

TIMELESS SHADOWS

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glories of the universe and the comparatively humble nature of human existence were recognized, contemplated, and absorbed in a matter of weeks..Through the big window beyond her, the charry branches of the massive oak tree formed a black cat's cradle against the sky, leaves quivering slightly, as though nature herself trembled in trepidation of what Junior Cain might do.."That's correct," Parkhurst said. "Probably one or more small blood vessels ruptured from the extreme violence of the emesis."..He knocked the pepper shaker on its side, and then with a groan put it upright once more..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.."It's a miracle both of you didn't go through that railing," the attorney agreed.."Why are you here?" "Where else I should be and for why? I watch you over." As the tears cleared from Agnes's eyes, she saw that Maria was sewing. A shopping bag stood to one side of the chair, and to the other side, open on the floor, a case contained spools of thread, needles, a pincushion, a pair of scissors, and other supplies of a seamstress's trade..He no longer had any reason to follow an exercise regimen. For twenty-three years, he'd needed to maintain good health in order to meet his responsibilities, but all the responsibilities that mattered to him had been lifted from his shoulders..How ironic it would be if Celestina, the aunt of Seraphim's bastard boy, proved to be the heart mate for whom Junior had been longing through the past few years of unsatisfying relationships and casual sex. This seemed unlikely, considering the jejune quality of her paintings, but perhaps he could help her to grow and to evolve as an artist. He was an open-minded man, without prejudices, so anything could happen after the child was found and killed..He was so innocent. This sweet boy, this pure and stainless infant, couldn't possibly have an enemy in the world, and she could not imagine any son of hers earning enemies, not if she raised him well. This was just a silly card reading..As Tom reached Celestina, she said, "Shots." She said, "Gunshots." She held the receiver in one hand and pulled at her hair with the other, as if with the administration of a little pain, she might wake up from this nightmare. She said, "He's in Oregon."..Shadows still perched throughout most of the room. They no longer reminded her of roosting birds, but of a featherless flock, leathery of wing and red of eye, with a taste for unspeakable feasts..Indeed, as Celestina and the kid reached the foot of the steps to this second house, Bartholomew pointed, and the woman turned to look back. She appeared to stare straight at the Mercedes, though the fog made it impossible for Junior to be sure..When she tried to speak to him, she could no more easily raise her voice than she could extend a hand to him..Junior wanted to shoot all of them, but he said, "Take it. Keep it. Get it the hell out of here."..After poring through enough sensational newspaper accounts to be convinced that the curse-casting reverend was undeniably dead, Junior had acquired four pieces of surprising information. Three were of vital importance to him..Still seeking some missing fact, some insight that would help him understand the maniac's Bartholomew obsession, Tom asked more questions until Celestina suddenly realized and revealed what might be the information that he sought: Cain's perverse insistence on playing the reverend's taped rough draft of "This Momentous Day" throughout his long assault on her sister.."No. But I'm sure as can be, the kid is better off undiscovered by the likes of him."..As one of the two paramedics hurried to the ambulance van and scrambled into the driver's seat, Agnes suffered another contraction so severe that for a tremulous moment, at the peak of the agony, she almost lost consciousness..She said, "Honey, what I'm wondering is ... could you walk where you don't have bad eyes, like you walked where the rain wasn't ... and leave the tumors in that other place? Could you walk where you have good eyes and come back with them?"..He had been walking ever since, two and a half years, with brief respites in Bright Beach..could spring the new deadbolts as easily as the old. Therefore, on the interior of the front and back doors, Junior added sliding bolts, which couldn't be picked from outside..The artist, six feet four and two hundred fifty pounds, looked markedly more dangerous in person than in his scary publicity photo. Still in his twenties, he had white hair that fell limp and straight to his shoulders. Dead-white skin. His deep-set eyes, as silver-gray as rain with an albino-pink undertone, had a predatory glint as chilling as that in the eyes of a panther. Terrible scars slashed his face, and red hash marks covered his big hands, as though he'd frequently defended himself barehanded against men armed with swords..A new quarry, operated by the same company, lay a mile farther north. This was the old one, abandoned after decades of cutting..Too much had happened in those rooms. They were stained dark with family history, and in the night, when either Edom or Jacob slept under that gabled roof, the past came alive again in dreams..Celestina expected to be taken to a waiting room, but instead the nun escorted her to surgical prep..Switching on the windshield wipers, Joey said, "That's the first time I've ever heard you admit that either of your brothers is odd."..The high point of his day was coming home to Perri. They met when they were thirteen, married at twenty-two. In May they would celebrate their twenty-third anniversary..Continuing to avert his eyes from the battered face and the two tone eyelids, Junior found the keys in an exterior pocket of the sports jacket. The credentials were tucked in an interior pocket: a single-fold leather holder containing the shiny badge and a photo ID..Junior had no idea who the driver of the Buick might be, but he hated the tall lanky son of a bitch because he figured the guy was humping Celestina, who would never have humped anyone but Junior if she had met him first, because like her sister, like all women, she would find him irresistible. He felt that he had a prior claim on her because of his relationship to the family; he was the father of her sister's bastard boy, after all, which made him their blood by shared--progeny..The port-wine birthmark appeared to be darker than before and differently mottled than he remembered it..Widening his eyes in calculated surprise, Junior said, "Are you a police officer?"..On a positive note, the apartment was heated by a gas furnace. A leak, a spark, an explosion, and he would never have to see poor Agnes in her misery..From out of the fog and darkness came the slap of running feet on bricks. He was sprinting toward the back of the house..Halfway home, he heard sirens and saw the beacons of approaching emergency vehicles. He pulled the Suburban to the side of the road and watched as two fire trucks passed, followed by an ambulance..At the open kitchen door, arms laden with a stack of four bakery boxes, her mother said, "Will you get those last four pies for me there on the table? And don't jostle them, dear."..Fortunately, just as he was about to declare his gut feelings to his superior and risk dismissal, he saw his potential patient. At fifteen, Seraphim was breathtakingly beautiful, in her own way as striking as Naomi, and instinct told Junior that the chance of being physically or morally polluted by her was negligible..In the living room, he removed a decorative pillow from the sofa. He carried it into the foyer..More likely than not, Victoria spoke directly to the maniac detective. Even if she reported her sordid fabrications to another officer, it would have gotten back to Vanadium, and the cop would have sought her out at once to hear her filth firsthand, whereupon she would have enhanced her story until it sounded as though Junior had grabbed her knockers and had tried to shove his tongue down her throat.."Search me. But I didn't tell him different. The less he knows, the better. I can't figure his motivation, but if you were tracking this guy by his spoor, you'd want to look for the imprint of cloven hooves."..In a stolen black Dodge Charger 440 Magnum, Junior Cain shot out of Spruce Hills on as straight a trajectory to Eugene as the winding roads of southern Oregon would allow, staying

off Interstate 5, where the policing was more aggressive...Junior's agony might have made him howl like a cankered dog or might even have dropped him to his knees if he hadn't used the pain to fuel his anger. His knobby countenance was so sensitive that the light breeze flailed his skin as cruelly as if it had been a barbed lash. Empowered by rage even more beautiful than his countenance was monstrous, he crossed the parking lot, looking through car windows in the hope of seeing keys dangling from an ignition...She lived with her parents then. They had converted the dining room to a bedroom for her...Nevertheless, when the points of soreness in his brow and cheeks gradually grew worse, he stopped at a service station near Courtland, bought a bottle of Pepsi from a vending machine, and washed down yet another capsule of antihistamines. He also took another antiemetic, four aspirin, and-although he felt no trembling in his bowels-one more dose of paregoric...Sweaty, chilled, trembling, weak-kneed, watery-eyed with self-pity, Junior spread a plastic garbage bag on the driver's seat. He got in the Suburban, twisted the key in the ignition, and groaned as the engine vibrations threatened to undo him...His previous plan to create a tableau-butler on the floor, open oven door-to portray Victoria's death as an accident was no longer adequate. A new strategy was required...All three of these sorry excuses for human beings were money mad. Rudy owned six successful used-car dealerships and--his pride--a Ford franchise selling new and used vehicles, in five Oregon communities, but he liked to live large; he also visited Vegas four times a year, pouring money away as casually as he might empty his bladder. Sheena enjoyed Vegas, too, and was a fiend for shopping. Kaitlin liked men, pretty ones, but since she might be mistaken for her father in a dimly lighted room, her hunks came at a price...Returning his attention to his own shoes, Jacob said, "So ... what am I supposed to do about this?".The rich aromas on the air would have thwarted the will of the most devout monks on a fast of penitence...Angel found this hysterical, and Agnes said long-sufferingly, "Thank you for the language lesson, Master Lampion..."Junior didn't want an apology. The offer of a free lunch-or an entire week of lunches-didn't charm a smile from him. He had no interest in taking home a free apple pie...Elsewhere in the cemetery, about 150 yards away, another interment service-with a much larger group of mourners-had begun prior to this one for Naomi. Now it was over, and the people were dispersing to their cars...His happy expectation thickened into dread when he spotted the ambulance at the curb. And in the driveway stood the Buick that belonged to Joshua Nunn, their family doctor...Inevitably, man of the arts that he was, his slouching brought him to several galleries. In the window of the fourth, not one of his favorite establishments, he saw an eight-by-ten photograph of Seraphim White...Her life was so blessed that she could have dealt with a horde of locusts, let alone a few mosquitoes..."I could have been killed," Junior Cain repeated, suddenly so horrorstruck by this realization that an iciness welled in his gut, and for a while he wasn't able to feel his extremities...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..."The white padded eye patches rebuffed her, and she realized how profoundly the boy's double enucleation would affect how easily she could read his moods and know his mind. Here was a littler loss until now shadowed by the greater destruction. Denied the evidence of his eyes, she would need to be better at noting and interpreting nuances of his body language-also changed by blindness-and his voice, for there would be no soul revealed by hand-painted, plastic implants...Tom plucked the quarter off the glass, folded it into his right fist, and then at once opened his hand, which was now empty...Late Thursday, following a nine-hour session with Hisscus, Nork, and Knacker, Magusson--negotiating in conjunction with the Hackachak counsel-had indeed reached acceptable terms. Kaitlin Hackachak would receive \$250,000 for the loss of her sister. Sheena and Rudy would receive \$900,000 to compensate them for their severe emotional pain and suffering; this allowed them to undergo a lot of therapy in Las Vegas. Junior would receive \$4,250,000. Magusson's fee was twenty percent prior to trial-forty percent if a settlement had been reached after the start of court proceedings-which left Junior with \$3,400,000. All payments to plaintiffs were net of taxes...Serving a formal dinner was Agnes's way of declaring-to herself more than to anyone else in attendance-that the time had come for her to get on with life for Bartholomew's sake, but also for her own...In a sudden desperate burst of action, Junior tore at the dead man's closed hand, sprang open the trap of fingers and palm-and did not find a quarter. Nor two dimes and a nickel. Nor five nickels. Nothing. Zip. Zero...nonetheless. The rapist's curse. Healthy, but healthy at the expense of Phimie...Celestina sensed an easy camaraderie between these two men, but also tension that was perhaps related to the reference to an illegal search...people that he was innocent and, in fact, constitutionally incapable of premeditated murder...If the wife killer had cut himself accidentally, his writing on the wall indicated a hair-trigger temper and a deep reservoir of long-nurtured anger...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...No doubt thinking about the land of the big bugs, into which she had pushed Enoch Cain, which was exactly what Barty had suddenly thought about, Angel said, "Honey, this is amazing, it's wonderful, but you've got to be careful..."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...Sapphires and emeralds, dazzling gems set in clearest white, ebony pupils at the center. Beautiful mysteries, these eyes, but no different now than they had ever been, as far as she could tell..."There must be something important I'm supposed to do here that I don't need to do everywhere I am, something I'll do better if I'm blind..."Great guy. Do you have an address for her, a way maybe I could get in touch about her brother?".AFTER UNDERGOING TESTS for brain tumors or lesions, to ascertain whether his seizure of violent emesis might, in fact, have a physical cause, Junior was returned to his hospital room shortly before noon...Junior descended the escalator two steps at a time, not content to let it carry him along at its own pace. When he reached the second floor, however, he found that Vanadium's ghost had done what ghosts do best: faded away. Abandoning his search for the perfect tie chain but determined to remain calm, Junior decided to have lunch at the St. Francis Hotel...When Junior checked his Rolex, he realized that he didn't know how long he'd been sitting here since Ichabod had driven off in the Buick. Maybe one minute, maybe ten...Shortly after nine-thirty in the morning, they landed in Eugene, and the cab driver who conveyed Junior to the town's largest shopping center spent more time staring at his afflicted passenger in the rearview mirror than he did watching the road. Junior got out of the taxi and paid through the driver's open window. The cabbie didn't even wait for his fiery-faced fare to turn completely away before he crossed himself...LATE TUESDAY AFTERNOON in Bright Beach, as a darker blue and iridescent tide rolled across the sky, seagulls rowed

toward their safe harbors, and on the land below, shadows that had been upright at work all day now stretched out, recumbent, preparing for the night..He found nothing especially gratifying, switched off the lights, and moved on to the living room. If Cain was coming home, he could glance up from the street and see lights ablaze here, so Vanadium resorted to a small flashlight, always carefully hooding the lens with one hand.."What are you strongest in?".Ferocious pirates, ruthless secret agents, brain-eating aliens from distant galaxies, super criminals hell-bent on ruling the world, bloodthirsty vampires, face-gnawing werewolves, savage Gestapo thugs, mad scientists, satanic cultists, insane carnival freaks, hate-crazed Ku Klux Klansmen, knife-worshiping thrill killers, and emotionless robot soldiers from other planets had slashed, stabbed, burned, shot, gouged, torn, clubbed, crushed, stomped, hanged, bitten, eviscerated, beheaded, poisoned, drowned, radiated, blown up, mangled, mutilated, and tortured uncounted victims in the pulp magazines that Paul had been reading since childhood. Yet not one scene in those hundreds upon hundreds of issues of colorful tales withered a corner of his soul as did a glimpse of Barty's empty sockets. The sight wasn't in the least gory, nor even gruesome. Paul cringed and looked away only because this evidence of the boy's loss too pointedly made him think about the terrible vulnerability of the innocent in the freight-train path of nature, and threatened to tear off the fragile scab on the anguish that he still felt over Perri's death..Of course, Angel might have been playing around with the talking book. Or, even though she'd left the dolls downstairs, she might have been filling the time until Barty's return by having a nice chat with Miss Pixie and Miss Velveta. She had other voices, too, for other dolls, and one for a sock puppet named Smelly..Aware that his tension was building intolerably, Junior decided that he needed Scamp more than he dreaded her. He spent the remainder of Wednesday, until dawn Thursday, with the indefatigable redhead, whose bedroom contained a vast collection of scented massage oils in sufficient volume to fragrantly lubricate half the rolling stock of every railroad company doing business west of the Mississippi..To celebrate, upon leaving the gallery, he went to the coffee shop in the Fairmont Hotel, atop Nob Hill, determined to have a beer and a cheeseburger..He swallowed one capsule and washed it down with water. He returned the pharmacy bottle to the nightstand..Max hung up. The Ansaphone made a series of small robot-mouse noises and then fell silent..pride, his one great shining moment but also his sinful pride. Clubbed with the trophy first, fists later. And now, here,..With the great tree ninety degrees to his left, he was able to locate the back-porch steps at forty-five degrees. He pointed with the cane, which otherwise he had not used. "The porch?".Magically, a shiny quarter appeared in Thomas Vanadium's right hand. It turned end over end, knuckle to knuckle, disappeared between thumb and forefinger, and reappeared at the little finger, beginning its cross-hand journey once more.."Thank you, Nurse Bressler," he said most solemnly, matching her tone, barely able to control the urge to glance at her, smile, and give her another preview of his quick, pink tongue..Those who had just met her and those who were overly charmed by eccentricity called her Seraphim, her name complete. Her teachers, neighbors, and casual acquaintances called her Sera. Those who knew her best and loved her the most deeply--like her sister, Celestina called her Phimie..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..Her awful sense of weightlessness became something much better: buoyancy, an exhilarating lightness of spirit. Fear remained with her-fear for Barty, fear of the future and of the strange complexity of Creation that she'd just glimpsed-but wonder and wild hope now tempered it..In each savings account, he deposited five hundred dollars in cash. He tucked twenty thousand in crisp new bills into each safe-deposit box..Sweet-tempered, generous, honest, kind Naomi had surely been incapable of murdering anyone-least of all the man she loved..Instinctively, he knew he should not give massages to Negroes. He sensed that somehow he would be physically or morally polluted by this contact.

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