

# NEW YORK SKETCHES

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but between two evils. For themselves, they create world after world of despair. For others, they make worlds of pain..As punctilious as you might expect any good accountant to be, Bartholomew Prosser didn't delay long enough to make it necessary for Junior to ring the bell twice. The porch light came on..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..Celestina, the battering Baptist, back in action, came at him again. With one leg broken, another cracked, and the stretcher bar splintered, the chair wasn't as formidable a weapon as it had been. She swung it, Junior dodged, she struck at him again, he juked, and she reeled away from him, gasping..As they moved around the base of the oak from one vantage point to another, people stopped by to reassure Agnes, although never with a word, as though to speak would be to jinx the climb. Maria placed a hand on her arm, squeezed gently. Celestina briefly massaged the nape of her neck. Edom gave her a quick hug. Grace slipped an arm around her waist for a moment. Wally with a smile and a thumbs-up sign. Tom Vanadium, thumb and forefinger in a confident OK. Lookin' good. Hang in there. Signs and gestures, maybe because they didn't want her to hear the quivers and catches in their voices..A table candle glowed in an amber glass. To Nolly, in this glimmering light, Kathleen's face was more radiant than the flame..When he noticed a blonde staring at him from a nearby booth, he smiled and winked at her. Although she was not attractive enough to meet his standards, there was no reason to be impolite.. "You did just fine, Tom, just fine," Agnes said in a consoling tone that she might have used with a boy whose performance, at a piano recital, had been earnest but undistinguished. "We were all quite impressed." "No. Lampion. Somewhere in your father's French background, there must have been lamp makers. A lampion is a small lamp, an oil lamp with a tinted-glass chimney. Among other things, in those long ago days, they used them on carriages." "He knew how you felt about having too much life insurance. So he didn't disclose it to you." Tom between curiosity and emotional exhaustion, Celestina held his gaze, thinking, and finally she said, "Deal." Agnes was not fully aware of how she was lifted from the car, but she remembered looking back and seeing Joey's body huddled in the tangled shadows of the wreckage, remembered reaching toward him, desperate for the anchorage that he had always given her, and then she was on the gurney and moving..When Junior opened the trunk, he discovered that fishing gear and two wooden carriers full of carpenter's tools left no room for a dead detective. He would be able to make the body fit only if he dismembered it first..But the other learning he had been given had made Otter touchy in these matters, delicate of conscience. The big galley they were building now would be rowed to war by Losen's slaves and would bring back slaves as cargo. It galled him to think of the good ship in that vicious usage. "Why can't we build fishing boats, the way we used to?" he asked, and his father said, "Because the fishermen can't pay us." Matching her fierce attention with a sudden intensity of his own, Joey said, "Bartholomew." Junior raised his voice even further: "In those old movies, the Little Rascals." "We were about to order dinner from room service," Tom said, handing a menu to Paul..What he learned working with his father and uncle in the shipyard he could use, at least; and he was becoming a good craftsman, even his father would admit that..As the fragrances of wet wool and sodden denim rose from her sweater and jeans, Agnes switched on the heater and angled the vanes of the middle vent toward Barty. "Honey, turn that other vent toward yourself." In spite of the ravages of illness and age, beauty remained in the old woman's face. Her bone structure was superb. In youth, she must have been stunning.. "Whatever you're paying here, that's what you'll pay for the new place," Lipscomb said. "I know how to build boats, how to sail boats." As home tours went, this one was notably less interesting than most. The accountant appeared to have no secret life, no perverse interests that he hid from the world..An SFPD patrol car swept past, its siren silent, the rack of emergency beacons flashing on its roof..After prying Junior out of the meditative position, Chicane pushed him onto his back and vigorously--indeed, violently--massaged his thighs and calves. "Really bad muscle spasms," he explained..When Agnes was surprised to discover that Barty's name had been inspired by the reverend's famous sermon, Paul was startled. He had heard "This Momentous Day" on its first broadcast, and learning that it would be rerun three weeks later by popular demand, he'd urged Joey to listen. Joey had heard it on Sunday, the second of January, 1965--just four days before the birth of his son.. "I guess so, but it's not that. I was thinking of something my little girl said." From the bathroom, Junior gathered an electric razor and toiletries. He added these to the suitcases..Music played within. An up-tempo number. Possibly swing. He couldn't quite identify the tune.. "Thank you, Dr. Lipscomb. I'll keep track of what you're losing every month, and someday I'll pay it back to you." Angel followed him at two steps, and when she stood beside his chair, watching him open the soft drink, Barty said, "Why were you following me?" Licky did not take him into the roaster tower, but back to the barracks. From a locked room he brought out a small, soft, thick, leather bag that weighed heavy in his hands. He opened it to show Otter the little pool of dusty brilliance lying in it. When he closed the bag the metal moved in it, bulging, pressing, like an animal trying to get free..He'd never had a chance to read this to Perri or to benefit from her opinion. Now, as he scanned the lines of his calligraphic handwriting, his words seemed foolish, inappropriate, confused..This ended any hope of romance, and he was disappointed. A less self-controlled man might have seized a nearby bronze vase--fashioned to resemble dinosaur stool--and stuffed her into it or vice versa..Confused, Panglo held out his right hand, but Jacob said, "Sorry, no offense, but I don't shake with anyone." "So entertaining, I felt I should have paid for those seats. When the third machine starts whizzing coins at him, he bolts like a kid running a graveyard at midnight on a dare." Nolly laughed, remembering..Without a word, Joshua Nunn and the paramedic retreated to the foyer. The parlor doors slid shut..This morning, Damascus had left the house early, before Vanadium came downstairs, which was perfect for Junior's purposes. While the maniac cop was finishing his shave and shower, Junior crept upstairs to check his room. He discovered the revolver in the second of the three places that he expected it to be, did his work, and returned the weapon to the nightstand drawer in precisely the position that he had found it. Narrowly avoiding an encounter with Vanadium in the hall, he retreated to the ground floor. After some fussing over the most effective placement, he left the quarter and the luggage--just as Vanadium, the human stump, clumped down the stairs. Junior experienced an unexpected delay when the detective spent half an hour making phone calls from the study, but then Vanadium went into the kitchen, allowing him to slip out of the house and complete his work..Breath repeatedly catching in her throat, heart thudding, Agnes watched her son through the open car door..Oregon State Police might find at least one reason to be suspicious of the tragic scenario that he was creating. He didn't know much about the technology that police might employ at a crime scene, and he knew even less about forensic pathology. He was just doing the best job he could.. "That's not what they say," the boy replied with a giggle, for his extensive reading had introduced him to words that he and she agreed were not his to use..Amazed, Agnes gaped at her baby. The throat lump that blocked her speech was part pride, part awe, and part fear, though she didn't at once understand why this wonderful precociousness should frighten her..Life was too short to waste it working if you had the means to afford lifelong

leisure..Although their apartments were above the garage, back to back, each was served by a separate exterior staircase. As often as either man entered the other's domain, they might as well have lived hundreds of miles apart..An IV rack stood beside the bed, dripping fluid into his vein, replacing the electrolytes that he had lost through vomiting, most likely medicating him with an antiemetic as well. His right arm was securely strapped to a supporting board, to prevent him from bending his elbow and accidentally tearing out the needle..This time he didn't flip the quarter straight into the air. He tipped his hand, and with his thumb, he shot the coin toward Agnes..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..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.. "Well," Agnes said, "thank the Lord, we don't have tornadoes here in California." "What was it like, Enoch? Did you look into her eyes when you pushed her?" Vanadium's uninflected monologue was like the voice of a conscience that preferred to torture by droning rather than by nagging. "Or doesn't a woman-killing coward like you have the guts for that? ".Without commenting, Tom continued: "And worlds just like ours-except that my parents never met, and I was never born. Worlds in which Wally was never shot because he was too unsure of himself or just too stupid to take Celestina to dinner that night or to ask her to marry him." Nolly, Kathleen, and Sparky had prepared him for Industrial Woman, but when the flashlight beam flared off her fork-and-fan-blade face, Vanadium twitched in fright. Without fully realizing what he was doing, he crossed himself.. "I'm going to tell you something about your father that might comfort you," he said, "but you can't ask me for more than I'm ready to say right now. It's all a part of what I'll discuss with you in Bright Beach." The fully evolved man never has to rely on the gods of fortune, Zedd tells us, because he makes his luck with such reliability that he can spit in the faces of the gods with impunity..On that busy night, with Vanadium's corpse in the Studebaker and Victoria's cadaver awaiting a fiery disposal at her house, Junior was too distracted to recognize the pertinence of the message. Now it tormented him from a dark nook in his subconscious.. "Cash," Junior said. "I'll pay cash, with whatever amount of deposit is required." "If you're a dowser, better dowse," said Licky, coming up alongside him and looking sidelong into his face. "And if you're not, you'd better dowse all the same. That way you'll stay above ground longer." 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..Vanadium clearly spent a lot of time in the kitchen; it was the only room in the house that felt comfortable and lived-in. Lots of culinary gadgets, appliances. Pots and pans hanging from a ceiling rack. A basket of onions, another of potatoes. A grouping of bottles with colorful labels proved to be a collection of olive oils.. "Who...who're you?" Junior rasped, still badly rattled by the nightmare and by Vanadium's presence, but quick-witted enough to stay within the clueless character that he had been playing..The traffic light turned green. Now onward home. Rolex recovered and bright upon his wrist, Junior Cain drove his Mercedes with a restraint that required more self-control than he had realized he could tap, even with the guidance of Zedd..He swept the immediate area with the flashlight, and shadows spun with shadows, waltzing spirits in the ballroom of the night..He stashed two suitcases full of clothes and toiletries-plus the contents of Pinchbeck's safe-deposit box-in the van, and then added those precious items that he'd be loath to lose if the hit on Bartholomew went wrong, forcing him to leave his Russian Hill life and flee arrest. The works of Caesar Zedd. Sklent's three brilliant paintings. The needlepoint pillows, to which he'd colorfully applied the wisdom of Zedd, constituted the bulk of this collection of bare essentials: 102 pillows in numerous shapes and sizes, which he had completed in just thirteen months of feverish stitchery~.As Lipscomb picked up the freshened baby, Grace said, "That was as effective as any minister's wife could've been with an impossible parishioner-and, oh, do I wish we could sometimes be that pointed." Their station wagon stood along the service road, at least a hundred yards from the grave. With no wind to harry it, the rain fell as plumb straight as the strands of beaded curtains, and beyond these pearly veils, the car appeared to be a shimmering dark mirage..He briefly considered playing dumb, but he knew she was too smart for that. "Gunsmoke, you mean. Listen, I know you'll do whatever's necessary to keep Angel safe, because you love her so much. Love will give..Magically, a shiny quarter appeared in Thomas Vanadium's right hand. It turned end over end, knuckle to knuckle, disappeared between thumb and forefinger, and reappeared at the little finger, beginning its cross-hand journey once more.. "Now this. But even if your dad had cooperated with me, nothing would have changed. Since Phimie never revealed his name, I wouldn't have been able to go after Cain any differently or more effectively." For a long time, she stood beside the bed, holding his hand, confident that on some level he was aware of her presence, though he gave no indication whatsoever that he knew she was there..He never passed through a phase during which he grew resistant to hugging or kissing. He was a hand-holding, cuddling boy to whom displays of affection came easily..She shivered, and Edom, thinking that she had caught a chill ripped off his suit jacket and draped it over her shoulders..Across the room, the girl on the window seat showed no awareness of his arrival. She sat sideways to him in the niche, with her back against one wall, knees drawn up, a big sketch pad braced against her thighs, working intently with colored pencils..To celebrate, upon leaving the gallery, he went to the coffee shop in the Fairmont Hotel, atop Nob Hill, determined to have a beer and a cheeseburger..Junior flung back the covers and came to his feet, but his knees proved weak, and he sat at once on the edge of the bed..As he turned the corner onto Jasmine Way, he felt his heart lift in expectation of the sight of his home. It wasn't a grand residence--a typical Main Street, USA, house-but it was more splendid to Paul than Paris, London, and Rome combined, cities that he would never see and would never regret failing to see..Barty, thirteen years old but listening to books at a postgraduate college level, had no doubt studied leukemia while they were awaiting the test results, to prepare himself to fully understand the diagnosis on first receiving it. He tried not to look stricken when he heard acute myeloblastic, which was the worst form of the disease, but he appeared more ghastly in his pretense than if he had revealed his understanding. Had his eyes not been artificial, his stiff-upper-lip pose would have been utterly unconvincing..As Wally followed them inside, Celestina grinned at him. "From the car to the living room, all as neat as a well-practiced ballet. We've got a big headstart on this married thing." Junior's throat wasn't half as sore as it had been the previous afternoon, and to these men, his soft, coarse voice must have sounded not abraded, but raw with emotion. "I don't care what's customary. I don't want anything. I don't blame anyone. These things

happen. If you have a liability release with you, I'll sign it right now." Not one day in anyone's life, so her father taught, is an uneventful day, no day without profound meaning, no matter how dull and boring it might seem, no matter whether you are a seamstress or a queen, a shoeshine boy or a movie star, a renowned philosopher or a Downs syndrome child. Because in every day of your life, there are opportunities to perform little kindnesses for others, both by conscious acts of will and unconscious example. Each smallest act of kindness—even just words of hope when they are needed, the remembrance of a birthday, a compliment that engenders a smile—reverberates across great distances and spans of time, affecting lives unknown to the one whose generous spirit was the source of this good echo, because kindness is passed on and grows each time it's passed, until a simple courtesy becomes an act of selfless courage years later and far away. Likewise, each small meanness, each thoughtless expression of hatred, each envious and bitter act, regardless of how petty, can inspire others, and is therefore the seed that ultimately produces evil fruit, poisoning people whom you have never met and never will. All human lives are so profoundly and intricately entwined—those dead, those living, those generations yet to come—that the fate of all is the fate of each, and the hope of humanity rests in every heart and in every pair of hands. Therefore, after every failure, we are obliged to strive again for success, and when faced with the end of one thing, we must build something new and better in the ashes, just as from pain and grief, we must weave hope, for each of us is a thread critical to the strength—to the very survival—of the human tapestry. Every hour in every life contains such often-unrecognized potential to affect the world that the great days for which we, in our dissatisfaction, so often yearn are already with us; all great days and thrilling possibilities are combined always in this momentous day. Yet in her heart, she wouldn't relinquish hope for a miracle. This was an amazing boy, a prodigy, a boy who could walk where the rain wasn't, already himself a miracle, and it seemed that anything might happen, that Dr. Chan might suddenly rush into the waiting room, surgical mask dangling from his neck, face aglow, with news of a spontaneous rejection of the cancer. His dry tongue, his parched mouth, his desiccated throat felt packed fall of sand, and his voice lay buried alive down there. What the commodifiers of fantasy count on and exploit is the insuperable imagination of the reader, child or adult, which gives even these dead things life—of a sort, for a while. Celestina intended to capture Nella as she was now, head at rest upon the pillow of, perhaps, her deathbed, eyes closed and mouth slack, face ashen but serene. Then she would draw four more portraits, using bone structure and other physiological evidence to imagine how the woman had looked at sixty, forty, twenty, and ten. 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. Recognizing the danger of saying the wrong thing, the potential for self-incrimination, Junior clenched his jaws and waited. exercise. Although they expected him to be dizzy, he had no difficulty whatsoever with his balance, and in spite of feeling a little drained, he wasn't as weak as they thought he was. He could have toured the hospital unassisted, but he played to their expectations and used the wheeled walker. Not that she ever gave any indication that her brothers were other than a source of pride for her. She treated them always with respect, tenderness, and love—as if unaware of their shortcomings. Setting out after dark, Paul had walked south, following the coastal highway. He was accompanied by the windy rush of passing traffic, but later only by the occasional cry of a blue heron, the whisper of a salty breeze in the shore grass, and the murmur of the surf. Without pushing himself too hard, he reached La Jolla by dawn. When she discovered she was pregnant, Phimie dealt with this new trauma as other naive fifteen-year-olds had done before her: She sought to avoid the scorn and the reproach that she imagined would be heaped upon her for having failed to reveal the rape at the time it occurred. With no serious thought to long-term consequences, focused solely on the looming moment, in a state of denial, she made plans to conceal her condition as long as possible. She continued: "When we don't allow ourselves to hope, we don't allow ourselves to have purpose. Without purpose, without meaning, life is dark. We've no light within, and we're just living to die." Simon's a good man. Now that he pretty much knows Cain pushed the wife, he doesn't feel better about representing him just because the payoff was big. And in the current case, he's not Cain's lawyer, so there's no conflict of interest, no ethics problem, so he's got a chance to set things right a little. Junior wanted to shoot all of them, but he said, "Take it. Keep it. Get it the hell out of here." With every step through the long night walk, Paul had considered what he would say, must say, if this encounter ever took place. Now all his practiced words deserted him.

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