

## 0 MY FATHER A COLLECTION OF LETTERS FROM SONS AND DAUGHTERS TO TH

Celestina dropped to one knee in front of Angel, to tie the drawstrings of the hood under the girl's chin..Initially, lying drowsily in the sumptuous comfort of Pratesi cotton sheets with black silk piping, Junior assumed that he was in a twilight state between wakefulness and sleep, and that the singing must be a lingering fragment of a dream. Although rising and falling, the voice remained so faint that he didn't at once identify the tune, but when he recognized "Someone to Watch over Me," he sat up in bed and threw back the covers..No elevator. He didn't have to worry that with no more warning than a ding, doors might slide open, admitting witnesses into the hall..Tom had acted with the best intentions-but also with the intelligence and the good judgment that God had given him and that he had spent a lifetime honing. Good intentions alone can be the cobblestones from which the road to Hell is built; however, good intentions formed through much self-doubt and second-guessing, as Tom's always were guided by wisdom acquired from experience, are all that can be asked of us. Unintended consequences that should have been foreseeable are, he knew, the stuff of damnation, but those that we can't foresee, he hoped, are part of some design for which we can't be held responsible..Once, she left the TV and came to Tom, where he sat talking with Paul. "It's like Gunsmoke and The Monkees are next to each other on the TV, both at the same time. But the Monkees, they can't see the cowboys-and the cowboys, they can't see the Monkees."Here again were these peculiar grammatical constructions, which sometimes she had thought were just the mistakes that even a prodigy could be expected to make, and which sometimes she had interpreted as expressions of fanciful speculations, but which lately she had suspected were of a more complex-and perhaps darker-nature. Now her dread took form, and she wondered if the personality disorders that had shaped her brothers' lives could have roots not just in the abuse they had taken from their father, but also in a twisted genetic legacy that could manifest again in her son. In spite of his great gifts, Barty might be destined for a life limited by a psychological problem of a unique or at least different-nature, first suggested by these occasional conversations that seemed not fully coherent.."No," said Vanadium, "you only think you know who I am and what I am, but you don't know anything. That's all right. You'll learn."..it to the granite-topped secretary, and sat in front of the telephone. Previously,.Frequently, these days, she found herself explaining aspects of life to Barty that she hadn't expected to discuss for years to come. She wondered how she could make him understand this: Life can be so sweet, so full, that sometimes happiness is nearly as intense as anguish, and the pressure of it in the heart swells close to pain..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..She figured that she could stay home, devoting herself to Barty, for perhaps three years before she would be wise to find work..Not that he failed to perform well. As always, he was a bull, a stallion, an insatiable satyr. None of his lovers complained; none had the energy for complaint when he'd finished with them.."Honey," Angel said to her daughter, "show us that game you were just playing with Koko. Show us, honey. Come on. Show us. Show us."..Perched on a chair with two plump bed pillows to boost her, Angel extracted one crisp strip from her club sandwich and asked Tom, "Where's bacon come from?".Junior was at critical depth. The psychological pressure was at least five thousand pounds per square inch and growing by the second. Implosion imminent..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..He switched on his flashlight. In the beam, on the blacktop, a silver disc. Like a full moon in a night sky..A great boom. Concussion rocked the floor and shuddered the walls and made the roof timbers squeal as though unsuspected colonies of bats had taken flight by the thousands all in the same instant..After Victoria had departed, Junior lay smiling at the ceiling, floating on Valium and desire. And vanity..Her father respected and admired Tom, so she was thankful for his presence. And anyone who could survive whatever catastrophe had left him with this cubistic face was a man she wanted on her team in a crisis..The prickly-bur ghosts of two little children didn't concern him. At worst, they were spiritual gnats..Paul withdrew the pistol from the drawer. The weapon didn't feel as good to him as guns always felt in the hands of pulp heroes..At the top of the candlestick, the drip pan and the socket were marked by a wine-red drizzle. The color of well-aged bloodstains..His first word after mama was papa, which she taught him while showing him pictures of Joey. His third word: pie..As Wally followed them inside, Celestina grinned at him. "From the car to the living room, all as neat as a well-practiced ballet. We've got a big headstart on this married thing."..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..No one could put him in prison because of his dreams. "I can't remember. Those are the worst, when you're not able to remember them-don't you think? They're always so silly when you can recall the details. When you draw a blank ... they seem more threatening."..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..As before, the name tolled through him like the ominous note of the deepest bass bell in a cathedral carillon, struck on a cold midnight..Jacob cooked corn bread, cheese-and-parsley omelettes, and crisp home fries with a dash of onion salt..1969 through 1973: the Year of the Rooster, chased by the Year of the Dog, followed fast by the Pig, faster by the Rat, with the Ox passing in a stampede pace. Eisenhower dead. Armstrong, Collins, Aldrin on the moon: one giant step on soil untouched by war. Hot pants, plane hijackings, psychedelic art. Sharon Tate and friends murdered by Manson's girls

seven days before Woodstock, the Age of Aquarius stillborn, but the death unrecognized for years. McCartney split, Beatles dissolved. Earthquake in Los Angeles, Truman dead, Vietnam sliding into chaos, riots in Ireland, a new war in the Middle East, Watergate..If she'd connected with his left side, as she intended, she might have broken his arm or cracked a few ribs. But lie saw the chair coming, and as agile as a base runner dodging a shortstop's tag, he turned away from her, taking the blow across his back.. "All right," Agnes said, and as she voiced her acceptance, she was shivered by a sudden fear for which she couldn't at once identify a cause..Later, at home, he gargled until he had drained half a bottle of mint-flavored mouthwash, took the longest shower of his life, and then used the other half of the mouthwash..This was the same woman who had been stripping the second bed when Celestina arrived earlier. Now she was here to remake the first..On this chilly January night, no campers or fishermen had staked claims along the lake. Because the trees were far enough back to be lost in the night, the immediate shore and the pooled blackness that it encircled appeared as desolate as any landscape on a world without an atmosphere.. "Cancer," she whispered, and superstitiously reproached herself for speaking the word aloud, as though thereby she'd given power to the malignancy and ensured its existence..Abruptly, without a cannonade of thunder, without artillery strikes of lightning, the storm broke. As loud as marching armies, rain tramped across the roof..the stems, thorns sharp against his tongue. And then Agnes. Agnes in the yard, screaming.As was true of the entire house, the bedroom was immaculate. The wood floor gleamed as though polished by hand. A simple white chenille spread conformed to the bed as smoothly and tautly as the top blanket tucked around a soldier's barracks bunk..By the time he went to bed Saturday night, the cards that had been only that morning were showing signs of wear..No one in Junior's circles seemed to care about the crisis in American music. He supposed he had a greater awareness of injustice than did most people..ROCKING AS IF AFLOAT on troubled waters, abused by an unearthly and tormented sound, Junior Cain imagined a gondola on a black river, a carved dragon rising high at the bow as he had seen on a "What car?" Celestina asked, stopping at the bottom of the steps and turning to look..He looked up into the eyes of the stocky man with the birthmark. They were gray eyes, hard as nail heads, but clear and surprisingly beautiful in that otherwise unfortunate face..In recounting the fortune-telling session, Agnes had not told the magician about the four jacks of spades, only about the aces of diamonds and hearts. She never wore her worries for anyone to see; and though she had made a joke of the appearance of the fourth knave on Friday, Edom knew that it had deeply troubled her..An exceptionally attractive woman, alone at the bar, stirred his desire. Glossy black hair: the tresses of night itself, shorn from the sky.Apparently, he'd been drooling for a long time. Where his chin and throat were not sticky, a crust of dried saliva glazed his skin..Either this chatterbox was at all times a babbling airhead or Junior particularly disconcerted him..The papermaker withdrew a thick wad of hundred-dollar bills from his envelope and, squinting, inspected the currency in the flickering light. "I'm leaving now, but you wait until movie's over." "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?" He knew the titles that he wanted: "Tunnel in the Sky, Between Planets, Starman Jones." Perri had been crippled seventeen years before Jonas Salk's vaccine had spared future generations from the curse of polio..she'd crossed herself during Edom's rant about the Tri-State Tornado of 1925. Then, she'd been warding off bad fortune; now, with a smile and a look of wonder, she was acknowledging the grace of God, which, according to the cards, had been settled generously on Bartholomew..While Angel continued her relentless interrogation of Paul Damascus, Tom joined her mother in front of the large window at the end of the room farthest from the dinner table..In the foyer again, about six feet inside the front door, he stood the wineglass on the floor. He placed the bottle of Merlot beside the glass, the red rose beside the bottle..Agnes winced. Already, another contraction. Mild but so soon after the last. She clasped her hands around her immense belly and took slow, deep breaths until the pain passed..Shortly after four o'clock, here was Neddy, already spiffed for work in black tuxedo, pleated white shirt, and black bow tie, with a red bud rose as a boutonniere, standing just inside the open door to Celestina White's studio apartment, holding forth in tedious detail as to the reasons why she was in flagrant breach of her lease and obligated to move by the end of the month. The issue was Angel, lone baby in an otherwise childless building: her crying (though she rarely cried), her noisy play (though Angel wasn't yet strong enough to shake a rattle), and the potential she represented for damage to the premises (though she was not yet able to get out of a bassinet on her own, let alone go at the plaster with a ball-peen hammer)..In this case, he was sure that vanity was not a fault, not the result of a swollen ego, but merely healthy self-esteem. That he was irresistible to women wasn't simply his biased opinion, but an observable and undeniable fact, like gravity or the order in which the planets revolved t around the sun..Agnes at last relented. "Someday, you're going to have to learn to relax, Maria." "Supposing he's senile, wouldn't he possibly think you were his long- lost brother or someone?" Tuesday morning, while he showered with a swimming cockroach that was as exuberant as a golden retriever in the motel's lukewarm water, Junior vowed never to kill again. Except in self-defense..Junior got in the car once more, slammed the door, and said, "Panfaced, double-chinned, half-bald, puke-collecting creep." Every time Junior glanced back, Vanadium was following his wake through the throng. Stocky but almost gliding. Grim and grimmer. Hideous. And closer..In the refrigerator, he found a stick of butter in a container with clear plastic lid. He took the container to the cutting board beside the sink, to the left of the cooktop, and opened it..As the last of the flan was served and Maria's girls took their seats once more, Barty blinked at the candles and said, "Gone now," even though the tiny spectrums still shimmered in the cut crystal. He turned his full attention to the flan with such enthusiasm that his mother soon stopped puzzling over rainbows.. "You better wise up, you tree-humping nitwit," Rudy advised Junior, grabbing the bed railing as if he might tear it off and use it to club his son-in-law senseless..As Junior paced the hotel room, his fear made way for anger. All he wanted was peace, a chance to grow as a person, an opportunity to improve himself And

now this. The unfairness, the injustice, galled him. He seethed with a sense of persecution..He briefly closed his hand around the three coins, then with a snap of his wrist, flung them at Nolly, who flinched. But either the coins were never flung or they vanished in midair-and his hand was empty.."I mean it. You have a lot of responsibilities here. Barty. Pie Lady Services. People who depend on you. Friends who love you. When you came on board with me, mister, you bought into a whole lot more than you can walk away from." Maria's belief in the efficacy of this ritual was not as strong as her faith in the Church, but nearly so. As she leaned over the votive glass, watching the final fragment dissolve into ashes, she felt a terrible weight lifting from her..As he raced into the future, the past caught up with him in the form of intestinal spasms, and by the time that he had driven only three miles, whimpering like a sick dog, he made an emergency stop at a service station to use the rest room..He had visited the library primarily to confirm that Harrison White was unquestionably dead. He'd shot the man four times. Two bullets 'in the gas tank of the stolen Pontiac destroyed the parsonage and should have incinerated the reverend. When you were dealing with black magic, however, you could never be too cautious..Startled, Junior sat up straight, clutching the silencer-fitted pistol, but the cruiser didn't abruptly brake and pull to the curb in front of the Mercedes, as he expected..Earlier, the dirty-sheet clouds had been wrung dry. Now, the trees that overhung the house had finally stopped dripping on the cedar shingled roof The night was so still that Agnes could hear the sea softly breaking upon the shore more than half a mile away.."No member of the society ever violates a secret confidence," Agnes assured him..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..The white Buick glided through the tides of fog like a ghost ship plying a ghost sea..In spite of its dazzle and power and comfort, however, the car was not able to lift his spirits as he cruised the hills of the city. Somewhere along these darkly glistening streets, in these houses and high-rises clinging to steep slopes awaiting seismic sundering, the boy was sheltered: half Negro, half white, full doom to Junior Cain..A table candle glowed in an amber glass. To Nolly, in this glimmering light, Kathleen's face was more radiant than the flame..If such a small quantity of crushed ice, taken in a single swallow, might cause..After a while, Franklin Chan asked, "Do you want me with you when you tell him?"..CLOUDS SWARMED THE late-afternoon sun, and the Oregon sky grew sapphire where still revealed. Cops gathered like bright-eyed crows in the lengthening shadow of the fire tower..Her elegance was appealing. A pink Chanel suit with knee-length skirt, a strand of pearls. Her figure was spectacular, but she didn't flaunt it. She was even wearing a bra. In this age of bold erotic fashion, her more demure style was enormously seductive..No sign of Vanadium. Some of the taller monuments offered hiding places on both sides of the cemetery road, as did the thicker trunks of the larger trees..Edom did as asked. Then he cut the deck into two approximately equal stacks when requested to do so..Shrieking like carrion-eating birds waiting for their wounded dinner to die, the Hackachaks twice drew stern warnings from nurses. They were told to quiet down and respect the patients in neighboring rooms..In Oregon, standing at Junior Cain's bedside, turning a quarter across the knuckles of his left hand, Thomas Vanadium asks about the name that his suspect had spoken in the grip of a nightmare..She worried that he would need to go to the bathroom during the night and that, half asleep, he might turn the wrong way, toward the stairs, and fall. Three times they paced off the route from the doorway of his room to the hall bath. She would have walked it a hundred times and still not been satisfied, but Barty said, "Okay, I've got it.".."Too few," said Maria, "might mean you made an admirably small number of moral mistakes but also that you failed to take reasonable risks and didn't make full use of the gift of life."..Junior was tempted to experiment with the controls. Maybe other messages were recorded on the machine. Listening to them would be delicious-even if every one of them turned out to be as meaningless to him as Max's--a little like browsing through a stranger's diary..From a distance and through a scattering of trees, Junior wasn't able to discern much about the other funeral, but he was pretty sure many if not most of that crowd were Negroes. He surmised, therefore, that the person being buried was a Negro, too..He smiled. "Those of us who were priests first--yeah, we're all a broody bunch. Of the others--not many, but probably more than you think.".."Was a priest," he corrected. "Might be again. At my request, I've been under a dispensation from vows and suspension from duties for twenty-seven years. Ever since those kids were killed."..Evidently, Jacob had made a quick trip to his apartment over the garage and, with no thought for mice and dust, had not closed the back door. Junior said, "You've caused me a lot of trouble, you know." He'd been building a beautiful rage all night, thinking about what he'd been through because of the girl's temptress mother, whom he saw so clearly in this pint-size bitch. "So much trouble."..Angel liked to perch sideways with a drawing tablet in the window seat in Barty's room, look out at the oak tree from the upper floor, and draw pictures inspired by things she heard in whatever book he was currently listening to. Everyone said she was a pretty good artist for a three-year-old, and Barty wished he could see how good she was. He wished he could see Angel, too, just once..The Worry Bear carries worries in his pockets. Under his Panama hat and in two gold lockets. Carries worries on his back and under his arms. Nevertheless, dear old Worry Bear has his charms..The only bad moment in the evening came when the pianist played "Someone to Watch over Me."..Industrial Woman, which he'd purchased for a little more than nine thousand dollars, less than eighteen months ago and at another gallery, would fetch at least thirty thousand in the current market, so rapidly had Bovol Poriferan's reputation risen..In reaction to a terrible sense of weightlessness, Agnes's two-fisted grip on the steering wheel grew so tight her hands ached. She held on with all her strength, as if at real risk of floating out of the car and up toward the source of the raveling skeins of rain..At one point late in the afternoon, as all three Hackachaks were hurling scorn and invective at Junior, he noticed Vanadium standing in the doorway, observing. Perfect. He pretended not to see the cop, and when next he sneaked a look, he discovered that Vanadium had vanished like a wraith. A thick slab of a wraith..Sheena Hackachak, at forty-four, was more beautiful than any current movie star. She looked twenty years younger than her true age, and she so resembled her late daughter that Junior

felt a rush of erotic nostalgia at the sight of her..From serviceway to alley to serviceway to street, into the city and the fog and the night, Junior ran from the Cain past into the Pinchbeck future..She found the switch and clicked off the lamp again. "Good-night, young prince..".Crossing Spruce Hills with John, Paul, George, Ringo, and dead Thomas, Junior headed back toward Victoria's place, where Sinatra was no longer singing..Spacious, the living room was furnished for two purposes: as a parlor in which to receive visiting friends, but also with two beds, because here Paul and Perri slept every night..".At the back of the second gallery, on the left, there's a corridor. The rest rooms are at the end of it, beyond the offices..".Tom had no idea who Perri might be, but something in the way Grace asked the question and the way she regarded Paul suggested that she knew something about Perri that had won her deep respect and admiration.."-and wherever he went, between his shows, he always gave free performances at nursing homes, schools for the deaf-".Junior knew that she must be teasing him. Her sense of play was delicious. Such devilry in her scintillant blue eyes, such sauciness..In spite of the gloom, the boy's miraculous accomplishment was evident: his clothes and hair were dry as though he'd worn a coat and hood..Over the final refrain of "I'll Be Seeing You" came a man's voice from the foyer, raised quizzically, with perhaps a note of surprise: "Victoria..Barty's mathematical genius proved to have a valuable practical application. Even in his blindness, he perceived patterns where those with sight did not. Working with Tom Vanadium, he devised strikingly successful investment strategies based on subtleties of the stock market's historical performance. By the 1980s, the foundation's annual return on its endowment averaged twenty-six percent: excellent in light of the fact that the runaway inflation of the 1970s had been curbed..Perhaps because Celestina was her father's daughter, with his faith in humanity, she was always deeply moved by the kindnesses of strangers and saw in them the shape of a greater grace. "Does your wife know what a lucky woman she is?". "Less than a year and a half ago, Hurricane Flora--she killed over six thousand in the Caribbean..".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..The disease hadn't corrupted her heart, and it had left her face untouched, as well. Lovely, she was, as she had always been..Instead of gaping at her as though she had been possessed by an inarticulate demon, Wally urgently fumbled a small box out of his jacket pocket and blurted, "Will you marry me?".He got everything he ordered-full value, and more. When he lifted off the top of the bun to squeeze mustard onto the burger, he discovered a shiny quarter pressed into the half-melted cheese..Barty paced off the downstairs hallway to the kitchen, thinking about Dr. Jekyll and the hideous Mr. Hyde..Angel was lying on a towel on the convertible sofa, where Grace had just changed her diaper..In spite of the bravado of the responses in Junior's unspoken half of the conversation, he was increasingly unnerved by Vanadium. The cop was a lunatic, all right, but he was something more than a mere nut case..".What do you think of the exhibition," Junior asked, taking one step toward the musician, crowding him..WHEN AT LAST Paul Damascus reached the parsonage late Friday afternoon, January 12, he arrived on foot, as he arrived everywhere these days..The sidewalks were crowded with businessmen in suits, hippies in flamboyant garb, groups of smartly attired suburban ladies in town to shop, and the usual forgettably dressed rabble, some smiling and some surly and some mumbling but as blank-eyed as mannequins, who might be hired assassins or poets, for all he knew, eccentric millionaires in mufti or carnival geeks who earned their living by biting heads off live chickens..The nurse raised her eyes from Agnes to this other person. "Yes a chip of ice would be all right..".So quick, this violence, over even as it began. Because he had no interest in aftermath, however, Junior suffered no disappointment at the briefness of the thrill. The past was past, and as he closed the front door and stepped around the body, he focused on the future..Meanwhile, as attorneys met on Tuesday afternoon, Junior, having taken leave from work, phoned a locksmith to change the locks at his house. As a cop, Vanadium might have access to a lock-release gun that.As though stirred by static electricity, the fine hairs on the backs of Tom's hands quivered, and a current of expectation coursed through him..Somehow, Vanadium's malevolent spirit was also to blame for Junior's failure to find a new heart mate, in spite of all the women he'd been through. Undoubtedly, when Bartholomew was dead and Vanadium vanquished with him, romance and true love would bloom..His breath was warm against her throat: "And I want to go back home to see some faces..".From Joey's closet, she extracted an old blue blazer that he seldom wore anymore. The lining was sagging, worn..If Junior was not discreet, and if gossip about the widower Cain and the sexy nurse began to circulate, Vanadium would be on the case again even if it had been closed. The cop was sick, hateful, driven by unknowable inner demons. Although he might for the moment have been reined in by those in higher office, mere gossip of a spicy nature would be excuse enough for him to open the file again, which he'd surely do without informing his superiors..Sometimes, in his mind, Tom wasn't running along the residential streets of Bright Beach, but along the corridor of the dormitory wing over which he had served as prefect. He was cast back in time, to that dreadful night. A sound wakes him. A fragile cry. Thinking it a voice from his dream, he nevertheless gets out of bed, takes up a flashlight, and checks on his charges, his boys. Low-wattage emergency lamps barely relieve the gloom in the corridor. The rooms are dark, doors ajar according to the rules, to guard against the danger of stubborn locks in the event of fire. He listens. Nothing. Then into the first room-and into a Hell on earth. Two small boys per room, easily and silently overcome by a grown man with the strength of madness. In the sweep of the flashlight beam: the dead eyes, the wrenched faces, the blood. Another room, the flashlight jittering, jumping, and the carnage worse. Then in the hall again, movement in the shadows. Josef Krepp captured by the flashlight. Josef Krepp, the quiet custodian, meek by all appearances, employed at St. Anselmo's for the past six months with nary a problem, with only good employee reviews attached to his record. Josef Krepp, here in the corridor of the past, grinning and capering in the flashlight, wearing a dripping necklace of souvenirs..Although he found Magusson's face sufficiently disturbing that he avoided looking at it more than necessary, and though Magusson's bulging eyes were so moist with bitterness and

with need that they inspired nightmares, Junior shifted his gaze from his half-numb hands to his attorney. "Luck? I lost my wife. And my unborn baby." "Let's roll 'em. out," Paul said, and he returned to the station wagon to ride shotgun beside Agnes.

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