

A MIRACLE FOR THE BABY DOCTOR

It was hard for him to lie. He thought he was awkward at it because he had no practice. Hound knew better. He knew that magic itself resists untruth. Conjuring, sleight of hand, and false commerce with the dead are counterfeits of magic, glass to the diamond, brass to the gold. They are fraud, and lies flourish in that soil. But the art of magic, though it may be used for false ends, deals with what is real, and the words it works with are the true words. So true wizards find it hard to lie about their art. In their heart they know that their lie, spoken, may change the world..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..She dealt with them equally, too, favoring neither-except in-the matter of pie delivery. On those rare occasions when she could not make these rounds herself and when she had no one to turn to but a brother, Agnes always asked for Edom's help..He rode up to the third of five floors in the service elevator, which other tenants were permitted to use only when moving in or moving out, or when taking delivery of large items of furniture. Another elevator, at the front of the building, was too public to suit his purposes..She nodded. And could not lift her gaze from her hands. Could not meet his eyes, afraid that his worry would feed her own, afraid also that the sight of his sympathy would shake loose her perilous grip on her emotions..Yes, she did, she had one, but not much of one, and compared to the McIntosh in Google's throat, this was just a bitty crab apple, easy to overlook, not excessive for a woman..I. In the Dark Time.Halos and rainbows loomed in her memory, ominous as they had never been before..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." Otter hesitated and said, "Yes."..Because the glass wings of the open window didn't lie flat against the exterior wall, they blocked his view. He had to thrust himself farther through the opening, until he seesawed on the sill, before he could see the length of the entire block, in which the gallery stood at approximately the middle.."Nothing of the kind." Agnes smiled at Barty and wiggled her finger in his grip. "They've always been my salvation. I don't know what I'd do without them."..The moon shimmered, and the stars blurred-but only briefly, for her devotion to this boy was a fiery furnace that tempered the steel of her spine and brought a drying heat to her eyes. Without Franklin Chan's full approval but with his complete understanding, Agnes took Barty home. On Monday, they would return to Hoag Hospital, where Barty would receive surgery on Tuesday..Vanadium arrived and stood beside Junior. His black suit was cheap, but it fit better than Rudy's.."I'm not sure which is more unusual-the site of the eruption, the number of boils, or the size of them."..Evidently, last evening, prior to keeping a dinner date with Victoria, when the taunting detective had illegally entered Junior's house and placed another quarter on the nightstand, he had seen the directory open on the kitchen table. Deducing the meaning of the red check marks, he inserted this card and closed the book: another small assault in the psychological warfare that he'd been waging..'A energy fighting over jurisdiction. We cooperate. The sheriff can de not to put a lot of his limited resources into this, and no one will blame him. He can call it an accident and close the case, and he won't..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..Tom would have edged to his right, away from Edom, if Jacob hadn't flanked him. He remembered the odd comment that the more dour of the twins had made about the Bakersfield train wreck..The receptionist, Rebecca, had stayed late, just to keep company with Barty in the waiting room. As she settled into a chair beside the boy, he asked her if she knew what gravity was on Mars, and when she confessed ignorance, he said, "Only thirty-seven percent what it is here. You can really jump on Mars."..As though the blush were transmitted by a virus, Junior caught the primrose-pink contagion from the pianist..And there are songs, old lays and ballads from small islands and from the quiet uplands of Havnor, that tell the story of those years..From her reading, she knew that amniotic fluid should be clear. A few traces of blood in it should not necessarily be alarming, but here were more than traces. Here were thick red-black streams..Still looming over her, he snatched the pad out of her hands and examined the sketch. "Where would you have seen this?"..PZ7.L52I5 Tal 2001 [Fic]-dc21 2001016554..When he dared to look in the mirror above the sink, he expected to see a haggard face, sunken eyes, but the grim experience had left no visible mark. He quickly combed his hair. Indeed, he looked so fine that women would as usual caress him with their yearning gazes when he made his way back through the gallery..For a while, Celestina had worried that the girl was slower to walk than other children, slower to talk, and slower to develop her vocabulary, even though Celestina read aloud to her from storybooks every day. Then, during the past six months, Angel had caught up in a rush though she traveled a road somewhat different from what the childrearing books described. Her first word was mama, which was fairly standard, but her second was blue, which for a while came out "boo." At three, an average child would be doing exceptionally well to identify four colors; Angel could name eleven, including black and white, because she was able routinely to differentiate pink from red, and purple from blue..Their story would be that Cain's gun had jammed just as Tom had entered Barty's bedroom. Too cowardly for hand-to-hand combat, the Shamefaced Slayer had fled through the open window. He was loose once more in an unsuspecting world..Yet the coin was as real as dead Naomi broken on the stony ridge at the foot of the fire tower..Junior had almost fumbled his fork when he recognized the tune. His heart raced. His hands were suddenly clammy.."July 14, 1960, in Guatemala City, Guatemala, a fire in a mental hospital-two hundred twenty-five dead."..If she'd connected with his left side, as she intended, she might have broken his arm or cracked a

few ribs. But he saw the chair coming, and as agile as a base runner dodging a shortstop's tag, he turned away from her, taking the blow across his back. Junior no longer leaned casually on the casing. He put both hands flat against the door. Think, think. A three-minute drive to the Lampion place. Maybe two minutes, running stop signs, cutting corners. He wasn't entirely sure what all he hoped to find. Perhaps an envelope or a cash box with folding money, which a fleeing murderer would surely pause to take with him. Suspicions might be raised if he left it behind. Perhaps a savings-account passbook. Junior was less surprised by his sudden assault on Victoria than by the failure of the bottle to break. He was, after all, a new man since his decision on the fire tower, a man of action, who did what was necessary. But the bottle was glass, and he swung forcefully, hard enough that it smacked her forehead with a sound like a mallet cracking against a croquet ball, hard enough to put her out in an instant, maybe even hard enough to kill her, yet the Merlot remained ready to drink. Although he considered tearing up the letter and throwing it away he knew that his perceptions were clouded by grief and that what he'd written might seem fine if he reviewed it in a less dark state of mind. He returned the letter to the envelope and put it in the drawer of his nightstand. When the sound-suppressor was properly attached to the pistol, Junior Cain leaned closer to the girl, peered into her eyes, and whispered, "Naomi, are you in there?" Near the top of the stairs, Barty thought he heard voices in his bedroom. Soft and indistinct. When he stopped to listen, the voices fell silent, or maybe he only imagined them. "Nicholas Deed." On her tongue, the name was as bitter as a dissolving aspirin. He was a pretty good detective, but as regarded the minutiae of daily life, he wasn't as organized as he would like to be. He never remembered to set aside his holey socks for darning; and once he had worn a hat with a bullet hole in it for nearly a year before he'd at last thought to buy a new one. Too late, Paul thought of the one more thing he had wanted to say. Too late, he said it anyway, "God bless you." Calling after her, Agnes said, "No, wait, sugarpie. He should be coming down right now, before it gets dark." "Because He didn't want you to be a dog." She finished tying a bow in the drawstrings. "There. You look just like an M&M." The ship of night floated over the city and cast down nets of darkness, gathering millions of lights like luminous fishes in its black toils. "If they always go there, smooch--smooch, then you're going to wind up with one really fat finger." * Agnes returned home from a pie run with the usual team-grown to five vehicles, including paid employees-to find a gathering in the yard and Barty halfway up the oak. "Your mind is as fascinating as ever," he said. "Your soul as beautiful. Listen, Per, since we were thirteen, I was never primarily interested in your body. You flatter yourself shamelessly if you think it was all that special even before the polio." WHEN DR. JIM PARKHURST made his evening rounds, Junior didn't continue to feign sleep but asked earnest questions to which he knew most of the answers, having eavesdropped on the conversation between the physician and Detective Vanadium. For the first few bites of crab in a light cornmeal crust, Nolly suspended their conversation. Bliss. The three of them, gathered around her in the quick, held fast to her, as if Death couldn't take what they refused to release. This was a memory, not a real voice. Even after you became an accomplished meditator, the mind resisted this degree of blissful oblivion and tried to sabotage it with aural and visual memories. Since the cops believed that Junior accidentally shot himself while searching for a nonexistent burglar, he was already in their book as an idiot. If he tried to explain how Vanadium had tormented him with the quarter, and how a quarter turned up, of all places, in his cheeseburger, they would figure him for a hopeless hysteric. Later, as Bonita and Francesca proudly served their mother's individually molded Christmas-tree-shaped servings of flan, which they themselves had plated, Barty leaned close to his mother and, pointing to the table in front of them, said softly but excitedly, "Look at the rainbows!" Agnes, who inherited the property, would have welcomed her brothers in the main house. Although both were willing to visit her for an occasional dinner or to sit in rocking chairs on the porch, on a summer night, neither could abide living in that ominous place. He possessed vast files on tragic fires, and most of them were committed to memory. In Vienna's magnificent Ring Theater, December 8, a blaze claimed 850 lives. On May 25, 1887, 200 dead at the Opera Comique, Paris. November 28, 1942, in the Coconut Grove nightclub in Boston when Jacob was only fourteen years old and already. Edom and Jacob Isaacson were her older brothers, who lived in two small apartments above the four-car garage at the back of the property. Nolly raised his martini glass in a toast. "To Kathleen Klerkle Wulfstan, dentist and associate detective." Barty, she explained, would be rich in many ways. Financially rich, but also rich in talent, in spirit, intellect. Rich in courage, honor. With a wealth of common sense, good judgment, and luck. Celestina stood listening until she heard Wally open the outer door and then close it. THE MORNING THAT it happened was bright and blue in March, two months after Barty took Angel for a dry walk in wet weather, seven weeks after Celestina married Wally, and five weeks after the happy newlyweds completed their purchase of the Galloway house next door to the Lampion place. Selma Galloway, retired from a professorship years earlier, had subsequently retired further, taking advantage of the equity in her long-owned home to buy a little condo on the beach in nearby Carlsbad. In his mind, he carried a blueprint of the house more precisely drawn than anything that might have been prepared by an architect. He knew the place to the inch, and he adjusted his pace and all his mental calculations every month to compensate for his steady growth. So many paces from here to there. Every turn and every peculiarity of the floor plan committed indelibly to memory. A journey like this was a complicated mathematical problem, but being a math prodigy, he moved through his home almost as easily as when he had enjoyed sight. Thunder less distant now. Around her-the crackle of police radios, the clang of tools being readied, the skirl of a stiffening wind. Dizzying, these sounds. She couldn't shut her ears against them, and when she closed her eyes, she felt as though she were spinning..mother's understanding of the world and of her own existence. Unlike most other toddlers, Barty was entirely comfortable with change. From bottle to drinking glass, from crib to open bed, from favorite foods to untried flavors, he delighted in the new. Although Agnes usually remained near at hand, Barty was as pleased to be put temporarily in the care of Maria Gonzalez as in the care of Edom, and he smiled as brightly for his dour uncle Jacob as for anyone. 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..Ordinarily, a child of three would be too young to learn the use of a blind man's cane, but Barty wasn't ordinary. Initially, no cane was available for such a small child, so Barty began with a yardstick sawn off to twenty-six inches. By his last day, they had for him a custom cane, white with a black tip; the sight of it and all that it implied brought tears to Agnes just when she thought her heart had toughened for the task ahead..buttery sunshine, and emerald-black where the shadows of limbs and leaves overlay it. Fat crows as black as..Whether or not the visitor in the client's chair had ever known much romance, he unquestionably had experienced too much adventure and more than his share of tragedy. Thomas Vanadium's face was a quake-rocked landscape: cracked by white scars like fault lines in a strata of granite; the planes of brow, cheeks, and jaws canted in odd relationships to one another. The hemangioma that surrounded his right eye and discolored his face had been with him since birth, but the awful damage to his bone structure was the work of man, not God..Once he had toured the exhibition, managing not to shudder openly, he tried to hang out within hearing distance of Celestina White, but without appearing to be listening with special intensity.. "From childhood, I've had this ... awareness, this perception of an infinitely more complex reality than what my five basic senses reveal. A psychic claims to predict the future. I'm not a psychic. Whatever I am ... I'm able to feel a lot of the other possibilities inherent in any situation, to know they exist simultaneously with my reality, side by side, each world as real as mine. In my bones, in my blood-".In that instant, she knew the dreadful shape of the future, if not its fine details..Among those present before the caravan returned were a few who should have known better than to allow this madness. Tom Vanadium, Edom, Maria. They stared up at the boy, tense and solemn, and Agnes could only suppose that they, too, had arrived after the fact, with the boy already beyond easy recall..A nurse in surgical greens appeared. "Pull up the sleeves of your scrub nearly to your elbows. Scrub hard. I'll tell you when to stop-". "He came through the surgery well. He'll be in post-op for a while, then brought here to the ICU. His condition's critical, but there are degrees of critical, and I believe we'll be able to upgrade him to serious long before this day is over. He's going to make it-".Delighted to be dating someone who lived neck-deep in culture especially after two months with Tammy Bean, the money maiden. Junior was surprised that he didn't score with Frieda on the first date. He was usually irresistible even to women who weren't sluts..When the long table was laden and the wine poured, when everyone but Mary settled into chairs, Angel said, "My daughter tells me she wants to make a short presentation before I say grace. I don't know what it is, but she assures me it doesn't involve singing, dancing, or reading any of her poetry." I..By the time this operation concluded and the sulphurous Mr. Cain was brought to some form of justice, Simon might have spent twenty or twenty-five percent of the fee that he'd collected from the liability settlement in the matter of Naomi Cain's death. The attorney put a substantial price on his dignity and reputation..In the bedroom, as he opened a suitcase on the bed, he saw the quarter. Shiny. Heads-up. On the nightstand..Deciding that he didn't need an exit line, Junior headed toward the service road and his Suburban.. "Well, certainly, I understand," said Panglo, slowly lowering the offered hand, although he clearly didn't understand at all..Matching her fierce attention with a sudden intensity of his own, Joey said, "Bartholomew-".MONDAY MORNING, January 17, Agnes's lawyer, Vinnie Lincoln, came to the house with Joey's will and other papers requiring attention.. "In cases like this, the malignancy is often more advanced in one eye than the other. If the size of the tumor requires it, we remove the eye containing the greatest malignancy, and we treat the remaining eye with radiation-".Celestina was unable to talk reason to him, and even her mother, Grace, who was living here for the interim and who was always oil on the stormiest of waters, couldn't bring a moment's calm to the velvet squall that was Neddy Gnathic in full blow. He had learned about the baby five days ago, and he had been building force ever since, like a tropical depression aspiring to hurricane status..Knacker or Hisscus, or Nork, was talking about an offering, as though Naomi were a goddess to whom they wished to present a penance of gold and jewels..The enormous canopy of the oak didn't shelter the lawn beneath it. The leaves spooned the rain from the air, measuring it by the ounce, releasing it in thick drizzles instead of drop by drop..Having booked the suite for three nights, Tom expected that he would spend far fewer late hours in his bed than sitting watch in the shared living room..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..At 11:45, on her way to bed, Agnes stopped at Barty's room and found him propped against pillows. The book was not particularly large as books went, but it was big in proportion to the boy; unable to hold it open with his hands alone, he rested his entire left arm across the top of the volume..Their apartment was in a four-story Victorian house that dripped gingerbread, in the exclusive Pacific Heights district. It had been converted to apartments with deep respect for the architecture, years before Wally bought it.. "I can't sleep half the time," Deed said, twisting the baseball cap in his hands. "I've lost weight, and I'm so nervous, jumpy-". Junior had walked along the big show windows, studying the two White paintings displayed to passersby, appalled by their beauty, when suddenly the door had opened and a gallery employee had invited him to come in. No printed invitation needed, no cool test to pass, no bouncers keeping the gate. Such easy accessibility served as proof, if you needed it, that this was not real art..In the instant that Junior had shoved Naomi into the rotted railing, he had foreseen this visit from Rudy, Sheena, and Kaitlin. He'd known he could pretend to be offended at the state's offer to put a price on his loss, could feign revulsion, could resist convincingly--until gradually, after grueling days or weeks, he reluctantly allowed the indefatigable..More walls than not, in both rooms, were lined with bookshelves and file cabinets. Here he kept numerous case studies of accidents, man-made disasters, serial killers, spree killers: proof undeniable that humanity was a fallen species engaged in both the unintentional and calculated destruction of itself.. "It's what?" asked the detective, for with the exception of his teeth, he was not a self-improved individual.. "One hour," he announced, establishing a countdown. In sixty minutes, his internal clock would rouse him from a meditative

state.. "Veal fit for kings," said their waiter, delivering the entrees, and one taste confirmed his promise.. "No, I don't see it," Chicane repeated. "There's no benefit to a meditation marathon. Twenty minutes is enough, man. Half an hour at the most. You relied on your internal clock, didn't you?" He said this as though confident Agnes would understand what he meant, with a smile and with a glint in his eyes that almost became a wink, as if they were members of a secret society in which these three repeated words were code, embodying a complex meaning other than what was apparent to the uninitiated.. "What room has Mrs. Lombardi been moved to?" she asked. "I'd like to ... to see her before I go." "I'm no hero," Paul insisted. "I just got your mom out of there in the process of saving myself."

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