

BOA NOITE BICHO PAPAÓ

After she flushed, Angel stood on a stepstool and washed her hands at the sink. The lid of the cooler wasn't on as tight as it ought to have been. From around one edge slipped a thin and sinuous stream of smoke. Something on fire. Perhaps the paramedic had given him an injection, a sedative. The howling ambulance rocked along on this most momentous day, Junior Cain wept profoundly but quietly--and achieved temporary peace in a dreamless sleep. 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. "Here we are," said the driver, braking to a stop at the curb in front of the gallery. The investigator's suite--a minuscule waiting room and a small office--lacked a secretary but surely harbored all manner of vermin. 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. He folded over his too-tight shirt collar, and with a second chin more prominent than when he reached the Suburban and closed his right hand around the handle on the driver's door, he felt something peculiar against his palm. A small, cold object balanced there. Then it would stop. The torment would stop. Surely. His sense of drift, of sliding aimlessly through the days, would lift from him, and he would find purpose once more in determined self-improvement. He would definitely learn French and German. He would take cooking classes and become a culinary master. Karate, too. Raised by a father to whom any form of amusement was blasphemy, Agnes had never seen a magician perform until she was nineteen, when Joey Lampion, then her suitor, had taken her to a stage show. Rabbits plucked out of top hats, doves conjured from sudden plumes of smoke, assistants sawn in half and mended to walk again; every illusion that had been old even in Houdini's time was a jaw-dropping amazement to her that evening. Now she remembered a trick in which the magician had poured a pitcher of milk into a funnel fashioned from a few pages of a newspaper, causing the milk to vanish when the funnel, still dry, was unrolled to reveal ordinary newsprint. The thrill that had quivered through her that evening measured I on the Richter scale compared to the full 10-point sense of wonder quaking through her at the sight of Barty as dry as if he'd spent the afternoon perched fireside. "Usually, I throw out a bunch of hocus-pocus, flourishes and patter, to distract people, so they don't even realize that what they've seen was real. They think the midair disappearance is just a trick." "You'll be out of ICU tomorrow, I bet. You'll have a phone, I'll call. And I'll come soon as I can." He'd once spoken that very sentiment to her. Golden haze, sun in the heart. His words had melted her, tears had sprung into her eyes, and sex been better than ever. "She's got preeclampsia. It's a condition that occurs in about five percent of pregnancies, virtually always after the twenty-fourth week, and usually it can be treated successfully. But I'm not going to sugarcoat this, Celestina. In her case, it's more serious. She hasn't been seeing a doctor, no prenatal care, and here she is in the middle of her thirtieth week, about ten days from delivery." In a neatly groomed neighborhood of unassuming houses, Vanadium's place was as unremarkable as those around it: a single-story rectangular box of no discernible architectural style. White aluminum siding with green shutters. An attached two-car garage. Writing came with reading, and in a notebook, he began to make entries about points of interest in the stories that he enjoyed. His *Diary of a Book Reader*, as he titled it, fascinated Agnes, who read it with his permission; these notes to himself were enthusiastic, earnest, and charming--but literally month by month, Agnes noticed that they grew less naive, more complex, more contemplative. Here again were these peculiar grammatical constructions, which sometimes she had thought were just the mistakes that even a prodigy could be expected to make, and which sometimes she had interpreted as expressions of fanciful speculations, but which lately she had suspected were of a more complex--and perhaps darker--nature. Now her dread took form, and she wondered if the personality disorders that had shaped her brothers' lives could have roots not just in the abuse they had taken from their father, but also in a twisted genetic legacy that could manifest again in her son. In spite of his great gifts, Barty might be destined for a life limited by a psychological problem of a unique or at least different--nature, first suggested by these occasional conversations that seemed not fully coherent. In his room, he settled on the bed with his constipating snacks and the county telephone book. Because he had packed the directory with the Zedd collection, the thief hadn't gotten it. THE GENEROUS EXPENSE allowance provided by Simon Magusson paid for a three-room suite at a comfortable hotel. One bedroom for Tom Vanadium, one for Celestina and Angel. "Wally," Celestina said, without hesitation, because suddenly she saw something of a Wally in his green eyes, which were livelier than they had been before. 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. Agnes wanted to tell them that all their efforts would be to no avail, that they should cease and desist, be kind and let her go. She had no reason to stay here anymore. She was moving on to be with her dead husband and her dead baby, moving on to a place where there was no pain, where no one was as poor as he. He hadn't learned much from the call other than that they hadn't found Vanadium in his Studebaker at the bottom of Quarry Lake. "I never spoke with God--Nor visited in Heaven--Yet certain am I of the spot--As if the Checks were given." So she reached across her body with her left hand, which Celestina gripped tightly. "All right," Celestina conceded, and looked relieved. "Thank you, Paul. You're not only an exceptionally brave man but a gracious one, as well." Although only half the stools at the counter were occupied, and none of those close to Junior, customers were seated in most of the booths. Some had their backs to him, and three were about Vanadium's size. For two years, since finding the quarter in his cheeseburger, Junior had been searching for a metaphysics that he could embrace, that squared with all the truths that he had learned from Zedd, and that didn't require him to acknowledge any power higher than himself. Here it was. Unexpected. Complete. He didn't fully understand the bit about monkeys and barrels, but he got the rest of it, and peace of a sort descended

upon him.. "And, listen, if you leave too soon behind me, I've got a guy watching, and he'll put a hollow-point thirty-eight in your ass." Two teenage boys and one elderly woman scrambled across the sidewalk, grabbing at the ringing rain of quarters. They caught some, but others bounced and twirled through their grasping fingers, rolling-spinning away into the gutter.. "You can't take much of anything by mouth for a few hours yet," said the nurse. "Nausea is too great a risk. Retching might start you hemorrhaging again." "He's crafty, you say. Can you use him?" He had recently learned about the demigods of classic mythology in one of the selections from the Book-of-the-Month Club.. After supper in a roadside diner, Paul returned to his room and studied a tattered map of the western United States, the latest of several he'd worn out over the years. Depending on the weather and the steepness of the terrain, he might be able to reach Spruce Hills, Oregon, in ten days.. 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.. A cheer went up from family and friends, and Agnes could only imagine what it must feel like to be Barty, both blind and blessed, his heart as rich in courage as in kindness.. Judging by the evidence, the nurse was home alone, but Junior raised his voice above the music and called out, "Hello? Is anyone here?" The musician's bird-sharp gaze grew dull. His pink tongue protruded from his mouth, like a half-eaten worm.. Barty, at the head of the table, sensed Mary's approach only as she was about to touch him. She put a hand on his arm and said, "Daddy, will you turn your chair away from the table and let me sit on your lap?" Slamming through the door, letting it bang shut behind him hard enough to crack the glass, crossing the porch, Tom took the beauty of the day like a fist in the gut. It was too blue and too bright and too gorgeous to harbor death, and yet it did, birth and death, alpha and omega, woven in a design that flaunted meaning but defied understanding. It was a blow, this day, a hard blow, brutal in its beauty, in its simultaneous promises of transcendence and loss.. 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.. In Cain's bedroom, Tom Vanadium's hooded flashlight revealed a six-foot-high bookcase that held approximately a hundred volumes. The top shelf was empty, as was most of the second.. Not that he failed to perform well. As always, he was a bull, a stallion, an insatiable satyr. None of his lovers complained; none had the energy for complaint when he'd finished with them.. At nearly forty years of age, Edom still dreamed of that grim summer afternoon, although not as often as in the past. When it troubled his sleep these days, it was a nightmare that gradually metamorphosed into a dream of tenderness and hope. Until the last few years, he'd always awakened when the roses were being jammed into his mouth or when the thorns flicked through his eyelashes, or when Agnes began to strike their father with the Bible, thus seeming to assure worse punishment. This additional act, this transition from horror to hope before he woke, had been added when Agnes was pregnant with Barty. Edom didn't know why this should be so, and he didn't try to analyze it. He was simply grateful for the change, because he woke now in a state of peace, never with worse than a shudder, no longer with a hoarse cry of anguish.. In the noble ruin of his face, Thomas Vanadium's smoke-gray eyes were striking, filled with a beautiful ... sorrow. Not self-pity. He clearly didn't regard himself as a victim. This, Kathleen felt, was the sorrow of a man who had seen too much of the suffering of others, who knew the evil ways of the world. These were eyes that read you at a glance, that shone with compassion if you deserved it, and that glared with a terrifying judgment if compassion wasn't warranted.. At the midpoint of the table, directly under the chandelier, the flashing silvery disc turned through the air, turned, turned, turned out of this world into another.. In the city again, he stopped long enough to donate the raincoat to a homeless man who didn't notice the few odd stains. This pathetic hobo happily accepted the fine coat, donned it-and then cursed his benefactor, spat at him, and threatened him with a claw hammer.. She moved beside him. "For one minute, after her heart stopped the first time, she wasn't here in St. Mary's, was she? Her body, yes, that was still here, but not Phimie." By this time, Vinton had finished, commercials had run, and the number-two song had started: "Come See About Me," by the Supremes.. Caesar Zedd recommended not merely seizing the day but devouring it. Chew it up, feed on the day, swallow the day whole. Feast, said Zedd, feast, approach life as a gourmet and as a glutton, because he who practices restraint will have stored up no sustaining memories when famine inevitably comes.. In a sudden desperate burst of action, Junior tore at the dead man's closed hand, sprang open the trap of fingers and palm-and did not find a quarter. Nor two dimes and a nickel. Nor five nickels. Nothing. Zip. Zero.. By the time he went to bed Saturday night, the cards that had been only that morning were showing signs of wear.. Raising his revolver, Tom squeezed off two shots, but the gun didn't discharge.. From serviceway to alley to serviceway to street, into the city and the fog and the night, Junior ran from the Cain past into the Pinchbeck future.. No turning back. In the fuming blackness, they would become disoriented in seconds, fall, and suffocate as surely as they would burn. Besides, the open window, providing draft, would draw the fire rapidly down the hallway at their backs.. "All right. Well ... Jesuits are encouraged to pursue education in any subject that interests them, not theology alone. I was deeply interested in physics." Kathleen watched him with obvious amusement, aware that he was savoring her suspense as much as he was the appetizer.. Tom stared at the girl's drawing-quite a good one for a child her age, rough in style, but with convincing detail-and if skin could be said to crawl, his must have moved all the way around his body two or three times before settling down again where it belonged. "Are these ... ?" Junior raised his voice even further: "In those old movies, the Little Rascals." He knew for a fact that Seraphim had died in childbirth. He had seen the gathering of Negroes at her funeral in the cemetery, the day of Naomi's burial. He had heard Max Bellini's message on the maniac cop's Ansaphone.. Of the things you couldn't have seen coming, I'm the worst ... I'm the worst ... I'm the worst..... At 3:22 in the morning, December 13, following a busy day of conducting ghost research, seeking Bartholomews in a telephone book, and working on his needlepoint, Junior awakened to singing. A single voice. No instrumental accompaniment. A woman.. As the afternoon waned toward a portentous dusk and toward the gallery reception for Celestina White, Junior prepared his knives and guns.. to believe

that any man with such a hard gut slung over his belt, with a bull neck. The bullet had been fired by a renegade cop who was every bit as lousy a marksman as he was a corrupt scumball. He'd been aiming for Nolly's crotch. As Celestina and her mother loaded the last of the pies into the ice chests in the Suburban, Paul and Agnes came back from her station wagon at the head of the caravan. "Don't worry, love. I'll make sure the snap's are constructed so you can get it off me easily enough." Having ridden from the church to the cemetery with Hanna, his housekeeper, Paul chose to walk home. The distance between Perri's new bed and her old was only three miles, and the afternoon mild. Maria looked stricken when she answered the doorbell, for she intuited that a visit, instead of a call, meant the worst. Shivering, Junior slammed the trunk lid and warily surveyed the lonely landscape. Black pines spread bristled arms through the chary night, and the moon cast down a jaundiced light that seemed to obscure more than it illuminated. Without using his flashlight, depending only on the moon, he ascended through the cemetery to the service road. "This is Detective Bellini, with the San Francisco Police Department. Is everything all right there?" She always had a generous heart. After disease whittled Perri's flesh, leaving her so frail, her great heart, undiminished by her suffering, seemed bigger than the body that contained it. of fists, hard blows, and his father's heavy breathing as he deals out the punishment. Edom himself lies face down in. Then he looked up at the massive limbs overhead, and the mood changed: A sense of impending insight at once gave way to the fear that an unsuspected fissure in a huge limb might crack through at this precise moment, crushing him under a ton of wood, or that the Big One, striking now, would topple the entire oak. The gas oven might blow up in his face, at last bringing him peace, but if it didn't, he would at least have cookies for Agnes. To his room then, where they sat side by side in bed, a plate of chocolate-chip cookies between them. Through the evening, they stepped off this earth and out of all its troubles, into a world of adventure, where friendship and loyalty and courage and honor could deal with any malignancy. Sapphires and emeralds, dazzling gems set in clearest white, ebony pupils at the center. Beautiful mysteries, these eyes, but no different now than they had ever been, as far as she could tell. Evidently, either Frank Sinatra was an enthusiasm that Victoria and the detective shared, or the nurse purchased some of the crooner's records expressly for their dinner engagement. He paid cash to the locksmith, and included in the payment were the two dimes and the nickel Vanadium had left on his nightstand. A cause now apparent, the fear explained, Agnes held her baby more tightly. So new to the world, he seemed already to be slipping away from her, captured by the whirlpool of a demanding destiny. 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. At this extreme end of town, no streetlamps lit the pavement. With only moonlight to reveal him, he wasn't likely to be recognized if anyone happened to glance out a window. Now, trouble. Different from what he'd experienced before but just as powerful and terrifying. He didn't need to regurgitate, but he desperately needed to evacuate. From the phone, Barty proceeded directly to the refrigerator. He opened the door, got a can of orange soda, and returned without hesitation to his chair at the table. Waste of time to check those places. More likely, woman and boy were hiding in the last room. This guy was spooky. Junior was beginning to think that the detective's unorthodox behavior wasn't a carefully crafted strategy, as it had first seemed, but that Vanadium was a little wacky. "July 6, 1944, in Hartford, Connecticut, a fire broke out in the great tent of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus at two-forty in the afternoon, while six thousand patrons watched the Wallendas, a world-famous high-wire troupe, ascend to begin their act. By three o'clock, the fire burned out, following the collapse of the flaming tent, leaving one hundred sixty-eight dead. Another five hundred people were badly injured, but one thousand circus animals-including forty lions and forty elephants-were not harmed." 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. He slept outdoors rarely and otherwise stayed in inexpensive motels, boardinghouses, and YMCAs. The blessing of Nellie's silence lasted only until Hanna, cursed with speech if not with sufficient strength to stand, said, "We tried to reach you, Mr. Damascus, but you'd already left the pharmacy." The previous April, the lads from Liverpool had claimed all five of the top five. Real Americans, like the Beach Boys and the Four Seasons, were forced to settle for lower numbers. It made you wonder who had really won the Revolutionary War. When at last he spoke, real grief, quiet but profound, softened his voice: "March first, three years ago, my wife and two sons-Danny and Harry, both seven, twins-were coming home from visiting her parents in New York. Shortly after takeoff ... their plane went down." FOR AMERICANS OF Chinese descent-and San Francisco has a large Chinese population-1965 was the Year of the Snake. For Junior Cain, it was the Year of the Gun, though it didn't start out that way. Through her efforts, the Bright Beach Public Library sponsored an ambitious oral-history project financed by two private foundations and by an annual strawberry festival. Local retirees were enlisted to record the stories of their lives, so that their experiences, insights, and knowledge wouldn't be lost to generations yet unborn. In reaction to a terrible sense of weightlessness, Agnes's two-fisted grip on the steering wheel grew so tight her hands ached. She held on with all her strength, as if at real risk of floating out of the car and up toward the source of the raveling skeins of rain. Trembling and sweating, he turned his back to the view window. As he retreated from the creche, he expected the oppressive pall of fear to lift, but it grew heavier. On the second morning of Barty's illness, Agnes came downstairs and found him at the kitchen table, in his pajamas, happily applying unconventional hues to a scene in a coloring book. The second and third rooms proved to be deserted, as well, and as muffled as the cushioned spaces of a funeral home, but an office was tucked discreetly at the back of the final chamber. As Junior crossed the third room, apparently monitored by closed-circuit security cameras, a man glided out of the office to greet him. "Wrong about what, sugarpie smooosh--smooosh?" Celestina asked as Wally pulled to the curb again and parked. 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..St. Mary's social workers did not arrive with dawn, so Celestina was given the privacy of one of their offices, where the wet face of the morning pressed blurrily at the windows, and where she phoned her parents with the terrible news. From here, too, she arranged with a mortician to collect Phimie's body from the cold-storage locker in the hospital morgue, embalm it, and have it flown home to Oregon..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..When he woke, he was in a hospital bed, his upper body slightly elevated. The only illumination was provided by a single window: an ashen light too dreary to be called a glow, trimmed into drab ribbons by the."Yes. The dried root of a Brazilian plant, the ipecacuanha. It induces vomiting with great effectiveness. The active ingredient is a powdered white alkaloid called emetine.".Three minutes by car, maybe two without stop signs. He could just about run it as fast as drive it. He had a bit of a gut on him. He wasn't the man he used to be. Ironically, however, after the coma and the rehab, he wasn't as heavy as he had been before Cain sunk him in Quarry Lake..against his face, thorns gouging his skin, piercing his lips. His father, oblivious of his own puncture wounds, trying to.Junior was glad for the chance to eavesdrop, not only because he hoped to learn the nature and depth of Vanadium's suspicions, but also because he was curious-and concerned-about the cause of the disgusting and embarrassing episode that had landed him here..After following his uncle's movements, Barty looked at the table again. "Pie, pie, pie, pie, pie, pie.".Worrying is what mothers do best. Celestina was her mother, as far as Angel was concerned, and the child was not yet of an age to be told, and to understand, that she had been blessed with two mothers: the one who gave birth to her, and the one who raised her..Under other circumstances, Agnes might have blushed, but now her apparently irrational fear of too much life insurance had been vindicated..Even though the detective was on the wrong track, Junior was beginning to feel aggrieved. As any good citizen, he was willing, even eager to cooperate with responsible policemen who conducted their investigation by the book. This Thomas Vanadium, however, in spite of his monotonous voice and drab appearance, gave off the vibes of a fanatic..On Thursday, January 4, he used his John Pinchbeck identity to purchase a new Ford van with a cashier's check. He leased a private garage space in the Pinchbeck name, near the Presidio, and stored the van there..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..".Most tornadoes stay on the ground twenty miles or less," Edom explained, "but this one kept its funnel to the earth for two hundred nineteen miles! And it was one mile wide. Everything in its path--torn, smashed to bits. Houses, factories, churches, schools--all pulverized. Murphysboro, Illinois, was wiped off the map, erased, hundreds killed in that one town..".This unflinching consistency of packaging enables card mechanics, professional gamblers, sleight-of-hand magicians--to manipulate a new deck with confidence that they know, starting, where every card can be found in the stack. An expert mechanic with practiced and dexterous hands can appear to shuffle so thoroughly that even the most suspicious observer will be satisfied--yet he will still know exactly where every card is located in the deck. With masterly manipulation, he can place the cards in the order that he wishes, to achieve whatever effect he desires.

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