

THE FLIGHT OF THE SEAGULL EL VUELO DE LA GAVIOTA

Still cautious, Junior approached the back door, the window. Vanadium's body lay on the car floor, wrapped in the tumbled blanket. "A wonderful wedding," Celestina promised her, taking a pair of pajamas from a dresser drawer. Paul was a dear man, different from Joey in appearance but so like him at heart. She shocked him by insisting they go at once to his house, to his bedroom. Red-faced as no pulp hero ever had been, Paul stammered out that he wasn't expecting intimacy of her so soon, and she assured him that he wasn't going to get it so soon, either. When he reported for a physical and a reassessment of his draft classification, on Wednesday, December 15, he left the insert in his hitching shoe; however, he limped like old Walter Brennan, the actor, hitching around the ranch in The Real McCoys. Turning his patched eyes in the general direction of his mother, Barty said, "Oops." He halted, made a quick calculation, turned, and moved toward where the back door ought to be. He found it half open. Grace, proving again the aptness of her name, said the one thing most likely, in time, to bring true peace to Celestina. "Remember Bartholomew." unwittingly oversell any strong reaction, striking a false note and raising suspicions. 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. glimmered along the barrel of a hypodermic syringe in the hand of the paramedic. Near midnight, she returned to her apartment. Lights out, in bed, staring at the ceiling, she was unable to sleep. Even above the piston-knock of her heart and the bellows-wheeze of her breath, Celestina heard wood crack, a small pane of glass explode, and metal torque with a squeal. The creep was going to get away. The hospital was eerily quiet, except for the occasional squeak of rubber-soled shoes on the vinyl floor of the corridor. When she closed the front door and turned away from it, Agnes bumped her swollen belly into Joey. His eyebrows shot up, and he put his hands on her distended abdomen, as if she were more fragile than a robin's egg and more valuable than one by Faberge. "You sounded as though you were in a lot of distress. You were frightened of this Bartholomew." Easter still lay a few weeks away, but already Celestina had begun decorating more than a hundred baskets, so that nothing would need to be done at the last minute except add the candy. Her living room was a warren of baskets, ribbons, bows, beads, bangles, shredded cellophane in green and purple and yellow and pink, and decorative little plush-toy bunnies and baby chicks. The end of his quest was near, so near, the right Bartholomew almost within 'mullet range. He was furious with Neddy Gnathic for possibly screwing this up. Six paces past that marker floorboard, Barty had the strangest feeling that someone was in the hallway with him. Already another contraction racked her, so intense that the pain was not limited to her lower back and abdomen, but seared the length of her spine, like an electric current leaping vertebra to vertebra. Her breath pinched in her chest as though her lungs had collapsed. Although the distance to the ground was only ten feet, she would be risking too much by running blindly off the roof and leaping to clear the fringe of fire at the edge. A landing on the lawn might end well. But if she fell onto the walkway, she might break a leg or her back, depending on the angle of impact. Beautiful she was, both of face and form, even with her mouth gaping wide and her eyes rolled back in her skull. How bright her future might have been if she had not chosen to deceive. A tease was, in essence, a deceiver-promising what she never intended to deliver. "It's a boy," Joey assured her, as though he had been given a vision. Thick blood sluiced across his lower lip, down his chin, bright arterial blood. "Baby, no," she pleaded. She appeared to be in her early thirties, perhaps six years older than Junior, but he didn't hold that against her. He wasn't any more prejudiced against older people than he was against people of other races and ethnic origins. One moment, girl and yellow vinyl ball. The next moment, gone as if they'd never been. In July 1967, at two and a half, he finally contracted his first cold, an off-season virus with a mean bite. His throat was sore, but he didn't fuss or even complain. He swallowed his medicine without resistance, and though he rested occasionally, he played with toys and paged through picture books with as much pleasure as ever. Suddenly remembering the doctor's assurance to Neddy that they would be out of this building by week's end, Celestina said, "But we've nowhere to go." Agnes thought crazily of their early dates and the first years of their marriage. They had occasionally gone to the drive-in, sitting close. Wishing he had left the gauze wrappings on his face, but afraid that the airwaves might already be carrying news of the bandaged man who had killed a minister in Spruce Hills, Junior abandoned the Dodge and hurriedly walked back to the private-service terminal, where the pilot from Sacramento waited. At the sight of his passenger, the pilot blanched and said, Allergic reaction to WHAT? And Junior said, Camellias, because Sacramento was the Camellia Capital of the World, and all that he wanted was to get back there, where he'd left his new Ford van and his Sklents and his Zedd collection and everything he needed to live in the future. The pilot couldn't conceal his intense revulsion, and Junior knew that he would have been stranded if he hadn't paid the round-trip charter fare in advance. "Your mother's wise," Paul said. "More than all the owls in the world," the boy agreed. When Agnes groaned, one of the shadows spread its wings, moved closer, to the right side of the bed, and resolved into a nurse. Agnes's vision had cleared. The nurse was a pretty young woman with black hair and indigo eyes. which was beginning to come into view, was as sharp as pins and needles, sheer torture to her eyes. Her hands trembled as she attempted to fold her sister's clothes into the small suitcase. What should have been a simple task became a daunting challenge; the fabric seemed to come alive in her hands and slip through her fingers, resisting every attempt to organize it. When eventually she realized there was no reason to be neat, she tossed the garments into the bag without concern for wrinkling them. Sometimes, while shaving or combing his hair, as he was looking in the bathroom or foyer mirror, Junior thought that he glimpsed a presence, dark and vaporous, less substantial than smoke, standing or moving behind him. At other times, this entity seemed to be within the mirror. He couldn't focus on it, study it, because the moment he became aware of the presence, it was gone. If their relationship had not

been limited to a single evening of passion, if they had not been of two worlds, if she had not been underage and therefore jailbait, they might have had an open romance, and then her death would have touched him more deeply.. "And," Joshua cautioned, "you better prepare for a long day. I'm pretty sure Dr. Chan will want to consult with an oncologist." "Oh, Wally, I am worried. I'm deeply worried. My mama is going to buy herself a first-class ticket to the fiery pit if she doesn't stop this prevaricatin'." By the first of November, they moved his mother's bed into the living room, so she could be in the center of things, where always she had been, though they admitted no guests now, only members of their family with its many names.. 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.. "Too bad. You might have used that to bargain with." Convinced that the house was playing tricks on him, Barty went downstairs, step by measured step, to the foyer and the ground-floor hall.. Initially, the Pacific could not be seen beyond an opaque lens of fog, Yet later, when the mist retreated, the sea itself became a portent of sightlessness: Spread flat and colorless in the morning light, the glassy water reminded her of the depthless eyes of the blind, of that terrible sad vacancy where vision is denied.. 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.. Always, he was good with Barty, and on this occasion, he teased more than the usual number of smiles and giggles from the boy as he tried to get him to read the Snellen chart on the wall. Then he lowered the lights in the examination room to study his eyes with an ophthalmometer and an ophthalmoscope.. Celestina extended her left hand, which shook so badly that she nearly knocked over both their wineglasses. "I will." Junior phoned a twenty-four-hour-a-day locksmith and paid premium post midnight rates to have the double deadbolts re-keyed.. That evening, he was filled with a greater sense of adventure than he'd felt since arriving in the city from Oregon. Consequently, he treated himself to three glasses of a superb Bordeaux and a filet mignon in the same elegant hotel lounge where he had dined on his first night in San Francisco, almost three years earlier.. Some information she'd withheld from him: that the cancer might already have spread, that he might still die even after his eyes were removed-and that if it hadn't yet spread, it might soon do so.. As outgoing as his twin uncles were introverted, Barty didn't withdraw from the festivities. Agnes never needed to remind him that family and guests took precedence over even the most fascinating characters in fiction, and the boy's delight in the company of others pleased his mother and made her proud.. On other nights, she had overheard this and been touched. On this Christmas Eve, however, it filled her with wonder and wondering, for she recalled their conversation earlier, at Joey's grave: Bartholomew was dead but didn't know it yet. Pistol in hand, cocoon in tatters, ready to spread his butterfly wings, Junior pushed the door to the apartment inward, saw a deserted living room, softly lighted and pleasantly furnished, and was about to step across the threshold when the street door opened and into the hall came Ichabod.. "Don't get me started on cyclones!" Edom hurried through the house and out to the station wagon, to fetch the boxes of groceries.. "I was raised to understand it," said Celestina, and when she looked across the room, she saw that her words had moved her mother.. Friday night, he slept more soundly than he'd slept since coming home from the pharmacy to discover Joshua Nunn and the paramedic in solemn silence at Perri's bedside. He didn't dream of trekking across a wasteland, neither salt flats nor snow-whipped plains of ice, and when he woke in the morning, he felt rested in body, mind, and soul.. One of the coin seekers knocked against Junior, jarring him loose of his paralysis, but when he stumbled out of the line of fire of the second vending machine, a third machine shot quarters at him.. From his first birthday to his third, Barty made worthless all the child-care and child-development books that a first-time mother relied on to know what to expect of her offspring, and when. Barty grew and coped and learned according to his own clock.. He felt some guilt at this-but only a little. His sister had done much for him; but jobless, ruled by his obsessions, hobbled by too much of his father's dour nature, there wasn't a lot that he could do for her. Just this benign deceit with the cards.. Hope was the handmaid to Agnes's faith. She always held fast to the belief that the future would be bright, but right now she was hesitant to test that optimism even with a harmless card reading. Yet, as with the fifth place setting, she was reluctant to object.. We have inhabited both the actual and the imaginary realms for a long time. But we don't live in either place the way our parents or ancestors did. Enchantment alters with age, and with the age.. "I can try, your highness." Using a three-step folding stool, he was able to get near enough to one of the vent plates in the living room to determine whether it might be the source of the song. just then the singing stopped.. "Well," Tom said, "those people who think it's just a trick generally react bigger than you folks, and you know it's real." On mechanic, he again glanced meaningfully at Edom, who felt a response was expected. When he opened his mouth, he could think of nothing to say, except that at Sanriku, Japan, on June 15, 1896, a 110 foot-high wave, triggered by an undersea quake, killed 27,100 people, most while they were in prayer at a Shinto festival. Even to Edom, this seemed to be an inappropriate comment, so he said nothing. .By the time he went to bed Saturday night, the cards that had been only that morning were showing signs of wear.. From San Francisco south to Orange County Airport on a crowded commuter flight, then farther south along the coast by rental car, Paul Damascus brought Grace, Celestina, and Angel to the Lampion house. "Before we go to my place, there's someone I very much want you to meet. She's not expecting us, but I'm sure it'll be okay." We cherish the old stories for their changelessness. Arthur dreams eternally in Avalon. Bilbo can go "there and back again," and "there" is always the beloved familiar Shire. Don Quixote sets out forever to kill a windmill... So people turn to the realms of fantasy for stability, ancient truths, immutable simplicities.. "Oh, sure, I know," Mary said. "But when it's a bad place, you feel it before you go in. So you just go around to the next place that isn't bad. No big deal." Leave the lamps burning, the door unlocked. A murderer, frantic to vanish while the victim remained undiscovered, wouldn't be worried about the cost of electricity or about protecting against burglary.. Had Kathleen Klerkle been a man, she would have enjoyed larger quarters in a newer building in a better part

of town. She was more gentle and respectful of the patient's comfort than any male dentist Nolly had ever known, but prejudice hampered women in her profession..He was still her boy. As always, her boy. Bartholomew. Barty. Her sweetie. Her kiddo.."This momentous day," Thomas Vanadium said quietly, stiff gazing into the grave, "seems full of terrible endings. But like every day, it's actually full of nothing but beginnings." .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..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." .He had visited the library primarily to confirm that Harrison White was unquestionably dead. He'd shot the man four times. Two bullets 'in the gas tank of the stolen Pontiac destroyed the parsonage and should have incinerated the reverend. When you were dealing with black magic, however, you could never be too cautious.."If Phimie wasn't here," Celestina said, "and then she came back, she was somewhere during that minute, wasn't she?" .At the front, a soft spotlight a focused on the life-size crucifix. The only additional illumination came from the small bulbs over the stations of the cross, along both side walls, and from the flickering flames in the ruby glass containers on the votive-candle rack.."Making too many wrong choices," Grace White said, "produces too many branches-a gnarled, twisted, ugly growth." .Her voice was soft, almost a whisper, and charged with anxiety; but under other circumstances, it would have been sexy..The bandaged man stormed up from the ruin of the living room, gauze fluttering around his lips as his hard exhalations seemed to prove that he wasn't a long-dead pharaoh reanimated to punish some heedless archaeologist who had ignored all warnings and violated his tomb. So this wasn't a Weird Tales moment..From Christmas through February, he dated a beautiful stock analyst and broker-Tammy Bean-who specialized in finding value in companies that had rewarding relationships with brutal dictators..In spite of the gloom, the boy's miraculous accomplishment was evident: his clothes and hair were dry as though he'd worn a coat and hood..Before he could replay the memory for further contemplation, Junior saw Ichabod exiting the house. The man returned to the Buick, seeming to float through the mist, like a phantom on a moor. He started the engine, quickly hung a U-turn in the street, and drove uphill to the house from which he had earlier collected Bartholomew..Later in the month, from Sparky Vox, Junior learned the building had a four-pipe, fan-coil heating system serving discrete ductwork for each apartment. Voices couldn't carry from residence to residence in the heating-cooling system, because no apartments shared ducting. Throughout the spring, summer, and autumn of 1967, Junior met new women, bedded a few, and had no doubt that each of his conquests experienced with him something she had never known before. Yet he still suffered from an emptiness in the heart..Junior tossed garments on the floor and across the bed to create the impression that the detective had packed with haste. After being imprudent enough to blast Victoria Bressler five times with his service revolver-perhaps in a jealous rage, or perhaps because he had gone nuts-Vanadium would have been frantic to flee justice..face with one hand, as if pulling off cobwebs. "Did you say you were in my house?" .He might have felt properly foolish if he had not suffered so much personal experience of Enoch Cain. This was a false alarm, but considering the nature of the enemy, it wasn't a bad idea to put himself through a drill from time to time..He reached toward the dead man's closed hand, but he couldn't find the courage to touch it. He was afraid that if he pried open the stiff fingers, he would discover a quarter inside..From the floor, Junior snatched up the bottle of wine that had twice failed to shatter. His lucky Merlot..All the way to the nightstand, he expected to discover that the revolver had been taken from the drawer. Yet here it was. Loaded..He spat on his right thumb, scrubbed the thumb against one of the dried drips on the floor, rubbed thumb and forefinger together, and brought the freshened spoor to his nose. He smelled blood..Friday, after dinner, when he'd heard enough of Maria's method of fortune-telling to know that four decks were required, that only every third draw was read, and that aces-especially red aces-were the most propitious cards to receive, Jacob had taken great pleasure in preparing for Barty the most favorable first eight cards that could possibly be dealt. This was a small gift to cheer Agnes, on whose heart Joey's death weighed as heavily as iron chains..As though the blush were transmitted by a virus, Junior caught the primrose-pink contagion from the pianist..The five tales in this book explore or extend the world established by the first four Earthsea novels. Each is a story in its own right, but they will profit by being read after, not before, the novels..Standing near the foot of the bed in a shapeless blue suit, Vanadium might have been the work of an eccentric artist who had carved a man out of Spam and dressed the meaty sculpture in thrift-shop threads..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..Junior suspected that no one other than this man's mother called him Tom. He was probably "Detective" to some and "Vanadium" to most who knew him.."-and the under girding of the observation platform itself is unstable. The whole thing could have fallen down with us on it!" .Hope, on many wings, hovered all around the physician, but he was afraid to let it roost..Off with the cap. Yellow capsules in the bottle, also blue. He managed to shake one of each color into the palm of his left hand without spilling the rest on the floor..Indeed, as Celestina and the kid reached the foot of the steps to this second house, Bartholomew pointed, and the woman turned to look back. She appeared to stare straight at the Mercedes, though the fog made it impossible for Junior to be sure..Further preparation-the purchase of gold coins and diamonds, the establishment of false identities-had to be delayed due to the hives. An hour short of dawn, Junior was awakened by a fierce itching not limited to his phantom toe. His entire body, over every plane and into every crevice, prickled and tingled and burned as with fever-and itched..The mummified moon had unwound itself from its rags of embalming clouds. Its pocked face glowered in full brightness on the

spreading branches of the pine, on the yard, and on the graveled driveway..Then Junior saw the blood on the right cuff of Vanadium's shirt. Blood dripping from his hand, too..demons: hypodermoclysis ... intravenous oxytocin ... maintain perfect asepsis, and I mean perfect, at all times ... a few oral preparations of ergot as soon as it's safe to give her anything by mouth.A music tradition was deeply rooted in the Negro community. No similar tradition in magic existed..Tom pushed his chair back from the table, got to his feet, and moved toward Celestina..The gurney, one wheel rattling. The young orderly behind it, dressed all in white. And the nurse again.."No, the more I think about it, the more it feels like this is just kids. Some kids goofing around, that's all. I- guess Vanadium got deeper under my skin than I realized, so when this came up, I couldn't think straight about it." "I'm wondering," Nolly said, "if you're not an officer of the law anymore, in what capacity are you going to pursue Cain?" "Well, as years pass, they're going to be a financial burden, if nothing else, so I'm glad I've got a little surprise for you."..Junior wanted to kill her. Kill him. Whatever. But he sensed that Renee knew more than a little about dirty fighting and that the outcome of a violent confrontation would not be easy to predict..Tucking the covers around Angel, Celestina said, "Would you like Uncle Wally to be your daddy?" "That would be the best." "I think so, too." "I never had a daddy, you know." "Getting Wally was worth the wait, huh?" "Will we move in with Uncle Wally?" "That's the way it usually works." "Will Mrs. Ornwail leave?" "All that stuff will need to be worked out." "If she leaves, you'll have to make the cheese."..Bartholomew didn't merely have something to do with babies. Bartholomew was a baby..In the gallery windows, eight of the nine sculptures were so disturbing that many passersby, catching sight of them, blanched and looked away and hurried on. Not everyone can be a connoisseur..Phimie's stubbornly high blood pressure, the presence of protein in her urine, and other symptoms indicated her preeclampsia wasn't a recent development; she was at increased risk of eclampsia. Her hypertension was gradually coming under control-but only by resort to more aggressive drug therapy than the physician preferred to use..After coffee had been served, when Celestina and Wally were no longer the center of attention, he indicated the array of desserts with his fork, smiled, and said, "I just want you to know, Celie, that these are sweets enough until we're married."

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