef Krepp killed eleven boys, ages six through eleven, murdering them in their sleep and cutting a different trophy from each-an eye here, a tongue there."..He wanted Celestina to sit in her seat and use her lap belt, but she insisted on cuddling next to him, as if she were a high-school girl and he

were her teenage beau. From the moment the girl was admitted on the evening of January 5, the nurses at St. Mary's Hospital in San Francisco called her Phimie, too, not because they knew her well enough to love her, but because that was the name they heard Celestina use. "You'll do better away from the ships, all the fighting and raiding. The King's working the old mines at Samory, round the mountain. There you'd be out of his way. Work for him you must, if you want to stay alive. I'll see that you're sent there. If you'll go." Whether making love or killing, he was never guided by bigotry. A private little joke with himself. But true. Neddy, dressed for work but overdressed for his own funeral, slumped against the wall, head bowed, chin on his chest. His pale hands were splayed at his sides, as though he were trying to strike chords from the floor tiles. Pecan cakes, cinnamon custard pies boxed in insulated coolers, gifts wrapped with bright paper and glittery ribbons. Agnes Lampion made deliveries to those friends who were on her list of the needful, but also to friends who were blessed with plenty. The sight of each beloved face, each embrace, each kiss, each smile, each cheerfully spoken "Merry Christmas" at every stop fortified her heart for the sad task awaiting her when all gifts were given. Unbuttoning her blouse, Celestina said, "Traditionally, puppies don't have a role in weddings." "Just now." Although Angel tried to sound nonchalant, she was trembling. "I'm not sure I can do it again." Glaring and red-faced, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, Neddy said, "I'm sorry, but you've got me all wrong. I'm not like Renee and you." Dessert was on the house. The waiter brought the four best items on the menu, to spare them the need to make two small decisions after having made such a big one. Out of Phimie's humiliation, terror, suffering, and death had come Angel, whom Celestina had first and briefly hated, but whom now she loved more than she loved Wally, more than she loved herself or even life itself. Phimie, through Angel, had brought Celestina both to Wally and to a fuller understanding of their father's meaning when he spoke of this momentous day, an understanding that brought power to her painting and so deeply touched the people who saw and bought her art. Consequently, he scheduled more time every day with the phone books. He had obtained directories for all nine counties that, with the city itself, comprised the Bay Area. This was a memory, not a real voice. Even after you became an accomplished meditator, the mind resisted this degree of blissful oblivion and tried to sabotage it with aural and visual memories. "Yeah, they think we're with Candid Camera. So Jimmy points to this United Parcel truck parked across the street and says the cameras are in there." Among those present before the caravan returned were a few who should have known better than to allow this madness. Tom Vanadium, Edom, Maria. They stared up at the boy, tense and solemn, and Agnes could only suppose that they, too, had arrived after the fact, with the boy already beyond easy recall. be entombed in one of those memorial walls, well above ground level, where nothing was likely to seep into them. "Where did you hear that expression," she demanded, though she couldn't conceal her amusement. For the first few bites of crab in a light cornmeal crust, Nolly suspended their conversation. Bliss. Celestina extended her left hand, which shook so badly that she nearly knocked over both their wineglasses. "I will." Celestina, Grace, even Tom himself, had taken extraordinary measures to leave no slightest trail. Those very few authorities who knew how to reach Tom and, through him, the others, were acutely aware that his whereabouts and phone number must be tightly guarded. "I see. Sometimes. Just quick. For like a blink. Like when you stand between two mirrors. You know?" "I got Starkweather, killing all those people with no hope of personal gain. You got maniac cops and this new war in Vietnam." "Well," Kathleen said, "even if the money wasn't so nice, I'd be sorry to see this case end." Kathleen had never heard a religious calling described in such odd words as these, and she was surprised, indeed, to hear a priest refer to God as "strange." As she struggled to cope with her loss, the last thing Agnes needed was the reminder posed by that empty chair. Maria's intentions were good, however, and Agnes didn't want to hurt her feelings. surreptitiously with Junior. He was accustomed to being an object of desire. This night, however, the only lady he cared about was San Francisco herself, and he wanted to be alone with her. "Because He didn't want you to be a dog." She finished tying a bow in the drawstrings. "There. You look just like an M&M." Using all its powers of concentration, which were formidable, Junior sought to silence the phantom Chicane. At first, the voice steadily faded, but soon it grew louder again, and more insistent. THE DEAD DETECTIVE, grinning in the moonlight, a pair of silvery quarters gleaming in the sockets once occupied by his eyes. The reception still roared in both showrooms of the gallery. Legions of the uncultured, taste-challenged in every regard except in their appreciation for hors d'oeuvres, yammered about art and chased their cloddish opinions with mediocre champagne. "He's a wonderful boy, so very bright, so very full of life. Blindness will be hard, but it won't be the end. He'll cope without the light. It'll be so difficult at first, but this boy ... eventually he'll thrive." With a shiver, Kathleen said, "We'd like to know more about why we did the things we did for you. Why the quarters? Why the song?" Junior could only imagine how flattered Victoria would be to receive the attentions of a twenty-three-year-old stud, flattered and grateful. When he contemplated all the ways she could express that gratitude, there was barely enough room behind the wheel of the Suburban for him and his manhood. After Agnes read the final words on the final page, Barty was drunk on speculation, chattering about what-might-have-happened-next to these characters that had become his friends. He talked nonstop while changing into his pajamas, while peeing, while brushing his teeth, and Agnes wondered how she would wind him down to sleep. To see his newborn baby girl, Barty shared the sight of other Bartys, and he so adored this little wrinkled Mary that he sustained his vision all day, until a thunderous migraine became too much to bear and a sudden frightening slurring of speech drove him back to the comfort of blindness. The popeyed little toad smirked over there on the far side of his pretentious desk. "Oh, sure, I know," Mary said. "But when it's a bad place, you feel it before you go in. So you just go around to the next place that isn't bad. No big deal." "I'm a less philosophical sort than Kathleen," Nolly said, "so what I've been wondering is where you learned the tricks with the quarter. How is it you're priest, cop-and amateur magician?" "That's not what they say," the boy replied with a giggle, for his extensive reading had introduced him to words that he and she agreed were not his to use. Their

apartment was in a four-story Victorian house that dripped gingerbread, in the exclusive Pacific Heights district. It had been converted to apartments with deep respect for the architecture, years before Wally bought it..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..Charmed by the vulnerability of the young, he'd never slept with an older woman. The prospect intrigued him. She would have tricks in her repertoire that younger women were too inexperienced to know..Slamming through the door, letting it bang shut behind him hard enough to crack the glass, crossing the porch, Tom took the beauty of the day like a fist in the gut. It was too blue and too bright and too gorgeous to harbor death, and yet it did, birth and death, alpha and omega, woven in a design that flaunted meaning but defied understanding. It was a blow, this day, a hard blow, brutal in its beauty, in its simultaneous promises of transcendence and loss.

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