

## **BADGIRL SKETCHBOOK VOL8 KICKSTARTER COVER**

Having gotten the new roof for them at cost, Agnes subsequently put together donations from a dozen individuals and one church group to cover all but two hundred dollars of the outlay. At the farthest end of the loft from the stereo speakers, voices nevertheless had to be raised in even the most intimate exchanges. The artist who had created *In the Baby's Brain Lies the Parasite of Doom, Version 6*, however, possessed a voice as deep, sharp-edged, and penetrating as his talent. Because of his blindness and his intellectual gifts, Barty was home schooled; besides, no teacher was a match for his autodidactic skills, nor could anyone possibly inspire in him a greater thirst for knowledge than the one with which he had been born. Angel went to this same informal classroom, and her sole fellow student was also her teacher. They aced the periodic equivalency tests that the law required. Their constant companionship seemed to be all play, yet was filled with constant learning, too. Tom pointed to the nearly finished martini that stood on the table before him. Balanced on the thin rim of the glass: impossibly, precariously--the coin. Houses made settling noises all the time. That was one reason why he couldn't rely much on sound to guide him through the darkness. A noise he thought had been made by the weight of his tread might as easily have been produced by the house itself as it adjusted to the. Rising, Celestina said to Tom, "Last Tuesday night, we had to switch on the lawn sprinklers. This will be much better." 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. The coin stopped turning, pinched flat between the knuckles of the cops middle and ring fingers. He retrieved a box of Kleenex from the nightstand and offered it to his suspect. "Here." 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. "Even in an infinite number of worlds," Wally objected, "there's no place I was that stupid." With his startling combination of a Mediterranean complexion and rust-red hair, his good looks, and his fit physique, Paul had the exotic appearance of a pulp-fiction hero. In particular, he liked to imagine that he might pass for Doc Savage's brother. For the first time since walking to La Jolla to meet Jonas Salk, Paul planned a journey with a specific purpose. "Acute nervous emesis," Junior croaked. "I've never thought of myself as a nervous person." almost recoiled in disgust. She held the newborn so that its mother could look into. A supply of ammunition lined the bottom of all the dresser and bureau drawers, concealed by underwear and other garments. Junior appropriated a box of 9-mm. cartridges. Traditional logic argued that an infant, no more than two weeks old, could not be a serious threat to a grown man. Under a declining moon, he fled discreetly three blocks to his Suburban, parked on a parallel street. He encountered no traffic, and on the way, he stripped off the gardening gloves and discarded them in a Dumpster at a house undergoing remodeling. Junior approached the headstone from behind, circled it, and shone the flashlight on the chiseled facts. For a while, Junior profited enormously from Tammy's investment advice, and the sex was great. As a thank-you for the hefty trading commissions she earned-and not incidentally for all the orgasms-Tammy gave him a Rolex. He didn't mind her four cats, didn't even care when the four grew to six, then to eight. He fiddled with the cylinder until it swung open. Five chambers, a gleaming cartridge in each. 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. "No member of the society ever violates a secret confidence," Agnes assured him. Now here was a thing, worse than the thought of a quarter in the closed hand: Neddy's eyes seemed to follow Junior as he rooted among the trash bags. "We'll need to talk about this a lot in the days to come, as we both have more time to think about it." "We were about to order dinner from room service," Tom said, handing a menu to Paul. He hadn't seen Thomas Vanadium since Monday, at the cemetery, and Vanadium hadn't pulled any tricks since leaving twenty-five cents at his bedside that same night. Almost four days undisturbed by the hectoring detective. In matters Vanadium, however, Junior had learned to be wary, prudent. Eventually, Junior remembered the quarter. He reached into the right pocket of the thin cotton bathrobe, but the coin wasn't there, as it should have been. The left pocket also was empty. Barty's math and reading skills exceeded those of most eighteen year-olds, but regardless of his brilliance, he was a few days shy of his third birthday. Prodigies were not necessarily as emotionally mature as they were intellectually developed, but Barty listened with sober attention, asked questions, and then sat in silence, staring at the book in his hands, with neither tears nor apparent fear. The bow business had started a few months ago. Angel said she wanted to look pretty in her sleep, in case she met a handsome prince in her dreams. Leaving Spruce Hills, Junior thought he was putting distance between himself and his enigmatic enemy, gaining time to study the county phone directory and to plan his continuing search if that avenue of investigation brought him no success. Instead, he had walked right into his adversary's lair. Thus far, none of these women of mercy was as lovely as Victoria Bressler, the ice-serving nurse who was hot for him. Nevertheless, he kept looking and remained hopeful. Too much, far too much to contend with, and so unfair: finding the Bartholomew needle in the haystack, hives, seizures of vomiting and diarrhea, losing a toe, losing a beloved wife, wandering alone through a cold and hostile world without a heart mate, humiliated by transvestites, tormented by vengeful spirits, too intense to enjoy the benefits of meditation, Zedd dead, the prospect of prison always looming for one reason or another, unable to find peace in either needlework or sex. 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.."Some Baptists are opposed to drink, Doctor, but we're the wicked variety. Though all we have is a warm bottle of Chardonnay." Although this was perhaps the happiest evening of Celestina's life, it wasn't without a note of melancholy. She couldn't avoid thinking about Phimie..This baffled Junior. To the best of his recollection, during the weeks that Seraphim had come to him for physical therapy, she had never mentioned an older sister or any sister at all..Handing Angel to Grace, Lipscomb said, "I own some investment properties. There's a two-bedroom unit available in one of them." He doubted the Studebaker would ever be found, but successful men were, without exception, those who paid attention to detail.."By the way he acted, you'd have sworn that he gave me and Angel shelter in the storm, back then, instead of turning us out to freeze in the snow." When he judged that he was near the porch steps, he probed with his cane. Two paces later, the tip rapped the lowest step..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." AFTER UNDERGOING TESTS for brain tumors or lesions, to ascertain whether his seizure of violent emesis might, in fact, have a physical cause, Junior was returned to his hospital room shortly before noon..After staring at the coins for a long moment, Kathleen said, "I don't think any mystery writer has ever done a series of novels about a priest detective who's also a magician." Apparently Maria wished that she'd brought a rosary to dinner. With the fingers of her right hand, she pinched the knuckles of her left, one after the other, as if they were beads..He didn't wonder about his sanity, either, as a less self-improved man might have done. No madman strives to enhance his vocabulary or to deepen his appreciation for culture..An elderly Negro gentleman answered the door. His hair was such a pure white that in contrast to his plum-dark skin, it appeared to glow like a nimbus around his head. With his equally radiant goatee, his kindly features, and his compelling black eyes, he seemed to have stepped out of a movie about a jazz musician who, having died, was on earth once more as someone's angelic guardian.."Yes. More about that later, just let me make it clear that an interest in physics doesn't make me a physicist. Even if I were, I couldn't explain quantum mechanics in an hour or a year. Some say quantum theory is so weird that no one can fully understand all its implications. Some things proven in quantum experiments seem to defy common sense, and I'll lay out a few for you, just to give you the flavor. First, on the subatomic level, effect sometimes comes before cause. In other words, an event can happen before the reason for it ever occurs. Equally odd ... in an experiment with a human observer, subatomic particles behave differently from the way they behave when the experiment is unobserved while in progress and the results are examined only after the fact-which might suggest that human will, even subconsciously expressed, shapes reality." After a while, Franklin Chan asked, "Do you want me with you when you tell him?" Later, in early '66, out of his coma and recovering sufficiently to have visitors, Vanadium spent a most difficult hour with his old friend Harrison White. Out of respect for the memory of his lost daughter, and not at all out of concern for his image as a minister, the reverend had refused to acknowledge either that Seraphim had been pregnant or that she'd been raped-although Max Bellini had already confirmed the pregnancy and believed, based on cop's instinct, that it had been the consequence of rape. Harrison's attitude seemed to be that Phimie was gone, that' nothing could be gained by opening this wound, and that even if there was a villain involved, the Christian thing was to forgive, if not forget, and to trust in divine justice.."Why are you here?" "Where else I should be and for why? I watch you over." As the tears cleared from Agnes's eyes, she saw that Maria was sewing. A shopping bag stood to one side of the chair, and to the other side, open on the floor, a case contained spools of thread, needles, a pincushion, a pair of scissors, and other supplies of a seamstress's trade..From the public hallway on the ground level, stairs led to the upper three floors. He would be able to hear anyone descending long before they arrived.."Sometimes it's sad here, Mommy. But it's not sad every place you are. Lots of places, Daddy's with you and me, and we're happier, and everything's okay." As yet, he hadn't taken either an antiemetic or antihistamine to ward off vomiting and hives, because he wanted to medicate -against those conditions as shortly before the violence as was practical, to ensure maximum protection. He'd intended to dose himself only after he followed Celestina home from the gallery and could be reasonably certain that he had located the lair of Bartholomew..She fussed over him, took his temperature, and spooned two chips of ice into his parched mouth. Leaving, she gave Celestina a meaningful look and tapped her wristwatch..Thrilled by the music but unable to understand a word of the play, he arranged German lessons with a private tutor..Barty turned away from her, surveyed the kitchen, and said, "Ah. The twisty is me." Grace declined food, but Tom ordered for her, anyway, selecting those things that by now he knew Celestina liked, guessing that the mother's taste had shaped the daughter's..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..Celestina hardly knew Paul, and although he'd saved her mother's life, his offer raised a look of doubt from her..On hearing of Bartholomew's-and/or Celestina's-death, Neddy would be on the phone to the police, pointing them toward Junior, in twelve seconds. Maybe

fourteen..Agnes could almost visualize the three-dimensional geometric model that her little prodigy had created in his mind, which he now relied upon to reach the upper floor without a serious stumble. Pride, wonder, and sorrow pulled her heart in different directions..To achieve certain narrative effects, I've fiddled slightly with the floor plan and the interior design of St. Mary's Hospital in San Francisco. In this story, the characters who work at St. Mary's are fictional and are not modeled after anyone on the staff of that excellent institution, either past or present..On one wall hung an impressive array of gardening tools. In the corner was a potting bench..Chicane wasn't alone. Sparky Vox, the building superintendent, approached behind him and hovered. Seventy-two yet as spry as a monkey, Sparky didn't walk so much as scamper like a capuchin.. "I'll teach her," Wally said, moving past them to the apartment door, fishing a ring of keys out of his coat pocket..Initially, Helen Greenbaum, at Greenbaum Gallery, had taken on three canvases, and had sold them within a month. She took four more, then another three when two of the four moved quickly. By the time that she'd placed ten pieces with collectors, Helen decided to include Celestina in a show of six new artists. And now, already, she had a show of her own..Quick introductions were made in the process of moving from the porch to the foyer, and Agnes said, "Come on back to the kitchen, I'm baking pies."..Wet cobblestones and tattered blacktop. Hurry, hurry. Past the lighted casement window in the gallery men's room..Walking was part of a fitness regimen that he took seriously. He would never be called upon to save the world, like the pulp heroes in the tales he enjoyed; however, he had solemn responsibilities he was determined to meet, and to do so, he must maintain good health..In November, Edom asked Maria Gonzalez to dinner and a movie. Although he was only six years older than Maria, both agreed that this was a date between friends, not really a boy-girl thing..Matching her fierce attention with a sudden intensity of his own, Joey said, "Bartholomew."..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.. "Oh? Do they rent their house out to pirates with little pirate children, clowns with little clown children?"..Anyway, if Celestina escaped, there would be a witness, and it wouldn't matter to a jury that she was a talentless bitch who painted kitsch. She would have seen Junior get out of the Mercedes and would be able to provide at least a half-accurate description of the car in spite of the fog. He still hoped to pull this off without having to give up his good life on Russian Hill..Perplexed by their peculiar behavior, even slightly unnerved, Tom answered Maria's question. "I'm afraid there's nothing else I can do, nothing more of a fantastic nature."..So here it came again, the hateful past, returning when Junior thought he was shed of it. This tall, lanky, Celestina-humping son of a bitch, guardian of Bartholomew, had driven away, gone home, but he couldn't stay in the past where he belonged, and he was opening his mouth to say Who are you or maybe to shout an alarm, so Junior shot him three times..Down the stairs, through the ground floor, quickly, soundlessly, breath held at times, listening for the other's breathing, listening for the softest squeak of rubber-soled shoes, although the hard clack of cloven hoofs and a whiff of sulfur would not have been surprising. At last he went to the kitchen, full circle from the shiny quarter on the breakfast table to the quarter again. No Cain..In his entire life, Junior had never suffered this much pain without first having killed someone. Reluctant to depart until certain that his student was out of danger physically, emotionally, and mentally, Bob Chicane stayed until three thirty. When he left, he broke some bad news to Junior: "I can't keep you on my student list, man. I'm sorry, but you're way too intense for me. Way too intense. Everything you do. All the women you run through, this whole art thing, whatever all those phone books are about--now even meditation. Way too intense for me, too obsessive. Sorry. Have a good life, man."..He was having difficulty focusing his attention on the problem at hand. Through his mind, odd and disconnected thoughts rolled like slow, greasy, eye-of-the-hurricane waves on an ominous sea..Fear clotted in Junior's veins, and he stood like an impacted embolism in the busy flow of pedestrians, certain that he himself would at any moment succumb to a stroke..He bolted up from the sofa, saying too loudly, "Canned hams," but at once he realized this made no sense, none, zip, so he searched desperately for something coherent to say--"Potatoes, corn chips"--which was equally ridiculous. Now Obadiah was staring at him with that concerned alarm you saw on the faces of people watching an epileptic in an uncontrolled fit, so Edom plunged across the living room as though he were falling off a ladder, toward the front door, struggling to explain himself as he went: "We've brought some, there are some, I'll get some,..Snap, snap, snap! Three more quarters ricocheted off the left side of his face--temple, cheek, jaw..With no clear awareness of having left the guest room, Paul looked down the enclosed stairs..The possibility that he'd left a clear fingerprint on the watch crystal had to be judged remote. And the band had been too textured to take a print useful to the police.."I can talk to you," he said to Salk. "You'll understand. She was hero, the only one I ever knew till I met you. I've read about them all my life, in pulp magazines and paperbacks. But Perri ... she was the real thing. She didn't save tens of thousands--hundreds of thousands of children like you've done, didn't change the world as you've changed it, but she faced every day without complaint, and she lived for others. Not through them. For them. People called her to share their problem, and she listened and cared, and they called her with their good news because she took such joy in it. They asked for her advice, and though she was inexperienced, really, so short of experience in so many ways, she always knew what to say, Dr. Salk. Always the right thing. She had great heart and natural wisdom, and she cared so much.".. "Better. Fear doesn't require him even to seduce a woman or to buy a bottle of whiskey. He just needs to open himself to it, and he will be filled like a glass under a faucet. As difficult as this may be to comprehend, Cain would choose to be neck-deep in a bottomless pool of terror, desperately trying to stay afloat, rather than to suffer that unrelieved hollowness. Fear can give shape and meaning to his life, and I intend not merely to fill him with fear but to drown him in it."..Shaking the ravaged khakis at him, she said, "Then what made such a mess of these?.Barty's mathematical genius proved to have a valuable practical application. Even in his blindness, he perceived patterns where those with sight did not. Working with Tom Vanadium, he

devised strikingly successful investment strategies based on subtleties of the stock market's historical performance. By the 1980s, the foundation's annual return on its endowment averaged twenty-six percent: excellent in light of the fact that the runaway inflation of the 1970s had been curbed.. "Not so bad, two thousand," Tom heard himself say idiotically. "I mean, compared to nearly four million." Without using his flashlight, depending only on the moon, he ascended through the cemetery to the service road.. To the alleyway again. Not through the clodhopper-cluttered gallery this time. Around the block at a brisk walk.. In the tree, the girl grinned. "Even if he stays up there until dawn, he'll still be coming down in the dark, won't he. Oh, we'll be fine, Aunt Aggie.. From his early adolescence, Edom was drawn to gardening, taking special pleasure in the cultivation of hybrid roses. He'd been only sixteen when one of his blooms earned first place in a flower show. When his father learned about the competition, he regarded Edom's pursuit of the prize as a grievous sin of pride. The punishment left Edom bedridden for three days, and when he came downstairs at last, he discovered that his father had torn out all the rose bushes.. He hadn't heard the cop get out of the chair and cross the dark room. Difficult. "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?" Worse, the people who adopted Seraphim's baby might be anywhere in the nine-county Bay Area. Millions of phone listings to scan.. Tom stared down into the oceanic depths of the city, through the reefs of buildings, to the lamp-fish cars schooling through the great trenches.. Junior could almost feel sorry for this sad, stocky, haunted detective, deranged by years of difficult public service.. Barty's reading and writing skills appeared to be related to his talent for math, as well. To him, language was first phonics, a sort of music that symbolized objects and ideas, and this music was then translated into written "syllables using the alphabet-which he saw as a system of math employing twenty-six digits instead of ten.. "Peach, raisin, walnut pies," Agnes said, "with regular bottom crust and a chocolate-crackle top crust." Her metal hands were still crossed defensively over her breasts. The artist had welded large hexagonal nuts to her rake-tine fingers to suggest knuckles, and balanced on one nut was a fourth quarter.. "Well, certainly, I understand," said Panglo, slowly lowering the offered hand, although he clearly didn't understand at all.. Agnes pulled the stack of cards in front of her. She discarded the first two, as Maria would have done, and turned over the third.. The wife killer was evil; and his evil would be expressed one way or another, regardless of the forces that affected his actions. If he'd not killed Naomi on the fire tower, he would have killed her elsewhere, when another opportunity for enrichment presented itself. If Victoria hadn't become a victim, some other woman would have died instead. If Cain hadn't become obsessed with the strange conviction that someone named Bartholomew might be the death of him, he would have filled his hollow heart with an equally strange obsession that might have led him, anyway, to Celestina, but that would surely have brought violence down on someone else if not on her.. When she tried to speak to him, she could no more easily raise her voice than she could extend a hand to him.. During the past three years, he'd suffered much because of these sisters, including most recently the humiliation in the Dumpster with the dead musician, Celestina's pencil-necked friend with a propensity for postmortem licking. The memory of that horror flared so vividly-every grotesque detail condensed into one intense and devastating flash of recollection-that Junior's bladder suddenly felt swollen and full, although he had taken a long satisfying leak in an alleyway across the street from the restaurant at which the postcard-painting poseur had enjoyed a leisurely dinner with Ichabod.. When the highway passed through a sunless ravine, he had broken into a sour sweat at the sight of the bloody pulsing reflections of the revolving rooftop beacons on the bracketing cut-shale walls. Now and then, the siren shrieked to clear traffic ahead, and he felt the urge to scream with it, to let loose a wail of terror and anguish and confusion and loss.. Evidently, Jacob had made a quick trip to his apartment over the garage and, with no thought for mice and dust, had not closed the back door. Junior said, "You've caused me a lot of trouble, you know." He'd been building a beautiful rage all night, thinking about what he'd been through because of the girl's temptress mother, whom he saw so clearly in this pint-size bitch. "So much trouble." Drawn by voices on the second floor, Tom took the stairs two at a time. A man and a boy. Barty and Cain. To the left in the hallway, and then to a room on the right.. The muffling fog quieted the city as much as obscured it, and the alley was surprisingly still. Many of the businesses were closed for the night, and as far as Junior could discern, no delivery trucks or other vehicles were parked the length of the block.. In spite of the thousands of hours that Paul was afoot, he seldom thought about why he walked. He met people along the way who asked, and he had answers for them, but he never knew if any answer might be the truth.. "I've got one of those faces so ordinary you see it everywhere," said Edom, and decided to tell the story of the Tri-State Tornado of 1925.. Later, at home in bed, after Nolly proved the value of oysters, he and Kathleen lay holding hands. Following a companionable silence, he said, "It's a mystery." He paused, not sure how to proceed. He was not accustomed to writing letters to total strangers.. He backed toward the hall door, watching as the fire spread. After lingering until certain that the house would soon be a seething pyre, he finally sprinted along the hall to the front door.. 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.. Edom's twin, Jacob, who had never held a job, lived in the second apartment. He'd been there since graduating from high school.. Maria looked stricken when she answered the doorbell, for she intuited that a visit, instead of a call, meant the worst.. Celestina met them at the front door and flung her arms around Wally. He let go of his cane-Tom caught it-and returned her embrace with such ardor, kissed her so hard, that evidently residual weakness was no longer a problem.. 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.. In the cab, pulling into traffic, the driver said, "The mister tells me you're the star of the

show tonight." of fists, hard blows, and his father's heavy breathing as he deals out the punishment. Edom himself lies face down in. Paul didn't realize that Grace had followed them into the living room until she screamed. She started to push past him, heading toward her husband even as Harrison went down.. He had never expressed opposition to starting a family. She'd had no reason to fear telling him that she was carrying their child.. "Mr. Cain, if he bothers you, would you want me to have his choke chain yanked?". No one could put him in prison because of his dreams. "I can't remember. Those are the worst, when you're not able to remember them-don't you think? They're always so silly when you can recall the details. When you draw a blank ... they seem more threatening." After wiping her floury hands, Agnes took the book from him and, examining it, could find nothing wrong. She flipped back a few pages, then a few forward, but the lines of type were crisp and clear. "Show me where, honey." "I know what you mean. Mr. Cain, I'd never turn my back on that much money if there was any damn way at all I could earn it." There would be lots of aftermath with three at once, especially if he took them out with point-blank head shots, but Junior was pumped full of reliable antiemetics, anti-diarrhetics, and antihistamines, so he felt adequately protected from his traitorous sensitive side. In fact, he wanted to see a significant quantity of aftermath this time, because it would be proof positive that the boy was dead and that all this torment had come at last to an end.. Junior didn't make the mistake of thinking that Magusson's new conciliatory attitude meant they were friends, that confidences could be shared or truths exchanged. The money-grubbing toad's only real friend would always be the one he saw in a mirror. If he discovered that Junior was having a great time post-Naomi, Magusson would store the information until he found a way to use it to his advantage.. 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.. He rolled Neddy onto one side, but no gold watch lay underneath, so he let the musician flop onto his back again.. "Wouldn't dream of asking you to make it a habit. Just this one time. If anguish, why not guilt?". "Don't get me started on cyclones!" Edom hurried through the house and out to the station wagon, to fetch the boxes of groceries.. interminably against the ignition plate before, at last, he was able to insert it. "Should be a boy, because then you'll always have a man around the house." Repressing a smirk, feigning a respectful solemnity, he dared to glance at Vanadium, but the detective stared into Naomi's grave as though he hadn't heard the mockery-or, having heard it, didn't recognize it for what it was.. Teasing out the card, Edom saw that it was an ace of diamonds-remarkable in light of Maria Gonzalez's fortune-telling session last Friday evening. He was more astonished, however, by the name printed in black ink diagonally across the face of the card: BARTHOLOMEW.. "There is no king in Earthsea," the young man said, stern and righteous, "In my master's service, then," Hound amended, patient.. A moment later, in the corridor, as Nolly locked the door to his suite, Kathleen linked her right arm through Vanadium's left. "Do I call you Detective Vanadium, Brother, or Father?". Taking her silence for assent, Tom continued: "Your father is gone from here, gone forever, but he still lives in other worlds. This isn't a statement of faith alone. If Albert Einstein were still alive and standing here, he'd tell you that it's true. Your father is with you in many places, and so is Phimie. In many places, she didn't die in childbirth. In some worlds, she was never raped, her life never blighted. But there's an irony in that, isn't there? Because in those worlds, Angel doesn't exist-yet Angel is a miracle and a blessing." He looked up from the city to the woman. "So when you're lying in bed tonight, kept awake by grief, don't think just about what you've lost with your father and Phimie. Think about what you have in this world that you've never known in some others-Angel. Whether God's a Catholic, a Baptist, a Jew, a Muslim, or a quantum mechanic, He gives us compensation for our pain, compensation right here in this world, not just in those parallel to it and not just in some afterlife. Always compensation for the pain ... if we recognize it when we see it." For eight months following that night, until late September of 1965, Vanadium had been in a coma, and his doctors had not expected him to regain consciousness. A passing motorist had found him lying along the highway near the lake, soaked and muddy. When, after his long sleep, he awakened in the hospital, withered and weak, he'd had no memory of anything after walking into Victoria's kitchen-except a vague, dreamlike recollection of swimming up from a sinking car.. "I don't ... don't understand." Blinking sleepily, pretending to be still thickheaded from tranquilizers and whatever other drugs they were dripping into his veins, Junior was pleased by the note of perplexity in his hoarse voice, although he knew that even an Oscar-caliber performance would not win over this critic.. He was uncomfortable, achy, thirsty, but he remained utterly still and observant. After a while, he realized that the sense of oppression with which he'd awakened was not entirely a psychological symptom: Something heavy lay across his abdomen. And it was cold-so cold, in fact, that it had numbed his middle to the extent that he hadn't immediately felt the chill of it. Shivers coursed through him. He clenched his jaws to prevent his teeth from chattering and thereby alerting the man in the chair. Although he never took his eyes off the corner, Junior became preoccupied with trying to puzzle out what was draped across his midsection. The mysterious observer made him sufficiently nervous that he couldn't order his thoughts as well as usual, and the effort to prevent the shivers from shaking a sound out of him only further interfered with his ability to reason. The longer that he was unable to identify the frigid object, the more alarmed he became. He almost cried out when into his mind oozed an image of Naomi's dead body, now past the whitest shade of pale, as gray as the faint light at the window and turning pale green in a few places, and cold, all the heat of life gone from her flesh, which was not yet simmering with any of the heat of decomposition that would soon enliven it again.. Only one member of the distant funeral party did not disperse toward the line of cars on the service road. A man in a dark suit headed downhill, between the headstones and the monuments, directly toward Naomi's grave.

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