

ASCENSIONI UMANE

And somewhere Selma Galloway, their neighbor, was not a spinster but a married woman with grandchildren. Unbuttoning her blouse, Celestina said, "Traditionally, puppies don't have a role in weddings." "And in a lot of somewheres," said Barty, "things are worse for us than here. Some somewheres, you died, too, when I was born, so I never met you, either." As Tom Vanadium studied the stained and ravaged wall again, a cold and quivery uneasiness settled insectivally onto his scalp and down the back of his neck, quickly bored into his blood, and nested in his bones. He had the terrible feeling that he was not dealing with a known quantity anymore, not with the twisted man he'd thought he understood, but with a new and even more monstrous Enoch Cain. Carrying the tote bag full of Angel's dolls and coloring books, Wally crossed the sidewalk ahead of Celestina and climbed the front steps. To have the best chance of becoming a master mechanic, any young apprentice needs a mentor. The art of total card control cannot be learned entirely from books and experimentation. Her voice as bright as her bed ensemble, spiritual sister to baby chicks everywhere, yellow Angel raised her head from the pillow and said, "Will you have a wedding?" Barty, didn't watch much television. He'd been up late enough to see Red Skelton only a few times, but that comedian always drew gales of laughter from him. The hilly streets of the city, ignoring all traffic lights and stop signs, pegging the speedometer needle at its highest mark, as though he might eventually be air-cooled by sufficient speed. He wanted to slam through unwary pedestrians, crack their bones, and send them tumbling. Her fear, Agnes suddenly realized, arose from her father's often expressed conviction that an attempt to excel at anything was a sin that would one day be grievously punished. All forms of amusement were sinful, by his way of thinking, and all those who sought even the simplest entertainment were lost souls; however, those who desired to amuse others were the worse sinners, because they were overflowing with pride, striving to shine, eager to make themselves into false gods, to be praised and adored as only God should be adored. Actors, musicians, singers, novelists were doomed to hell by the very acts of creation which, in their egomania, they saw as the equal of their Creator's work. Striving to excel at anything, in fact, was a sign of corruption in the soul, whether one wanted to be recognized as a superior carpenter or car mechanic, or a grower of prize roses. Talent, in her father's view, was not a gift from God, but from the devil, meant to distract us from prayer, penitence, and duty. "I'd give anything if it hadn't happened," he said earnestly. And now a tortured note wrung wet emotion from his voice "I only wish it had been me who died." Weatherworkers used to carry a leather sack in which they said they kept the winds, untying it to let a fair wind loose or to capture a contrary one. Maybe it was only for show, but every weatherworker had a bag, a great long sack or a little pouch. In the kitchen, he sat her in a chair and let her slump forward over the breakfast table. With her arms folded, with her head on her arms and turned to one side, she appeared to be resting. The dear man cried and kissed her scars and told her that she was as beautiful as any woman alive. They stood then for a while, embracing, his hands upon her back, her breasts against his chest, and twice they kissed, but almost chastely, before she put on her blouse again. "Some places, it has to be like that." some places it has to be that your eyes are okay? Wonderful. Oh, perfect. So Neddy, a friend of Celestina's, knew that Junior, reputed to be a vicious sadist, had attended this reception under a false name. If Junior really was a sleazy pervert of such rococo tastes that he would be shunned even by the scum of the world, even by the deranged mutant offspring of a self-breeding hermaphrodite, then surely he was capable of murder, too. Sobbing desperately, he dropped the telephone handset on the secretary, seized the dishtowel. He wrapped the cloth tightly around the shattered stump, applying pressure to diminish the bleeding. Having been so wounded by one death, Celestina could not imagine how Lipscomb could have survived the loss of his entire family. Pity knotted her heart and cinched her throat so that she spoke in little more than a whisper: "Was that the American Airlines. . ." "Three hundred and ninety-six of the dead were children under the age of ten," Jacob continued. "A passenger train was tumbled off the tracks, killing twenty. Another train with tank cars got smashed around, and oil spilled across the flood waters, ignited, and all these people clinging to floating debris were surrounded by flames, no way to escape. Their choice was being burned alive or drowning." 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. After a minute, he slipped his hand into his pocket. The quarter was still there. Tossing the knave onto the table, Agnes said, "Barty doesn't seem too impressed with this devil." When Paul practiced the quarter trick, he usually did so on the sofa or in an armchair, and always in a room with carpeting, because when dropped on a hard surface, the coin rolled and required too much chasing. They would have given him an antinausea medication. It most likely wasn't going to work quickly enough to save him. Celestina checked her wristwatch and saw that she was running late. With Angel's short legs and layers of red, there was no point in trying to hurry. Then the hero got in the sedan with his friends, and they drove away into the sun-splashed morning. 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..More walls than not, in both rooms, were lined with bookshelves and file cabinets. Here he kept numerous case studies of accidents, man-made disasters, serial killers, spree killers: proof undeniable that humanity was a fallen species engaged in both the unintentional and calculated destruction of itself..The weather was good, so he went for a walk, though he crossed the street repeatedly to avoid passing newspaper-vending machines..He stood watching until the car cruised out of sight, and even after it dwindled to a speck and vanished in the distance, he stared at the point in the street where it had last been, stared while a breeze turned playful, tossing eucalyptus leaves around his feet, stared until at last he turned and began the long walk home...A nurse in surgical greens appeared. "Pull up the sleeves of your scrub nearly to your elbows. Scrub hard. I'll tell you when to stop..". "Just now." Although Angel tried to sound nonchalant, she was trembling. "I'm not sure I can do it again..". "I want you to adopt the baby." Before they could react, she hurried on: "I won't be twenty-one for four months yet, and even then they might give me trouble about adopting, even though I'm her aunt, because I'm single. But if you adopt her, I'll raise her. I promise I will. I'll take full responsibility. You don't have to worry that I'll regret it or that I'll ever want to drop her in your laps and escape the responsibility. She'll have to be the center of my life from here on. I understand that. I accept it. I embrace it..". Thus armored, he at last arrived in the city of Sacramento, an hour before dawn. Sacramento, which means "sacrament" in Italian and in Spanish, calls itself the Camellia Capital of the World, and holds a ten-day camellia festival in early March-already advertised on billboards now in mid-January. The camellia, shrub and flower, is named for G. J. Camellus, a Jesuit missionary who brought it from Asia to Europe in the eighteenth century.. "Not really. I love you, Mommy." He yawned and dropped into sleep with a quickness that always amazed her. And then everything changed in one stunning moment. Changed profoundly and forever.. "Do you know him? " Edom asked, gazing longingly now at the open door, from which Jacob had turned away. "Obadiah Sepharad? ". The house was empty, silent. Hanna worked only days. Nellie Oatis, Perri's companion, was not employed here anymore.. "I can't sleep half the time," Deed said, twisting the baseball cap in his hands. "I've lost weight, and I'm so nervous, jumpy..". On the nightstand stood a stainless-steel carafe beaded with condensation. Maria took the cap off the water carafe, and with a longhandled spoon, she scooped out a chip of ice. Cupping her left hand.. This guy was spooky. Junior was beginning to think that the detective's unorthodox behavior wasn't a carefully crafted strategy, as it had first seemed, but that Vanadium was a little wacky.. She must have sensed his assessment of her and realized that she had little chance of charming him, for she turned at once away and never looked in his direction again.. He reached the end of the alleyway, stumbled into the stream of pedestrians, nearly knocked over an elderly Chinese man, turned, and discovered ... no Vanadium.. Yet he brooded even at breakfast, in spite of the consolation of clotted cream and berries, raisin scones and cinnamon butter. In better worlds, wiser Tom Vanadiums chose different tactics that resulted in less misery than this, in a far swifter conveyance of Enoch Cain to the halls of justice. But he was none of those Tom Vanadiums. He was only this Tom, flawed "land struggling, and he couldn't take comfort in the fact that elsewhere he had proved to be a better man.. Otter was silent a while. Then he said in a low voice, "Clay, and gravel, and under that the rock that bears garnets. All under this part of the city is that rock. I don't know the names..". Less cautious than the typical accountant, perhaps mellow in this season of peace, Prosser opened the door without hesitation.. Aware of the mortician's new edginess, Jacob was convinced that his initial distrust of Panglo was justified. This twitchy little guy seemed to have something to hide. Jacob didn't have to be a cop to recognize nervousness born of guilt.. He was relieved that he hadn't moved his head or made a sound. He wanted to understand as much of the situation as possible before revealing that he was awake.. SHORTLY BEFORE one o'clock, the Hackachaks descended in a fury, eyes full of bloody intent, teeth bared, voices shrill.. "I'm going to recommend that you be admitted overnight and that we lance these under hospital conditions. We'll use a sterile needle on some of them, but a number are so large they're going to require a surgical knife and possibly the removal of the carbuncle core. This is usually done with a local anesthetic, but in this instance, while I don't think general anesthesia will be required, we'll probably want to sedate you that is, put you in a twilight sleep..". He snatched up the wine list before she could look at it. "If you're paying, then I'm ordering whatever costs the most, regardless of what it tastes like..". For guidance, Agnes couldn't rely entirely on any of the child rearing books in her library. Barty's unique gifts presented her with special parenting problems. Now, when he asked if he could stay up even later, to read about John Thomas Stuart and Lummo, John's pet from another world, she granted him permission.. When he noticed that twilight had come and gone, he realized also that he'd walked through Bright Beach, along Pacific Coast Highway, and south into the neighboring town. Perhaps ten miles.. Snapping the cylinder into place, he rose to his feet. Already he had a new plan, and the cop's revolver was the most important tool that he required to implement it.. To become a physical therapist, Junior had taken more than massage classes, so he knew what hematemeses meant. Hematemesis: vomiting of blood.. At the bed, he spread the garment across his pillow. Lying down, he pressed his face into the sweater. The sweet subtle scent of Naomi was as effective as a lullaby, and soon he dozed off.. Packed full of aftermath, the movie was too violent for Junior's taste. He had wanted to meet at a showing of Doctor Dolittle or The Graduate. But Google, as paranoid as a lab rat after half a lifetime of electroshock experiments, insisted on choosing the theater.. He hurried into the bedroom and switched on the nightstand lamp, without concern for whether the light might be seen from the street.. 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.. He was surprised they had come so soon, less than twenty-four hours after the tragedy. This was

especially unusual, considering that a homicide detective was obsessed with the idea that rotting wood, alone, was not responsible for Naomi's death. Junior realized he was on the verge of babbling, and with an effort, he silenced himself. With her brothers, she adjourned to the waiting room, where the three of them sat drinking vending-machine coffee, black, from paper cups. The driver's door opened, shoving aside a damaged tea table, and a man climbed out of the Pontiac. If he hadn't been such a rational, stable, no-nonsense person all of his life, Junior might have thought he was losing his mind. 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. Junior said nothing. He was still upset with Naomi for hiding the pregnancy from him, but he was delighted that the baby would have been his. Now Vanadium couldn't claim that Naomi's infidelity and the resultant bastard had been the motive for murder. I got Starkweather, killing all those people with no hope of personal gain. You got maniac cops and this new war in Vietnam. They laughed and held hands. For the first time since Phimie's panicked phone call from Oregon, Celestina felt that everything would eventually be all right again. Lipscomb shifted his gaze from the street below to the source of the rain. "Phimie was not gone long, perhaps a minute-a minute and ten seconds at most-and when she was with us again, it was clear from her condition that the cardiac arrest was most likely secondary to a massive cerebral incident. She was disoriented, paralysis on the right side ... with the distortion of the facial muscles that you saw. Her speech was slurred at first, but then something strange happened. . . ." "After the quake," Edom said, "forty thousand people took refuge in a two-hundred-acre open area, a military depot. A quake-related fire swept through so fast they were killed standing up, so tightly packed together they died as a solid mass of bodies." Nicholas Deed was not the knave. He had already brought all the ruin into their lives that he was going to bring. "That's correct," Parkhurst said. "Probably one or more small blood vessels ruptured from the extreme violence of the emesis." She looked around the room. "He's invisible like the Cheshire cat?" "His whole world is as real as ours, but we can't see it, and people in his world can't see us. There're millions and millions of worlds all here in the same place and invisible to one another, where we keep getting chance after chance to live a good life and do the right thing." The little hands, so weak now but someday strong: Would they eventually be capable of savagery, as were the father's hands? Misbegotten offspring. This seed of a demonic man whom Phimie herself had called sick and evil. However innocent-looking now, what pain might she eventually in-- on others? What outrages might she commit in years to come? Although Celestina searched intently, she could not glimpse the father's evil in the child. "And maybe," said Agnes, caught up in the speculation, "when your life comes to an end in all those many branches, what you're finally judged on is the shape and the beauty of the tree." IN NEED OF OIL, the hand crank squeaked, but the tall halves of the casement window parted and opened outward into the alleyway. "Two weeks to go. I'm not going to miss that. I've cleared all appointments off my calendar." Gradually, Agnes realized that this was not a prayer for the soul of a deceased infant but for the survival of one still alive. 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." "Do you know about the earthquake that destroyed seventy percent of Tokyo and all of Yokohama on September 1, 1923?" he asked. For all his brilliance, however, he was still a boy who loved to run and jump and tumble. Who swung from the backyard oak tree in a rope-and-tire swing. Who was thrilled when given a tricycle. Who giggled in delight while watching his uncle Jacob roll a shiny quarter end over-end across his knuckles and perform other simple coin tricks. Regrettably, he had no choice but to conclude that she hadn't made up her mind whether to keep the baby or to seek out an illegal abortion without Junior's approval. She had been thinking about scraping his child out of her womb without even telling him. "All under here's worked out long since" Licky said. And Otter had begun to be aware of the strange country under his feet: empty shafts and rooms of dark air in the dark earth, a vertical labyrinth, the deepest pits filled with unmoving water. "Never was much silver, and the watermetal's long gone. Listen, young'un, do you even know what cinnabar is?" The corroded casement-operating mechanism began to give way, as did the hinges, and the window sagged outward. Tom didn't know what to make of this bit of information, so he said, "That's a lot." Bearing roses upon their arrival, they hadn't bothered with umbrellas. Besides, although the sky glowered, the forecast had predicted no precipitation. Agnes considered describing the sunset to the blinded boy, but her hesitancy settled into reluctance, and by the time the stars came out, she had said not a word about the day's splendid final act. For one thing, she worried that her description would fall far short of the reality, and that with her inadequate words, she might dull Barty's precious memories of sunsets he had seen. Primarily, however, she failed to remark on the spectacle because she was afraid that to do so would be to remind him of all that he had lost. "And you're saying fear can fill his emptiness as well as sex or booze?" Kathleen wondered. Earthquake weather. Southern Californians had many definitions of that term, but Edom knew he was right this time. Thunder would roll again soon, but it would arise from underfoot. "Sure. That's how it works with everything. Everything that can happen does happen, and each different way of happening makes a whole new place." excited, shrieking. Branch to branch, the flapping of wings is leathery, demonic. The only other sounds are the thud. "This meeting of the North Pole Society of Not Evil Adventurers is officially closed." "Retinoblastoma is usually unilateral," Dr. Chan continued, "occurring in one eye. Bartholomew has tumors in both." Here, now, came the anaconda smile. "Did you argue about the baby, Enoch? Maybe she wanted it, and you didn't. Guy like you--a baby would cramp your style. Too much responsibility." There was an otter in our brook. "Or at least, if the police knew the truth at that time, they hadn't yet gone public with it. I had no reason to mention it to you back then. I didn't even know Vanadium was missing." "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?" Something was due to happen in this peculiar, extended, almost casual

haunting under which he had suffered for more than two years, since finding the quarter in his cheeseburger. While all around him in the streets, people bustled in good cheer, Junior slouched along in a sour mood, temporarily having forgotten to look for the bright side..Edom had turned away from the box of groceries that he was packing. Frowning at the pies, he said, "You don't think. . .Footsteps in the hall drew their attention to the open door, where the surgeon appeared in his loose cotton greens..Agnes called their two-car parade a Christmas caravan, which appealed to Barty's sense of magic and adventure. Repeatedly he turned in his seat and rose to his knees to look back at his uncle Edom, waving vigorously.."You haven't had previous episodes like this?" Parkhurst asked, standing at the bedside with a file folder in his hands, half-lens reading glasses pulled down to the tip of his nose..Jacob cooked corn bread, cheese-and-parsley omelettes, and crisp home fries with a dash of onion salt..Cold, wind-driven rain slashed through the missing windows, and voices rose in the street as people ran toward the Pontiac-thunder in the distance-and on the air was the ozone scent of the storm and the more subtle and more terrible odor of blood, but none of these hard details could make the moment seem real to Agnes, who, in her deepest nightmares, had never felt more like a dreamer than she felt now..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..He was glad that he'd taken the double dose of antiemetics. In spite of this provocation, his stomach felt as solid and secure as a bank vault..Although the Rolex was expensive, Junior cared nothing about the monetary loss. He could afford to buy an armful of Rolexes, and wear them from wrist to shoulder..Her voice was flat and a little hard. Another man might have mistaken her tone for disapproval, for impatience, even for quiet anger..She removed a temporary cap from the second bicuspid on the lower left side and replaced it with the porcelain cap that had been delivered by the lab that morning..Not once did he look back to see if the fire had grown visible as a glow against the night sky. The events at Victoria's were part of the past. He was finished with all that. Junior was a forward-thinking, future-oriented man..Junior attended a New Year's Eve party with a nuclear-holocaust theme. Festivities were held in a mansion usually hung with cutting-edge art, but all the paintings had been replaced with poster-size blowups of photos of ruined Nagasaki and Hiroshima..With a portion of his profits from Tammy Bean's stock picks, Junior had bought a second painting by Sklent. Titled *In the Baby's Brain Lies the Parasite of Doom, Version 6*, it was so exquisitely repellent that the artist's genius could not be in doubt..In a red coat with a red hood, Bartholomew appeared first in the arms of the tall lanky man, the Ichabod Crane look-alike, who also had a large tote bag hanging from his shoulder..He'd wanted to give Celestina more help than she would accept. She continued working nights as a waitress for two years, while she completed classes at the Academy of Art College, and she quit her job only when she began to sell her paintings for enough to equal her wages and gratuities..He didn't want to risk marrying weapon and silencer here in the hall, where he might be seen. Besides, complications could arise from being splattered with Neddy's blood. Aftermath was disgusting, but it was also highly incriminating. For the same reason, he was loath to use a knife..Weird, this kid. Making him uneasy. All in white, with her incomprehensible yammering about talking books and talking dogs and her mother driving pies, and working on a damn strange drawing for a little girl..On January 3, 1968, Paul was fewer than 250 miles from Spruce Hills, Oregon. He wasn't aware of that town's proximity, however, and he didn't, at the time, have it as his destination..Perhaps the paramedic had given him an injection, a sedative. the howling ambulance rocked along on this most momentous day, Junior Cain wept profoundly but quietly--and achieved temporary peace in a dreamless sleep..Junior considered slipping quietly around the house, peering in windows, to be sure she was alone, before approaching directly. If she saw him, however, his wonderful surprise would be spoiled..Because his lacrimal glands and tear ducts were intact, Barty could cry with his plastic eyes. Consequently, it didn't seem all that much more incredible to be seeing with them..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..Four blocks from his office, on a street more upscale than his own, Nolly came to the Tollman Building. Built in the 1930s, it had an Art Deco flair. The public areas featured travertine floors, and a WPA-ers mural extolling the machine age brightened a lobby wall..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..He rolled his head back and forth on the pillow. "Nope. It's still just something you gotta feel."..She proceeded down the shadowy center aisle, genuflected at the chancel railing, and went to the votive rack..Nolly sighed. "Well, I guess if you were going to just plug him, you could've done that already, soon as you got to town.".."Evidence suggests Vanadium killed a woman here, a nurse at the hospital. Lover's quarrel, perhaps. He set her house on fire with her body in it, to cover his tracks, but he must have realized they would still finger him, so he lit out.".."Money's no object. I can afford whatever you'd like to charge. And I'd be a diligent student."..Rudy Hackachak--Big Rude to his friends--was six feet four, as rough-hewn as a log sculpture carved with a woodsman's ax. In a green polyester suit with sleeves an inch too short, an unfortunate urine yellow shirt, and a tie that might have been the national flag of a third world country famous for nothing but a lack of design sense, he looked like Dr. Frankenstein's beast gussied up for an evening of barhopping in Transylvania..Although Junior continued to feel threatened, continued to trust his instinct in this matter, he didn't devote his every waking hour to the hunt. He had a life to enjoy, after all. Self-improvements to undertake, galleries to explore, women to pursue..After carefully wiping her fingers on a paper napkin, Maria examined the garments with interest. She carried her living as the seamstress at Bright Beach Dry Cleaners. At the sight of each rent, popped button, and split seam she clucked her tongue..Instead,

he imagined Vanadium's blunt fingers moving over the intravenous apparatus with surprising delicacy, reading the function of the equipment as a blind man would read Braille with swift, sure, gliding fingertips. He imagined the detective finding the injection port in the main drip line, pinching it between thumb and forefinger. Saw him produce a hypodermic needle as a magician would pluck a silk scarf from the ether. Nothing in the syringe except deadly air. The needle sliding into the port"Here we are," said the driver, braking to a stop at the curb in front of the gallery..On Joey's side, there was no family to provide help. His mother had died of leukemia when he was four. His dad, fond of beer and brawling--like father not like son--was killed in a bar fight five years later. Without close relatives willing to take him in, Joey went to an orphanage. At nine he wasn't prime adoption material--babies were what was wanted--and he'd been raised in the institution..To Nolly, Kathleen said, "This is why I married you. To be around talk like this."..Although Zedd counsels living in the future, he recognizes the need to have full recollection of the past when absolutely needed. One of his favorite techniques for jolting memories loose when the subconsciously..Standard decks of playing cards are machine packed, always in the same order, according to suits. You can absolutely count on the fact that each deck you open will be assembled in precisely the same order as every other deck you have ever opened or ever will open..AT THE END OF THE fourth book of Earthsea, Tehanu, the story had arrived at what I felt to be now. And, just as in the now of the so-called real world, I didn't know what would happen next. I could guess, foretell, fear, hope, but I didn't know..The paper towels were spotted with butter. He crumpled them and threw them in the trash..If he had known that he would break his solemn vow twice before the month was ended--and that neither victim, unfortunately, would be a Hackachak--he might not have fallen asleep so easily. And he might not have dreamed of cleverly stealing hundreds of quarters out of Thomas Vanadium's pockets while the baffled detective searched for them in vain..Junior felt a little lightheaded. He felt strange. He hoped he wasn't coming down with the flu..In the late-afternoon light, on this Christmas Eve, Barty was no ghost, no illusion.

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