

ACUTE MEDICINE SECOND EDITION

Dr. Salk returned the photos, put a hand on Paul's shoulder, and smiled. "But that's always the way, you see? Heroes always get back more than they give. The act of giving assures the getting back." Just as Celestina snapped shut the latches on the suitcase and turned to the door, a nurse's aide entered, pushing a cart loaded with towels and bed linens. Across the room, the girl on the window seat showed no awareness of his arrival. She sat sideways to him in the niche, with her back against one wall, knees drawn up, a big sketch pad braced against her thighs, working intently with colored pencils. That was another thing. Junior hadn't gotten his noon meal, because the spirit of Vanadium had nearly caught up with him when he'd been browsing for tie chains and silk pocket squares before lunch. Then he missed dinner, as well, because he had to maintain surveillance on Celestina when she didn't go straight home from the gallery. He was hungry. He was starving. This, too, she had done to him. The bitch. Junior had expected these singular creatures, and he needed them to be as monstrous as they had always been in the past. Nonetheless, he shrank back against his pillows in dismay when they exploded into the hospital room. Their faces were as fierce as those of painted cannibals coming off a fast. They gestured emphatically, spitting expletives along with tiny bits of lunch dislodged from their teeth by the force of their condemnations. "You do believe that? Because I don't see ... I don't know how could work with someone who thought I was capable of . . .". "Simon's a good man. Now that he pretty much knows Cain pushed the wife, he doesn't feel better about representing him just because the payoff was big. And in the current case, he's not Cain's lawyer, so there's no conflict of interest, no ethics problem, so he's got a chance to set things right a little." 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. Intuition told Tom Vanadium that the removal of the paintings was significant, but he wasn't a talented enough Sherlock to leap immediately to the meaning of their absence. 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. Dinner was available in the lounge. Junior enjoyed a superb filet mignon with a split of fine Cabernet Sauvignon. "I'll show you some. That's what Gelluk's after. The ore of watermetal. Watermetal eats all the other metals, even gold, see." Tom was alone. The place should be silent. Hanna Rey, the housekeeper, wasn't scheduled to arrive until ten o'clock. He wondered what it would be like to make love to Renee and kill her. Only once had he killed without good reason. And that had been one of the infuriating Bartholomews. Prosser in Terra Linda. A man. On that occasion, no erotic element had been involved. This would be a first. Embarrassed, cold, abruptly frightened, she returned to the Old West, where night on the low desert was warm. The campfire flickered welcomingly. John Wayne put an arm around her and said, "There are no dead husbands or dead babies here," and though he intended only to reassure her, she was overcome by misery until Shirley MacLaine took her aside for some heart-to-heart girl talk. Agnes woke again and was no longer chilled, but feverish. Her lips were cracked, her tongue rough and dry. "Nicholas Deed." On her tongue, the name was as bitter as a dissolving aspirin. As he turned the corner onto Jasmine Way, he felt his heart lift in expectation of the sight of his home. It wasn't a grand residence--a typical Main Street, USA, house--but it was more splendid to Paul than Paris, London, and Rome combined, cities that he would never see and would never regret failing to see. Prudence required that they strategize as though Enoch Cain were Satan himself, as though every fly and beetle and rat provided eyes and ears for the killer, as though ordinary precautions could never foil him. Rico, her own husband--a drunkard and a gambler--had run off with another woman, abandoning Maria and their two small daughters. No doubt, he had departed in a spotlessly clean, sharply pressed, perfectly mended ensemble. The lunatic lawman was not at any of the tables. Junior was sure of that, because indulging his appreciation for lovely women, he had roamed the room repeatedly with his gaze. Not many men wore hats these days. Since his teenage years, Nolly had favored a porkpie model. San Francisco was often chilly, and he began losing his hair when still young. Junior no longer leaned casually on the casing. He put both hands flat against the door. Of the three Bartholomews that he'd turned up recently, he chose Prosser because, burdened by the name Enoch, Junior felt sympathy for any girl whose parents had cursed her with Zelda. 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. "Thursday it is," he said, clearly delighted to be receiving only a third of the fair-market rental from his apartment. This was the image that plied the turbulent waters of Junior Cain's imagination when he sailed out of the driver's door and came around to face the Studebaker, his heart dropping like an anchor. Assuming that the boy had closed his eyes and was talking to himself, somewhere between his self-told bedtime story and a dream, Agnes retreated from the room, pulling the door only half shut behind her. To the foot of the bed slouched the third and final Hackachak: twenty-four-year-old Kaitlin, Naomi's big sister. Kaitlin was the unfortunate sister, having inherited her looks from her father and her personality equally from both parents. A peculiar coppery cast enlivened her brown eyes, and in a certain slant of light, her angry glare could flash as red as blood. At home, after phoning her folks, Celestina made a ham sandwich. She ate a quarter of it. Then two bites of a chocolate croissant. One spoonful of butter pecan ice cream. Everything was without taste, more bland than Phimie's hospital food, and it cloyed in her throat. "All right," Celestina said, "yes, of course." She could see no harm in humoring Phimie. "Angel. Angel White. Now, you calm down, you relax, don't stress yourself." To be fair, with her exceptional beauty, she would have been the center of attention even in a gathering of real artists. Junior had little chance of getting at Seraphim's bastard boy without going through this woman and

killing her as well; but if his luck held and he could eliminate Bartholomew without Celestina realizing who had done the deed, then he might yet have a chance to discover if she was as lubricious as her sister and if she was his heart mate..From the bathroom, Junior gathered an electric razor and toiletries. He added these to the suitcases..In spite of major earthquakes pending, explosions of dynamite hauling trucks on the highway, tornadoes somewhere churning, the grim likelihood of a great dam bursting along the route, freak ice storms stored up in the unpredictable heavens, crashing planes and runaway trains converging on the coastal highway, and the possibility of a sudden violent shift in the earth's axis that would wipe out human civilization, they risked crossing the boundaries of Bright Beach and traveled north into the great unknown of territories strange and perilous..He got in the Suburban, pulled the door shut, but didn't at once start the engine..FOLLOWING A SECOND NIGHT at the Sleepie Tyme Inne, waking at dawn, Junior felt rested, refreshed-and in control of his bowels..The Bright Beach Library was open until nine on Friday evening. Arriving an hour before closing, they returned the Heinlein novels that Barty had already read and checked out the three that he wanted. In a spirit of optimism, they borrowed a fourth, Podkayne of Mars..After using a paring knife to section and core an apple, Paul withdrew a sheet of stationery from his desk and uncapped a fountain pen. His penmanship was old-fashioned -in its neatness, as precise and appealing as fine calligraphy. He wrote: Dear Reverend White ...Reminding himself that nature was merely a dumb machine, utterly devoid of mystery, and that the unknown would always prove familiar if you dared to lift its veil, Junior discovered he could move. Each of his feet seemed to weigh as much as one of Wroth Griskin's cast bronzes, but he crossed the sidewalk and went into Galerie Coquin..On his nightstand, he found an envelope evidently placed there by Hanna, after she'd taken it from his pharmacy smock, which he had given her to launder. The envelope contained the letter about Agnes Lampion that Paul had written to Reverend White in Oregon.. "I didn't know it myself till I realized I was right in your neighborhood. I assumed your mother and Angel would be here, and I hoped you might be. If I'm intruding-".Hound shrugged. He didn't choose to tell Losen that people hated him disinterestedly.. "You'll need time to ... adjust to this," he said. "Perhaps you've got to call family...". "I'm glad to hear it," Tom said. His thin smile might have been ironic, though it wasn't easy to interpret the meaning of any subtle expression on his hammered face.All day, for reasons he couldn't quite put into words, Junior had carried that quarter in a pocket of his bathrobe. From time to time, he had taken it out to examine it..He had been surprised to learn her age. She didn't appear to be that old. Thirty or not, Victoria was unusually attractive..Junior tipped his head back and gazed up toward the section of broken-out railing along the high observation deck..Instead of staring at Barty directly, he watched Angel as she studied the eyeless boy. She had exhibited no horror at the concave slackness of his closed lids, and when one lid fluttered up to reveal the dark hollow socket, she hadn't shown any revulsion. Now she moved closer to Barty's chair, and when she touched his cheek, just below his missing left eye, the boy didn't flinch in surprise..Increasingly, he used meditation to relieve stress. He was so skilled at concentrative meditation without seed-blanking his mind-that half an hour of it was as refreshing as a night's sleep..Between new women and needlepoint pillows, he participated in s'ances, attended lectures given by ghost hunters, visited haunted houses, and read more strange books. He even sat for the camera of a famous medium whose photographs sometimes revealed the auras of benign or malevolent presences hovering in the vicinity of her subject, though in his case she could discern no telltale sign of a spirit..Sudden rain spared her the need to finish the sentence. A few fat drops drew both their faces to the sky, and even as they rose to their feet, this brief light paradiddle of sprinkles gave way to a serious drumming..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-worshipping 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..He intended to mash the sole of Victoria's right shoe in the pat of butter and leave a long smear on the floor, as though she slipped on it and fell toward the ovens..Instead, her father asked, "Is this emotion talking, Celie, or is this brain as much as heart?".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..O foolish writer. Now moves. Even in storytime, dreamtime, once-upon-a time, now isn't then..Tom proved to be more useful than either a cop or a priest to Pie Lady Services, when he discovered a talent for money management that protected their funds from twelve percent inflation and in fact brought them a handsome return in real terms..From his motel room, he telephoned Hanna Rey in Bright Beach. She still looked after his house on a part-time basis, paid the bills from a special account while he traveled, and kept him informed about events in his hometown. From Hanna, he learned that Barty Lampion's eyes had been lost to cancer..If this insurance payoff was not mere coincidence, if it was the wealth that had been foretold, then how far behind the fortune did the knave travel? Years? Months? Days?.The detective shrugged. "The girl might've had her baby at a third rate hospital, one with poor control of patients' records and a less professional staff. Or the kid might have been placed for adoption through some baby brokerage in it strictly for the money. Then there would've been opportunities to learn something. But as

soon as I discovered it was St. Mary's, I knew we were screwed.".."Don't worry," Celestina told him, "after what we've seen this past week, we're still with you."..Move, move, like a runaway train, leaving the dead nuns--or at least one dead musician--far behind..Finished, she gave him a mirror, so he could admire his new bicuspid cap. After five years of dentistry, paced so as not to tax Nolly's tolerance, Kathleen had done well what nature had done poorly, giving him a perfect bite and a supernatural smile. This final cap was the last of the reconstruction..Swift and yellow, Angel flew to her mother, grabbing at one of the bunched drapes as if she might hide behind it..Junior glimpsed Vanadium first in profile--and then, as the cop rode down and away, only the back of his head. He hadn't seen this man in almost three years, yet he was instantly certain that this was no coincidental look-alike. Here went the filthy-scabby-monkey spirit itself..Scamp had fabulous legs, and her bralessness left no doubts about the lusciousness and authenticity of her chest, but after an hour of conversation about something or other, before suggesting that they leave together, Junior maneuvered her into a reasonably private corner and discreetly put a hand up her skirt, just to confirm that his gender suspicions were correct..After Victoria had departed, Junior lay smiling at the ceiling, floating on Valium and desire. And vanity..He went upstairs to change out of his dark blue suit and badly scuffed black shoes..An emergency kit in the trunk of his car contained a flashlight. He fetched it and sweetened the bribe to the valet..The reverend made the first toast, speaking so softly that his tremulous words seemed to bloom in Celestina's mind and heart rather than to fall upon her ears. "To gentle Phimie, who is with God."..She switched on the windshield wipers. Repeatedly, in the, arc of cleared glass, the graveyard was revealed in sharp detail, and yet the place remained less than fully familiar to her. Her whole world had been changed by Barty's dry walk in wet weather..Paul stayed with her, sometimes wincing at the ground as though the danger were there, not above--which, in a sense, it was, because impact rather than the fall itself is the killer--and at other times putting his arms around her, staring up at the boy above. But he, too, was silent..Oblivious that she and Barty had become the center of attention, Angel said, "Does he ever get the quarters back?"..He hurried the length of the diner, pushing past waitresses, checking out all three of the possibilities, but of course, none of them was the dead detective--or anyone else Junior had ever seen before. He was looking for--what?--a ghost, but vengeful ghosts didn't sit down to a meat-loaf lunch in the middle of a hauntin..Fortunately, at least the desk was cigarette-scarred, because it came with the office. It had been the property of a skip-tracer named Otto Zelm, who'd made a good living at the kind of work Nolly avoided out of boredom: tracking down deadbeats and repossessing their vehicles. On a stakeout, Zelm fell asleep in his car, while smoking, thereby triggering the payoff of both life- and casualty-insurance policies, and freeing the lease on this furnished space..PERRI'S POLIO-WHITTLED body did not test the strength of her pallbearers. The minister prayed for her soul, her friends mourned her loss, and the earth received her..He returned to the house and extinguished the three blown-glass oil lamps on the living-room coffee table. Out, as well, the silk-shade lamp.. "Each life," Barty Lampion said, "is like our oak tree in the backyard but lots bigger. One trunk to start with, and then all the branches, millions of branches, and every branch is the same life going in a new direction.".."You feel remorse, though," said Agnes. "I can see you do. And not just because of what happened to your hands."..This Monday afternoon, he longed for the escape and solace of half-hour pulp adventure. But he decided that he ought to at last compose the letter he'd been meaning to write for at least ten days.. "Living high. When I wasn't on the road, I had a fine house here in Bright Beach, not this rental shack I'm in now, but a nice little place with an ocean view. You can guess what went wrong."..He got everything he ordered--full value, and more. When he lifted off the top of the bun to squeeze mustard onto the burger, he discovered a shiny quarter pressed into the half-melted cheese..Clutching the blanket, she thought of the funerary lap robes that red the legs of the deceased in their caskets, for she felt sometimes cove half dead. Both feet in this world--yet walking beside Joey on a strange road Beyond..This show was hopeless, disastrous, stupid, foolish, painful, lovely, wonderful, glorious, sweet..Part of him knew this sound was his heartbeat, not the footfalls of an otherworldly pursuer, but that part of him wasn't dominant at the moment. He moved faster, not exactly running, but hurrying like a man late for an appointment..Maria's belief in the efficacy of this ritual was not as strong as her faith in the Church, but nearly so. As she leaned over the votive glass, watching the final fragment dissolve into ashes, she felt a terrible weight lifting from her.. "Honey," she said, crouching to peer at him through the vertical slats of the playpen, "what're you doing?"..The baby felt too light to be real. She weighed five pounds fourteen ounces, but she seemed lighter than air, as though she might float up and out of her aunt's arms.. "Veal fit for kings," said their waiter, delivering the entrees, and one taste confirmed his promise.. "By the close of business tomorrow," said the lawyer, "I expect to have an offer for your consideration."..Sitting on a stool at the counter, he ordered a cheeseburger, coleslaw, french fries, and a cherry Coke..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.. "Jacob scares people," Agnes said. "No one would eat a pie that Jacob delivered without having it tested at a lab."..In Room 724, standing alone at her sister's bedside, watching the girl sleep, Celestina told herself that she was coping well. She could handle this unnerving development without calling in either of her parents..For a finder's fee, Junior was put in touch with a papermaker named Google. This was not his real name, but with his crossed eyes, large rubbery lips, and massively prominent Adam's apple, he was as perfect a Google as ever there had been..Her first year at college, she had hoped only to be able one day to earn a living as an illustrator for magazines or on the staff of an advertising agency.. A career in the fine arts, of course, was every painter's fantasy, the full freedom to explore her talent; but she would have been grateful for the realization of a much humbler dream. Now, she was just twenty-three, and the world hung before her like a ripe plum, and she seemed able to reach high enough to pluck it off the branch..Barty read aloud as Agnes drove, because she'd enjoyed the novel only from page 104. He wanted to share with her the exploits of Jim and Frank and their Martian

companion, Willis..MONDAY MORNING, January 17, Agnes's lawyer, Vinnie Lincoln, came to the house with Joey's will and other papers requiring attention..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..From the plush pillowy shadows of the bed, Barty said, "Oh, look. Christmas lights.".Frowning, Panglo, said, "Terrible, you're right, so many terrible things happen, but I don't see why trains-".Instead, as he settled into the offered chair, he withdrew a picture of Perri from his wallet. It was an old black-and-white school photograph, slightly yellow with age, taken in 1933, the year he'd begun to fall in love with her, when they were both thirteen..Vanadium flipped the quarter straight into the air and at once spread his arms, palms turned up to show that his hands were empty.

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