

A TROUBLESOME NAME

He was no longer in his scrubs, but wore gray wool slacks and a blue cashmere sweater over a white shirt. Face somber, he looked less like an obstetrician engaged in the business of life than like a professor of philosophy forever pondering the inevitability of death. He would have liked to take Industrial Woman, as well, but she weighed a quarter ton. He couldn't manage her alone, and he dared not hire a day worker, not even an illegal alien, to assist him, and thereby compromise the Pinchbeck van and identity. To prove himself, he read a little of Dickens when she requested it, a passage from *Great Expectations*. Then a passage from Twain. Twilight, nearly gone and purple in the west, inspired a bright violet line along the crest of an incoming bank of bay fog, as though the mist were shot through with a luminous vein of neon, transforming the entire sparkling city into a stylish cabaret just now opening for business. The night, soft as a woman come to dance, carried a steely blade of cold in its black-silk skirts. This seemed to be a statement of great mystery and beauty, and Agnes was still contemplating it when the last of the ice melted on her tongue. Instead of more ice, sleep was spooned into her, as dark and rich as baker's chocolate. He said, "There's a whiteness in Barty's right pupil ... which I think indicates a growth. The distortions in his vision are still there, though somewhat different, when he closes his right eye, so that indicates a problem in the left, as well, even though I'm not able to see anything there. Dr. Chan has a full schedule tomorrow, but as a favor to me, he's going to see you before his usual office hours, first thing in the morning. You'll have to start out early." The air was cool but not yet cold. A faint breeze smelled of the sea beyond the hill. 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. Now he had to focus on being ready for the evening of January 12: the reception for Celestina White's art show. She had adopted her sister's baby. Little Bartholomew was in her care; and soon, the kid would be within Junior's reach. The bright side was easy to see. If Vanadium's reputation among other cops and among prosecutors was that of a paranoid, a pathetic a after phantom perpetrators, his unsupported belief that Naomi. Celestina said, "Phimie wasn't a mind reader. That's science fiction, Dr. Lipscomb." "I think we could wind up as crazy as he is, if we tried long enough to puzzle out his twisted logic." 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. Rescuers encouraged her to move safely away from the passenger's door, as far as possible, to avoid being inadvertently injured as they tried to break in to her. She could go nowhere but to her dead husband. As if he sensed her reluctance to return to Dr. Chan, Barty had kept her occupied with talk of the red planet as they approached the office building, had talked her off the street, along the driveway, and into a parking space, where finally she relinquished the fantasy of an endless road trip. At 5:45, long past the end of office hours, Dr. Chan's suite was quiet. Angel cocked her head and studied his left hand, which he had closed while opening his right. She pointed. "It's there." He hesitated, because until the limited explanations he'd made to Celestina in San Francisco, he had never discussed his special perception with anyone except two priest counselors in the seminary. At first he felt uneasy, talking of these matters to strangers-as if he were making a confession to laity who held no authority to provide absolution but as he spoke to this hushed and intense gathering, his doubts fell away, and revelation seemed as natural as talk of the weather. After the paralytic bladder seizures had passed and Junior had drained Lake Mead, Chicane recommended plenty of caffeine and sugar to guard against an unlikely but not impossible spontaneous return to a trance state. "Anyway, after pumping alpha waves for as long as you just did, you shouldn't actually need to sleep anytime soon." Dining room. Two place settings at one end of the table. Wineglasses. Two ornate pewter candlesticks, candies not yet lit. hearts represented either a rival in love or a lover who would betray an enemy who would deeply wound the heart. The knave of diamonds was someone who would cause financial grief. The knave of clubs was someone who would wound with words: one who libeled or slandered, or who assaulted you with mean-spirited and unjust criticism. Junior Cain was committed to continuous self-improvement. He believed in the need constantly to expand his knowledge and horizons order to better understand himself and the world. The quality of life was solely the responsibility of oneself he author of *How to Have a Healthier Life through Autohypnosis* was Dr. Caesar Zedd, a renowned psychologist and best-selling author of a dozen self-help texts, all of which Junior owned in addition to the literature that he had acquired from the book club. When he had been only fourteen, he'd begun buying Dr. Zedd's titles in paperback, and by the time he was eighteen, when he could afford to do so, he'd replaced the paperbacks with hardcovers and thereafter bought all the doctor's new books in the higher-priced editions. The collected works. Only a small group of mourners gathered for this service. Junior and Naomi had been so intensely involved with each other that, unlike many young married couples, they had made few friends. 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. Even Rudy, as huge as Big Foot and as amoral as a skink, was afraid of this woman. "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. The sound made by the dropping corpse indicated that cushioning trash lined the bottom of the bin, and also that it was no more than half full. This improved chances that Neddy wouldn't be discovered until a dump truck tumbled him into a landfill-and even then perhaps no eyes would alight upon him again except those of hungry rats. At eleven o'clock Saturday morning, having just settled in the hotel after arriving from St. Mary's, they were

waiting for the SFPD to deliver suitcases of clothes and toiletries that Rena Moller, Celestina's neighbor, had packed according to her instructions. While waiting, the three of them took an early lunch-or a late breakfast-at a room service table in the living room..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..Her shaking threatened her composure. She was Barty's mother and father, his only rock, and she must always be strong for him. She clenched her teeth and tensed her body and gradually quieted the tremors by an act of will..Requests for permission to make copies of any part of the work should be mailed to the following address:..Flush with the promise of their engagement, still excited by the success at the gallery, with Angel exuberant in spite of the hour and Oreo energized, he was amazed that they had made the transfer of the little red whirlwind from house to Buick to house with nothing else forgotten other than one purse. Celie called it ballet, but Wally thought that it was merely momentary order in chaos, the challenging-joyous-frustrating-delightful-exhilarating chaos of a life full of hope and love and children, which he wouldn't have traded for calm or kingdoms..He didn't even dare to pretend to wake up now, with a mutter and a yawn because the detective would know that he was faking, that he had been awake all along. And if he'd been feigning unconsciousness, eaves..She got up from the chair, went to the window, and raised the venetian blind rather than look out between its slats..Suddenly so many of Zedd's greatest maxims seemed to conflict with one another, when previously they had together formed a reliable philosophy and guide to success..Reflecting upon her son's clever, diligent, and uncomplaining adaptation to darkness, she wished that she had described to him the dazzling sunset under which they had made their journey home. Although her words might have been inadequate to the spectacle, he would have elaborated on them to create a picture in his mind; with his creative skills, the world that he'd lost with his sight might be remade in equal splendor in his imagination.. "Fifteen fifty-six?" Bill frowned. "Hell, the Chinese probably didn't even have mud back then."..Among Junior's many gifts, his ability to focus might have been the most important. Bob Chicane, his former instructor in matters meditative, had called him intense and even obsessive, following the painful incident involving meditation without seed, but intensity and obsession were false charges. Junior was simply focused..Even someone of saintly habits and selfless behavior might be a monster in his heart, filled with unspeakable desires, which he might act upon only once or never..They were dining by candlelight. Vanilla-scented bougies stood on the sideboard, across the room, glimmering in glass chimneys, but Barty pointed instead to five squat red candles distributed through the centerpiece of pine sprays and white carnations..What might have become a waiting game of epic duration was ended when the door to the room swung inward, and a doctor in a white lab coat entered from the corridor. He was backlit by fluorescent glare, his face in shadow, like a figure in a dream..With his ringleted yellow hair, coiled mustache, and haughty right file, this was a jack that looked as if he might be a knave in the worst sense of the word..When he heard the snick of the lock being disengaged, he rammed into the men's room..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.. "That's the Oreo. After I ate it up, the cookie went smooosh--smooosh into my finger."..Junior stalked her, but she eluded him. Always, the song seemed to arise from the next room, but when he passed through the doorway into that space, the voice then sounded as if it came from the room that he'd just left..Although her hands were shaking and her knees felt as though they might buckle, Agnes lifted two pies off the table..Tom was an Oregon State Police detective, as far as Celestina knew, and she didn't understand what he was doing here..If he had been any other three-year-old, she would have told a compassionate lie. He was her miracle child, however, her prodigy, and he would know a lie for what it was.. "Yes," she admitted, her face still close to his, "I'm afraid. But Dr. Chan is a fine surgeon, and this is a very fine hospital."..He prepared his knives and guns. Blades and bullets. Fortune favors the bold, the self-improved, the self-evolved, the focused..Even in this soft light, Nolly could see that she was blushing like a young girl. She glanced around at the nearby tables.. "A friend's daughter. They say she died in a traffic accident down in San Francisco. She was even younger than Naomi."..Because he kept imagining the stealthy sounds of a dead cop rising in vengeance behind him, Junior switched on the radio. He tuned in a station featuring a Top 40 countdown.. "Who hired him to hex the ship, fool?"..On the other hand, one needed to believe in something. Junior didn't clutter his mind with superstitious nonsense or allow himself to be constrained by the views of bourgeois society or by its smug concepts of right and wrong, good and evil. From Zedd, he'd learned that he was the sole master of his universe. Self-realization through self-esteem was his doctrine; total freedom and guiltless pleasure were the rewards of faithful adherence to his principles. What he believed in-the only thing he believed in-was Junior Cain, and in this he was a fiercely passionate believer, devout unto himself. Consequently, as Caesar Zedd explained, when any man was clearheaded enough to cast off all the false.. "We've mapped three routes to the top," Angel said, "and each offers different challenges. Barty's eventually going to climb all of them, but he's starting with the hardest."..During the day and then following a dinner break, the Hackachaks persisted. The hospital had never witnessed such a spectacle. Shifts changed, and new nurses came to attend to Junior in greater numbers than necessary, using any excuse to get a glimpse of the freak show..He and the homicide detective had been friends for almost thirty years, since Max had been a uniformed rookie on the SFPD and Vanadium had been a young priest freshly assigned to St. Anselmo's Orphanage here in the city. Before choosing police work, Max had contemplated the priesthood, and perhaps back then he had sensed the cop-to-be in Tom Vanadium..The house was hers, free and clear of mortgages. There were two savings accounts to which Joey had diligently made deposits weekly through nine years of marriage..Halted by the unmistakable meaning of the expressions on these women's faces,

Paul was grateful that Nellie was briefly stricken mute. He didn't believe he had the strength to receive the news that she had tried to deliver..Ordinarily, a child of three would be too young to learn the use of a blind man's cane, but Barty wasn't ordinary. Initially, no cane was available for such a small child, so Barty began with a yardstick sawn off to twenty-six inches. By his last day, they had for him a custom cane, white with a black tip; the sight of it and all that it implied brought tears to Agnes just when she thought her heart had toughened for the task ahead..PZ7.L52I5 Tal 2001 [Fic]-dc21 2001016554."I love you, Daddy," she said, and put the palms of her hands flat against his temples.. "I sure think so. I think she's everything. I tell her she's the moon and stars. I'm probably spoiling her rotten."..The stump was capped at the end of the internal cuneiform, depriving Junior of everything from the metatarsal to the tip of the toe. He was delighted with this result, because successful reattachment would have been a calamity..He was, admittedly, surprised that Nurse Bressler was strongly compelled to come on to him even though she had read his patient file and knew that he'd recently been a veritable geyser of noxious spew, that during the violent seizure in the ambulance, he had also lost control of bladder and bowels, and that he might at any moment suffer an explosive relapse. This was a remarkable testament to the animal lust he inspired even without trying, to the powerful male magnetism that was as much a part of him as his thick blond hair.. "We have dams, though," said Jacob, gesturing with his fork. "The Johnstown Flood, 1889. Pennsylvania, sure, but it could happen here. And that was a one, let me tell you. The South Fork Dam broke. Wall of water seventy feet high totally destroyed the city. Your tornado killed almost seven hundred, but my dam killed two thousand two hundred and nine. Ninety-nine entire families were swept from the earth. Ninety-eight children lost both parents."..He thought he heard the tick-scrape-rattle-clink of Industrial Woman on the prow. In the living room. Now the hall. Approaching..The diarrhea was over, finished, part of the past. Long ago he had learned never to dwell on the past, never to be overly concerned about the worries of the present, but to be focused entirely on the future. He was a man of the future..This was not a ghost. This was not a walking dead man. This was something else, but until he knew what it was, who it was, the only person he could possibly look for was Vanadium..The first was an ace of hearts. This, Maria said, was a very good card, indeed. It meant that Barty would be lucky in love..Celestina stared out for a moment, and then turned her head to look at Tom, with both the shade of the night and the sparkle of the metropolis still captured in her eyes. "What was that all about?"..If the sight of his daughter almost drove him to his knees, the sight of his wife, also his first in seven years, lifted him until he was virtually floating across the grass..She remained fixated on the card that she had just dealt, and for a while she didn't speak, as though the eyes of the paper knave held her in thrall. Finally she said, "Monster. Human monster."..and half rotten. She tore it. With the small scissors, she opened the shoulder seam from the inside..In truth, he was terrified. Although his need for her company was so profound that it seemed to arise from his marrow, a part of him marveled-and trembled-at his dedicated pursuit of her..That same day, he dared to visit two galleries. Neither of them had a pewter candlestick on display..He lay still, waiting for silence to return, so he could hear whether the great gong had drawn people into the alley..Junior had hoped not to be recognized by anyone at this affair. He regretted that he hadn't stuck to his original plan, maintaining surveillance of the gallery from his parked car..After a surgeon had lanced fifty-four boils and cut the cores from the thirty-one most intractable (shaving the patient's head to get at the twelve that were festering on his scalp), and after three days of hospitalization to guard against staphylococcus infection, and after he had been turned back into the world as bald as Daddy Warbucks and with the promise of permanent scarring, Junior visited the Reno library to catch up with current events.. "Well, Uncle Jacob doesn't understand kids. Anyway, this is pretty good stuff."..The odds against this phenomenal eleven-card draw must be millions to one, which seemed to give the predictions validity..Impressed by the sureness and swiftness with which the blind boy negotiated the steps and set off across the lawn, Tom didn't initially notice anything unusual about his stroll through the deluge..As they moved around the base of the oak from one vantage point to another, people stopped by to reassure Agnes, although never with a word, as though to speak would be to jinx the climb. Maria placed a hand on her arm, squeezed gently. Celestina briefly massaged the nape of her neck. Edom gave her a quick hug. Grace slipped an arm around her waist for a moment. Wally with a smile and a thumbs-up sign. Tom Vanadium, thumb and forefinger in a confident OK. Lookin' good. Hang in there. Signs and gestures, maybe because they didn't want her to hear the quivers and catches in their voices..A residual tension drained out of Junior. He was somewhat surprised that he had still been concerned about the song..NORTHBOUND ON THE coastal highway, headed for Newport Beach, Agnes saw bad omens, mile after mile.. "It's chilly and foggy and late, and there might be villains afoot at this hour," he intoned with mock gravity. "The two of you are Lipscomb women now, or soon will be, and Lipscomb women never go unescorted through the dangerous urban night."..The hospital was eerily quiet, except for the occasional squeak of rubber-soled shoes on the vinyl floor of the corridor.. "The mass of these malignancies suggest they will soon spread-or have already spread-out of the eye to the orbit. There is no hope that radiation therapy will work in this instance, and no time to risk trying it even if there were hope. No time at all. No time. Dr. Schurr and I agree, to save Bartholomew's life, we must remove both eyes immediately."..Suitcases seemed to be missing. Some clothes, as well. Could mean a weekend vacation..Darkrose and Diamond..Paul's Mediterranean complexion didn't make a blush easy to detect, but Tom thought his face brightened until it was a shade or two closer to the color of his rust-red hair. His eyes, usually so direct, evaded Celestina..Tom plucked the quarter off the glass, folded it into his right fist, and then at once opened his hand, which was now empty..Frowning, Panglo, said, "Terrible, you're right, so many terrible things happen, but I don't see why trains-".Playing with fire was fun when you didn't have to attempt to conceal the fact that it was arson..A pink spot in the center of Victoria's forehead marked the point of impact. Soon it would be an ugly bruise. The skull bone did not appear to have been cratered..Neither hesitantly nor recklessly, the boy set off across the lawn toward the porch

steps. He maintained a far straighter line than Agnes would have been able to keep with her eyes closed..Celestina looked out a kitchen window and saw Agnes in the Lampion driveway, where the three-vehicle caravan was assembled. She was loading her station wagon..Panic set in when he began to wonder if these intestinal spasms were going to prevent him from leaving Spruce Hills. In fact, what if they required hospitalization?.pistol that he'd purchased in late June. The city operated a program to melt confiscated and donated weapons and to remake them into plowshares or xylophones, or into the metal fittings of hookah pipes..Maybe every accidental death was suspicious to Vanadium. His obsessive hounding of Junior might be his standard operating procedure..Yet that evening, when she'd accepted his proposal and asked if he wasn't frightened, he said, "Not anymore."..Then he closed his eyes, held the revolver in both hands, and at point-blank range, he shot the dead woman twice.."Well, certainly, I understand," said Panglo, slowly lowering the offered hand, although he clearly didn't understand at all..This philosophy had worked for him previously, but forgetting the aftermath was more difficult when the aftermath was your own poor, torn, severed toe. Your own poor, torn, severed toe was infinitely more difficult to ignore than a busload of dead nuns..By the time this operation concluded and the sulphurous Mr. Cain was brought to some form of justice, Simon might have spent twenty or twenty-five percent of the fee that he'd collected from the liability settlement in the matter of Naomi Cain's death. The attorney put a substantial price on his dignity and reputation.."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..Like a disc fish with silvery scales, the coin lay in the cup of Junior's palm. Directly over his life line..They came to the house in Boatwright Street after dark. They kicked the door in, and Hound, standing among the armed and armored men, said, "Him. Let the others be." And to Otter he said, "Don't move," in a low, amicable voice. He sensed great power in the young man, enough that he was a little afraid of him. But Otter's distress was too great and his training too slight for him to think of using magic to free himself or stop the men's brutality. He flung himself at them and fought them like an animal till they knocked him on the head. They broke Otter's father's jaw and beat his aunt and mother senseless to teach them not to bring up crafty men. Then they carried Otter away..For a driver who had just engaged in a demolition derby with a house, the mummified man was steady on his feet and unhesitant in his actions. He turned to Harrison White and shot him twice in the chest..Years earlier, a stream had been diverted to fill the vast excavation. Stock fish were added, mostly trout and bass.."Mommy, watch!" He turned in the deluge with his arms held out from his sides. "Not scary!"..A stab of horror punctured Celestina as she failed to repress a mental image of a carnival-sideshow monster, half dragon and half insect, coiled in her sister's womb. She hated the rapist's child but was appalled by her hatred, for the baby was blameless..Agnes had the craziest notion that he was counting them, when at is age, Of course, he would have no concept of numbers..Agnes's chilled bones. Pushing a tangle of wet hair away from her face, she realized that her hands were shaking.."I hope it was all right I let him in, Mr. Cain." Sparky had a capuchin's overbite, too. "He told me it was an emergency."..Stopping at the door without opening it, Vanadium turned to stare at Junior, but said nothing..He'd once spoken that very sentiment to her. Golden haze, sun in the heart. His words had melted her, tears had sprung into her eyes, and sex been better than ever..By the time he went to bed Saturday night, the cards that had been only that morning were showing signs of wear.

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