

## NEUMONIA

"Well, sure," said Mary, "without dying first. That would be the easy way to get there. I'm a Lampion, aren't I? Do we take the easy way, if we can avoid it? Did Daddy take the easiest way up the oak tree?". 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.. The customers were in a mood, most of them grumbling about their ailments. Others complained about the dreary weather, the increasing number of kids zooming along sidewalks on these damn new skateboards, the recent tax increases, and the New York Jets paying Joe Namath the kingly sum of \$427,000 a year to play football, which some saw as a sign that the country was money-crazy and going to Hell.. She left him sore in places that had never been sore before. Yet he was more stressed out on Thursday than he'd been on Wednesday.. The night of Barty's birth, when Joey actually lay dead in the pickup-bashed Pontiac, as a paramedic had rolled Agnes's gurney to the back door of the ambulance, she had seen her husband standing there, untouched by that rain as her son was untouched by this. But Joey-dry-in-the-storm had been a ghost or an illusion fostered by shock and loss of blood.. She thought that she already knew all about humility, about the necessity of it, about the power of it to bring peace of mind and to heal the heart, but in the following few minutes, she learned more about humility than she had ever known before.. The dining room again, but this time he remembered how he had gotten here: by way of the living room.. If Vanadium appeared among these men, Junior would not only puke out the contents of his stomach, but also would disgorge his internal organs, every last one of them, and spew up his bones, too, until he emptied out everything within his skin.. Gore made him sick. He refused to attend movies that dwelt on the consequences of violence, and he had even less of a stomach for blood in real life.. "Possible complications include cerebral hemorrhage, pulmonary edema, kidney failure, necrosis of the liver, coma-to name a few.".. open grave. In his hand: the white rose, its thorns slick with his blood. He dropped the bloom, and it fell out of sight, into the gaping earth, atop Naomi's casket.. The pair of sliding doors at the living-room archway stood half open. Beyond, voices drew Paul against his will.. Thus far, there were only two unexpected developments, the first being his explosive vomiting. He hoped he would never have to endure another such episode.. "Here we are," said the driver, braking to a stop at the curb in front of the gallery.. Celestina screamed-"Here! In here!"--as she slapped the magazine into the butt of the pistol... He smiled and shrugged. "I used to be a fisher of men. Now I hunt them. One in particular.".. After a hesitation, she said, "You're the boogeyman, except when I saw you, I was hiding under the bed where you're supposed to be.".. Junior considered leaving before Vanadium--still seventy-five yards away--arrived. He was afraid he would appear to be fleeing.. "August, 1931. Along the Huang He River in China. Three million seven hundred thousand people died in a great flood," Edom said.. As the unwanted change pinged against the concrete at his feet, Junior-snap, snap-saw the source of the next two rounds. They spat out of the vertical pay slot on a newspaper-vending machine; one hit his nose, and the other rang off his teeth.. A smoldering cigarette, usually dangling aslant from one corner of a hard mouth set in a cynical sneer, was standard issue for tough-guy gumshoes, but Nolly didn't smoke. His failure to develop this bad habit resulted in a less satisfyingly murky atmosphere than the clients of a private dick might expect.. Cradling the baby, the nun turned with it to Celestina, folding back a thin blanket to present her with a good look at the tiny girl.. Again he fired into the lock, squeezed the trigger a second time, and discovered that no rounds remained in the magazine. Extra cartridges were distributed in his pockets.. She felt that she had failed her sister. She didn't know what more she could have done, but if she'd been wiser and more insightful and more attentive, surely this terrible loss would not have come to pass.. Although he was a stranger, arriving unannounced, and something of an eccentric by anyone's definition, Paul was received by Grace and Harrison White with warmth and fellowship. At their doorstep, raising his voice to compete with the wailing weather, he hurriedly blurted out his mission, as if they might reel back from his wild windblown presence if he didn't talk quickly enough: "I've walked here from Bright Beach, California, to tell you about an exceptional woman whose life will echo through the lives of countless others long after she's gone. Her husband died the night their son was born, but not before naming the boy Bartholomew, because he'd been so impressed by 'This Momentous Day. And now the boy is blind, and I hope you'll be able and willing to give some comfort to his mother." The Whites failed to reel backward, didn't even flinch from his unfortunately explosive statement of purpose. Instead, they invited him into their home, later invited him to dinner, and later still asked him to stay the night in their guest room.. Finding nothing more of interest in the study, he considered searching the rest of the house.. The container-eye-level at the top, battered, rust-streaked, beaded with condensation--was larger than some in the alleyway, with a bifurcated lid. Both halves of the lid were already raised.. Channeling his beautiful rage, Junior hefted the corpse onto the windowsill, and shoved it headfirst into the alley. The fog received it with what sounded almost like a swallowing noise.. 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.. FOLLOWING A SECOND NIGHT at the Sleepie Tyme Inne, waking at dawn, Junior felt rested, refreshed--and in control of his bowels.. With the uniformed troopers was a stocky, late-fortyish, brush-cut man in black slacks and a gray herringbone sports jacket. His face was almost pan flat, his first chin weak, his second chin stronger than the first, and his function unknown to Junior. He would have been the least likely man to be noticed in a ten-thousand-man convention of nonentities, if not for the port-wine birthmark that surrounded his right eye, darkening most of the bridge of his nose, brightening half his forehead, and returning around the eye to stain the upper portion of his cheek.. Agnes found this turn of events amazing, amusing, ironic--and a little sad. She would have dearly loved to teach the boy to read and write, to see his knowledge and competence slowly flower under her care. Although she fully supported Barty's exploration of his gifts, and although she was proud

of his astounding achievements, she felt that his swift advancement was robbing her of some of the shared joy of his childhood, even though he remained in so many ways a child..Although Junior was free of the superstitions that Naomi, in her innocence and sentimentality, had embraced, he wept without pretense..As she struggled to cope with her loss, the last thing Agnes needed was the reminder posed by that empty chair. Maria's intentions were good, however, and Agnes didn't want to hurt her feelings..Short and slender, Dr. Chan was as self-effacing as a Buddhist monk, as confident and as gracious as a mandarin emperor. His manner was serene, and his effect was tranquility..Kitchen staff. All men. Some looked up in surprise; others were oblivious of him. He stalked the cramped work aisles, eyes watering from the fragrant steam and the heat, seeking Vanadium, an answer..The white Buick glided through the tides of fog like a ghost ship plying a ghost sea.. "Well, with so much on His shoulders, He can't always watch us directly, you know, with His fullest attention every minute, but He's always at least watching from the corner of His eye. You'll be all right. I know you will."..By the time Agnes opened the driver's door and slumped behind the steering wheel, Barty levered himself onto the seat beside her. Grunting, he pulled his door shut with both hands as she jammed the key in the ignition and started the engine.. "When the Iroquois Theater in Chicago burned on December 30, 1903" he said aloud, testing his memory, "during a matinee of Mr Blue Beard, six hundred two people perished, mostly women and children."..That was all right, for she had done the same for Otter's elder sister, and so his parents sent him to her in the evenings. But she taught Otter more than the song of the Creation. She knew his gift. She and some men and women like her, people of no fame and some of questionable reputation, had all in some degree that gift; and they shared, in secret, what lore and craft they had. "A gift untaught is a ship unguided," they said to Otter, and they taught him all they knew. It wasn't much, but there were some beginnings of the great arts in it; and though he felt uneasy at deceiving his parents, he couldn't resist this knowledge, and the kindness and praise of his poor teachers. "It will do you no harm if you never use it for harm," they told him, and that was easy for him to promise them..The guy was carrying a purse, whatever that meant, and when he walked through the door, he had a goofy look on his face, but his expression changed when he saw Junior..Paul shook his head. "Oh, no. People look at our marriage, and they think I gave up so much, but I got back a lot more than I gave."..He drove his yellow-and-white 1955 Ford Country Squire station wagon. He'd bought the car with some of the last money he earned in the years when he had been able to hold a job, before his ... problem..The word need, instead of want, moved Paul to follow the doctor across the coffee shop..She was not yet twenty-one, and he was at least twice her age, but he leaned like a small child against her, and like a mother she comforted him.. "Everyone knows about Vanadium. He's a crusader, self-appointed champion of truth, justice, and the American way. A holy fool, if you will. With the case closed, he has no authority to harass you."..NOLLY SAT BEHIND his desk, suit jacket draped over the back of the chair, porkpie hat still squarely on his head, where it remained at virtually all times except when he was sleeping, showering, dining in a restaurant, or making love..On the third of June, he found another useless Bartholomew, and on Saturday, the twenty-fifth, two deeply disturbing events occurred. He switched on his kitchen radio only to discover that "Paperback Writer," yet another Beatles song, had climbed to the top of the charts, and he received a call from a ea woman..And had Phimie, retrieved from death by the resuscitation procedures of the surgical team, repaid Nella's kindness with her own stunning message to Lipscomb?.Besides, he didn't want the police in San Francisco to know that he'd been suspected, by at least one of their kind, of having killed his wife in Oregon. What if one of the locals was curious enough to request a copy of the case file on Naomi's death, and what if in that file, Vanadium had made reference to Junior waking from a nightmare, fearfully repeating Bartholomew? And then what if Junior eventually located the right Bartholomew and eliminated the little bastard, and then what if the local cop who'd read the case file connected one Bartholomew to the other and started asking questions? Admittedly, that was a stretch. Nevertheless, he hoped to fade from the SFPD's awareness as soon as possible and live henceforth beyond their ken..In his seventies but vigorous and full of fun, Sparky liked to take an occasional jaunt to Reno, to pump the slot machines and try a few hands of blackjack. The off-the-record, tax-free monthly checks from Simon were gratefully received, ensuring the old man's cooperation with the conspiracy.."-and when I get up off the street, my clothes are a mess, and I've got this face."..Agnes was grateful for the speed with which these arrangements were made, but she was also disturbed. Chan's expeditious management of Barty's case resulted in part from his friendship with Joshua, but an urgency arose, as well, during his examination of the boy, from a suspicion that he remained reluctant to put into words. Dr. Morley Schurr, the oncologist, who had offices in a building near Hoag Hospital, proved to be tall and portly, although otherwise much like Franklin Chan: kind, calm, and confident..On this occasion, however, he couldn't have focused on a book even if he'd had the strength to hold it. The fierce paroxysms that clenched his guts also destroyed his ability to concentrate..Startled, Nolly checked his shirt pocket and withdrew a quarter. "It's not the same one."..The blonde was coming on to him, just as a score of other women had done since his arrival, so Junior tried to balance seduction with information gathering. Putting his hand over the hand with which she was gently massaging his thigh, he said, "I knew her brother in Nam. Then I got wounded, shipped out, lost touch. Like to find him.".. "No, I didn't see him," Junior reminded the attorney. "I just assumed, when this harassment started here-".. "I do, don't I," Rena agreed, as with one plump hand she spread the pleated skirt of her brightly patterned dress..Then he closed his eyes, held the revolver in both hands, and at point-blank range, he shot the dead woman twice..In January 1965, Magusson had sent Cain to Nolly as a client, not sure why the creep needed a private detective. That had turned out to be the business about Seraphim White's baby. Simon's warning to be careful of Enoch Cain had helped to shape Nolly's decision to withhold the information about the child's placement..These Spartan arrangements were good enough for Vanadium. He had arrived from Oregon the previous night with three suitcases full of his clothes and personal effects. He expected that his unique combination of detective work and psychological warfare would

enable him to entrap Cain in a month, before these accommodations began to feel too austere even for one to whom anything fancier than a monk's cell could seem baroque..At best, Vanadium might decide Junior had come here to learn what other funeral his nemesis had attended-which was, in fact, the true motivation. But this made it clear that Junior feared him and was striving to stay one step ahead of him. Innocent men didn't go to such length. As far as the fruitcake cop was concerned, Junior might as well have painted I killed Naomi on his forehead..He groaned. "That just doesn't cut it, Mom. If I gotta be blind, I think I should get to say peed off."..He had nothing against Negroes. He didn't wish them ill. He wasn't prejudiced. Live and let live. He believed that as long as they stayed with their own kind and abided by the rules of a polite society, like everyone else, they had a right to live in peace..Holding the mug in his right hand, Tom picked up the coin and rolled it across the knuckles of his left. Paul's quarter, after all. A two-bit temptation to panic. As gifted with physical grace as with good looks, Junior stepped into the bedroom doorway, lithely and with feline stealth. He leaned against the jamb..Dr. Zedd's death, just last Thanksgiving, had been a blow to Junior, a loss to the nation, to the entire world. He considered it a tragedy equal to the Kennedy assassination one year previous..Tongue clamped between his teeth as he concentrated on keeping the blue crayon within the lines of the bunny, Barty nodded. "Yeah..Over generous slices of Black Forest cake and coffee, Jacob at first held forth on the explosion of a French freighter, carrying a cargo of ammonium nitrate, at a pier in Texas City, Texas, back in 1947. Five hundred and seventy-six had perished..On Thursday, December 28, employing forged driver's licenses and social-security cards as identification, Junior opened small savings accounts and also rented safe-deposit boxes for Pinchbeck and Gammoner at different banks with which he'd never previously done business, using the mailing addresses that he'd established earlier..In San Francisco, Seraphim Aethionema White lies beyond all hope of resuscitation. So beautiful and only sixteen..Playing with fire was fun when you didn't have to attempt to conceal the fact that it was arson..With effort, she managed to say, "I'm sorry, sweetie," but her voice was sufficiently distorted by anguish that even to herself, she sounded like a stranger..He wanted to say: The vain, power-mad politicians who milk cheers from ignorant crowds, the sports stars and preening actors who hear themselves called heroes and never object, they should all wither with shame at the mention of your name. Your vision, your struggle, the years of grueling work, your enduring faith when others doubted, the risk you took with career and reputation--it's one of the great stories of science, and I'd be honored if I could shake your hand..I have trusted in thy mercy, she thought desperately, reaching for comfort to Psalms 13:5.. "He must've listened on the car radio," Agnes said, digging down into the layered days in her packed trunk of memories. "He was trying to get ahead of his work, so he'd be able to stay around the house a lot during the week after the baby came. So he arranged to meet with some prospective clients even on Sunday. He was working a lot, and I was trying to deliver my pies and meet my other obligations before the big day. We didn't have as much time together as usual, and even as impressed as he must've been with the sermon, he never had a chance to tell me about it. The next-to-last thing he ever said to me was 'Bartholomew.' He wanted me to name the baby Bartholomew."..Bright though they were at all times, Barty's Tiffany eyes shone brighter now with beams of North Pole magic. "Maybe I do feel it.".. "Besides, I still live by my vows as much as possible, though I've had the longest continuing dispensation on record." A smile on that cracked countenance could be touching, but an ironic look now worked less well; it gave Kathleen a chill. "Vanity is a sin I've more easily been able to avoid than some others."..As though one of the quarters had dropped into his ear and triggered a golden oldie in the jukebox of his mind, Junior heard Vanadium's voice in the hospital room, in Spruce Hills, on the night of the day when Naomi died: "en you cut Naomi's string, you put an end to the effects that her music would have on the lives of others and on the shape of the future.....Lifted from his despair by this exhilarating wrath, Junior turned away from the mirror, looking for the bright side once more. Perhaps it was the bathroom window..Closing her eyes, Agnes whispered, "Bartholomew," in a reverent voice full of wonder, full of awe..Whether the cop was unhinged or not, Junior had nothing to gain by talking to him, especially in this disorienting darkness. He was exhausted, achy, with a sore throat, and he couldn't trust himself to be as..Maria's mother, visiting from Mexico, was babysitting, so Maria came without her children, as a guest, joining Agnes and the laugh-a-minute Isaacson twins, chroniclers of destruction. They ate in the dining room, rather than at the kitchen dinette, with a lace-trimmed tablecloth, the good china, crystal wineglasses, and fresh flowers..Besides, Junior was reluctant to kill Vanadium, for real this time, and risk discovering- that the detective's filthy-scabby-monkey spirit would in fact prove to be a relentless haunting presence that gave him no peace.. "I don't stumble. Not much, anyway." To the girl, Bartholomew said, "Angel, are you okay?"..Throughout the day, he tried not to think about the four knaves. But he was an obsessive, of course, so in spite of all his trying, he did not succeed.. "I'll never forget it," Dr. Salk promised. With his attention still on Perri's pictures, he said, "But I'm afraid you give me far too much credit. I'm no superman. I didn't do the work alone. So many dedicated people were involved."..Alone, Junior sat in the breakfast nook with a pot of coffee and an entire Sara Lee chocolate fudge cake..Paul checked the back of the Suburban, since he fancied himself the wagonmaster. He wanted to be sure that the goods were loaded in such a way that they were unlikely to slide or be damaged. "Packed tight. Looks just fine," he declared, and closed the tailgate door.. "Frozen firing pin," Cain said. His smile was venomous. "I worked on it. I hoped you'd get here in time to see the consequences of your stupid games."..The porch light wasn't on. No landscape lighting brightened the backyard. Barty was a gray shadow moving through darkness and through the darkling drizzle..Never before had she put faith in any form of prognostication. In the whispery falling of those twelve cards, however, she heard the faint voice of truth, not quite a coherent truth, not as clear a message as she might have wished, but a murmur that she couldn't ignore..To prove himself, he read a little of Dickens when she requested it, a passage from Great Expectations. Then a passage from Twain..A spirit-shredding bleakness clawed at her, but she couldn't permit it to leave her in tatters. If she traded hope for despair, as her

brothers had done, Bartholomew would be finished before he'd begun. She owed him optimism, lessons in the joy of life.. "I wouldn't just whack anyone, not even a worm bucket like Cain, any more than I would commit suicide. Remember, I believe in eternal consequences." He assumed that she hadn't phoned the police to make a formal report. No need to go out of her way to slander Junior when Thomas Vanadium had been prowling the hospital at all hours of the day and night, ready to lend an ear to any falsehood about him, as long as it made him appear to be a sleazeball and a wife killer.. Two teenage boys and one elderly woman scrambled across the sidewalk, grabbing at the ringing rain of quarters. They caught some, but others bounced and twirled through their grasping fingers, rolling-spinning away into the gutter.. "I just wanted everyone to come see the spider, that's all. It was a really, really icky interesting bug." During the five years following Agnes's death, their family of many names thrived. Barty and Angel had brought them all together in this place fifteen years previously, but the destiny about which Toni had spoken on the back porch, that night in the rain, seemed to be in no hurry to manifest itself Barty could find no painless way to sustain secondhand sight, so he lived without the light. Angel had no reason to shove anyone else into the world of the big bugs, where she'd pushed Cain. The only miracles in their lives were the miracles of love and friendship, but the family remained convinced of eventual wonders, even as they got on with the day at hand.. An emergency kit in the trunk of his car contained a flashlight. He fetched it and sweetened the bribe to the valet.. She slept for a while, waking to a prayer spoken softly but fervently in Spanish.. 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?" Here they came at last, guns drawn, wary. Different uniforms, yet they reminded him of the cops in Oregon, gathered in the shadow of the fire tower. The same faces: hard-eyed, suspicious.. By the time he got to the cooler, he could see this wasn't smoke, after all. It dissipated too quickly. Cool against his hand. The cold steam from dry ice.. Joey couldn't raise his head, couldn't turn more directly toward her ... because his spine had been damaged, perhaps severed, and he was paralyzed.. 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. . . They would have given him an antinausea medication. It most likely wasn't going to work quickly enough to save him.. To Agnes, Jacob said, "Likely to be a sunnier fortune if the cards are bright and fresh, don't you think?" Hound had taken him, had stood and seen his people beaten senseless, had not stopped the beating. Yet he spoke as a friend. Why? said Otter's look. Hound answered it.. Bartholomew's genius might have been intimidating, even off-putting, if he'd not been as much child as child genius. Likewise, he would have been wearisome if impressed by his own gifts.. This wasn't a new sensation. He had experienced it before. In the night just passed, when he awakened from an unremembered dream and saw the bright quarter dancing across Vanadium's knuckles.. From a cutlery drawer, Tom withdrew a knife. The largest and sharpest blade in the small collection.. Tom received a fierce hug, too, and a sisterly kiss, and he was grateful for them. He had been a loner for too long, as a hunter of men pretty much had to be when on a long hard road of recuperation and then on a mission of vengeance, even if he called it a mission of justice. During the few days he'd spent guarding Celestina and Grace and Angel in the city, and subsequently during the week with Wally, Tom had felt that he was part of a family, even if it was just a family of friends, and he had been surprised to realize how much he needed that feeling.. Unable to continue Tehanu's story (because it hadn't happened yet) and foolishly assuming that the story of Ged and Tenar had reached its happily-ever-after, I gave the book a subtitle: "The Last Book of Earthsea." Vanadium was no ordinary cop, as he himself had said. In his obsession, convinced that Junior had murdered Naomi and impatient with the need to find evidence to prove it, what was to stop the detective if he decided to deal out justice himself? What was to prevent him from walking up to the Suburban right now and shooting his suspect pointblank? Warily, Junior ventured into the gallery to make inquiries. He expected the staff to express utter bafflement at the name Celestina White, expected the poster to have vanished when he returned to the display window.. Earlier, before leaving home, he had taken a preventive dose of paregoric. For now, at least, his bowels were quiet.. Junior couldn't see the lights of the nearest other houses. Either those structures were screened by trees or the neighbors weren't home.. He tucked his left arm tight against his side and threw himself against the door. The obstructing furniture was heavy, but it moved an inch. If it would give one inch, it would give two, so it wasn't immovable, and he was already as good as in there.. force open Edom's mouth. "Eat your sin, boy, eat your sin!" Edom resists eating his sin, but he's afraid for his eyes.. Agnes wasn't able to interpret his expression, not because he was in the least difficult to read, but because her perceptions were skewed by sudden fear and a flood of adrenaline. Her heart seemed to spin like a flywheel in her breast.. As instructed earlier by phone, Junior purchased a large box of Raisinettes and a box of Milk Duds at the refreshment stand, and then he sat in one of the last three rows in the center section, eating the Milk Duds, grimacing at the sticky noises his shoes made when he moved them on the tacky floor, and waiting for Google to find him.. "so she's married," Junior said, figuring that maybe Celestina wasn't his heart mate, after all.. He fiddled with the cylinder until it swung open. Five chambers, a gleaming cartridge in each.. Unobtrusively, Junior followed the musician across the large front room, but by an indirect arc, using the babbling bourgeoisie for cover.. Alone again with Wally, Celestina said, "They told me that once you regained consciousness, I can only visit ten minutes at a time, and not that often, either." "Thursday it is," he said, clearly delighted to be receiving only a third of the fair-market rental from his apartment.. Agnes saw no arc of color from candle to candle, and she thought that he must mean for her to look at the many cut-crystal wineglasses and water glasses, in which the lambent flames were mirrored. Here and there, the prismatic effect of the crystal rended reflections of the flames into red-orange-yellow-green-blue-indigo-violet spectrums that danced along beveled

edges..After two years of rehabilitation, Tom had been pronounced as fit as ever, a miracle of modern medicine and willpower. But right now he seemed to have been put back together with spit and string and Scotch tape. Arms pumping, legs stretching, he felt every one of those eight months of coma in his withered-and-rebuilt muscles, in his calcium depleted-and-rebuilt bones..No mystery here. No reason to leap to the ceiling and cling upside down like a frightened cartoon cat..After clicking off the kitchen lights, the hall light, and the light in the foyer, he pulled shut the front door, leaving the house dark and silent behind him..Lying on his side in bed, clothed and shod, knees drawn up, arms folded across his chest, hands pressed under his chin, like a precocious fetus dressed and waiting for birth, Junior tried to recall the chain of logic that had led to this long and difficult pursuit of Bartholomew. That chain led three years into the past, however, which to Junior was an eternity, and not all the links were still in place..Kathleen and Nolly shifted their attention to Tom's clenched left hand, although the quarter could not possibly have traveled from one fist to the other.

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