

HENRY OSCAR HOUGHTON A BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

According to Helen, more than half the paintings had been sold by the close of the reception, a record for the gallery. With the exhibition scheduled to run two fall weeks, she was confident that they would enjoy a sellout or the next thing to it. When she tried to speak to him, she could no more easily raise her voice than she could extend a hand to him. Dr. Zedd's death, just last Thanksgiving, had been a blow to Junior, a loss to the nation, to the entire world. He considered it a tragedy equal to the Kennedy assassination one year previous. 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. "Blood tests should reveal whether the child's yours or not. That also might explain all this." Neddy possessed all the musical talent, but Junior had the muscle. Pinned against the wall, his throat in the vise of Junior's hands, Neddy needed a miracle if he were ever again to sweep another glissando from a keyboard. A shiver of awe traveled Celestina's spine, because she knew what the physician's next words would surely be. As she clambered through the open door into Celestina's lap, the girl said, "Uncle Wally gave me an Oreo." Barty never cried. In the hospital neonatal unit, he'd been a marvel to the nurses, because when the other newborns were squalling in chorus, Barty had been unfailingly serene. Three times, Mary vanished, and three times she reappeared, before she led the bamboozled Koko to her mother and father. "Neat, huh?" The 9-mm pistol and the ammunition were on the foyer table. With trembling hands, Junior tore open the boxes and loaded the gun. But both the Church and quantum physics contend there is no such thing. Coincidence is the result of mysterious design and meaning--or it's strange order underlying the appearance of chaos. Take your pick. Or, if you choose, feel free to believe that they're one and the same. EARLY CHRISTMAS EVE, gallery brochure in hand, Junior returned to his apartment, puzzling over mysteries that had nothing to do with guiding stars and virgin births. Barty approached stair climbing as a mathematical problem, calculating the precise movement of each leg and placement of each foot necessary to successfully negotiate the obstacle. He proceeded less slowly on the next three steps than he had on the first three, and thereafter he ascended with growing confidence, pumping his legs with machinelike precision. The muscles of his legs grew as hard as any of the landscapes that he trod. Granite thighs; calves like marble, roped with veins. Last night, in the superintendent's basement apartment, as they shared a bottle of wine, Sparky had told Vanadium numerous weird tales about Cain: The Night He Shot Off His Toe, The Day He Was Saved from a Meditative Trance and Paralytic Bladder, The Day the Psychotic Girlfriend Brought a Vietnamese Potbellied Pig to His Apartment When He Was Out and Fed It Laxatives and Penned It in His Bedroom Spacious, the living room was furnished for two purposes: as a parlor in which to receive visiting friends, but also with two beds, because here Paul and Perri slept every night. The girl was creepy, no doubt about it, and Junior felt now precisely as he had felt on the night of Celestina's exhibition at the Greenbaum Gallery, when he had come out of the alleyway after disposing of Neddy Gnathic in the Dumpster and had checked his watch only to discover his bare wrist. He was missing something here, too, but it wasn't merely a Rolex, wasn't a thing at all, but an insight, a profound truth. unwittingly oversell any strong reaction, striking a false note and raising suspicions. Just as the man turned away, Junior got a glimpse of what he wore under a London Fog raincoat. Between the lapels of the coat: a white shirt with a wing collar, a black bow tie, the suggestion of black-satin lapels like those on a tuxedo jacket. 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. The can struck Junior hard in the face, breaking his nose, before he could duck. Strangely, as sometimes happened in this room, his missing toe itched. There was no point in removing his shoe and sock to scratch the stump, because that would provide no relief. Curiously, the itch was in the phantom toe itself, where it could never be scratched. They were driven to St. Mary's by Detective Bellini in a police sedan. Tom Vanadium--a friend of her father's whom she had met a few times in Spruce Hills, but whom she didn't know well--literally rode shotgun, tensed to react, wary of the occupants of other vehicles on. All these punctures in the wall. Gouges. Slashes. So much rage required to make them. Scamp was a multitasking woman, with smoother skin than a depilated peach, with more delicious roundnesses than Junior could catalog, but she proved not to be the remedy for his tension. Only Bartholomew, found and destroyed, could give him peace. 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. 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." When the third knave of spades appeared, Edom said to Maria, "What kind of enemy does three in a row describe?" They would have given him an antinausea medication. It most likely wasn't going to work quickly enough to save him..out of hand. "Well ... yes, I suppose so." Spineless, unethical quack bastard, Junior thought bitterly. Three and a half days had passed since he'd pushed his wife off the tower, and in that time he'd had no real fun. He was gregarious by nature, never one to turn down a party invitation. He liked to laugh, to love, to live, but he couldn't enjoy life when he must remember at all times to appear bereft and to keep sorrow in his voice. Joey rested not under the stern watch of the cypresses, but near a California pepper tree. With its graceful, cascading boughs, it appeared to stand in meditation or in prayer. If he hadn't been such a rational, stable, no-nonsense person all of his life, Junior might have thought he was losing his mind. By nature, she was unable to hold fast to resentment, couldn't nurture a grudge, and was incapable of vengeance. She had forgiven even her father, who had put her through hell for so long, who had blighted the lives of her brothers,

and who had killed her mother. Forgiving was not the same as condoning. Forgiving did not mean that you had to exonerate or forget..At first all had gone well. Agnes, Maria, and Edom were rightly amazed. A thrill of wonder and big smiles all around the table. They were enthralled by the astoundingly favorable fall of cards, a breathtaking mathematical improbability..For the first time since walking to La Jolla to meet Jonas Salk, Paul planned a journey with a specific purpose..They were each down to one last sip of wine, studying dessert menus, when Celestina began to wonder if, in spite of all instincts and indications, she might be wrong about the state of Wally's heart. The signs seemed clear, and if his radiance wasn't love, then he must be dangerously radioactive-yet she might be wrong. She was a woman of some insight, quite sophisticated in many ways, with the raw-nerve perceptions of an artist; however, in matters of romance, she was an innocent, perhaps even more pitifully naive than she realized. As she perused the list of cakes and tarts and homemade ice creams, she allowed doubt to feed upon her, and as the thought grew that Wally might not love her that way, after all, she became desperate to know, to end the suspense, because if she didn't mean to him what he meant to her, then Daddy was just going to have to accept her conversion from Baptist to Catholic, because she and Angel would have to spend some serious heart-recovery time in a nunnery.. "When you called earlier in the year, to ask for a referral to a private investigator down there, the woman had recently turned up dead and Vanadium was gone, but no one put the two together at first." Edom had noticed them earlier. Now he saw they were in worse condition than he'd thought. Enlarged knuckles, fingers not entirely at natural angles to one another. Perhaps Obadiah had rheumatoid arthritis, like Bill Kleifton, though a less crippling case..Junior continued east, weaving through the horde, convinced that he could hear the ghost cop's footsteps distinct from the tramping noise made by the legions of the living, penetrating the grumble and the bleat of traffic. Hollow, the dead man's tread echoed not only in Junior's ears but also through his body, in his bones..From the door to the sink, nervously fishing a plastic pharmacy bottle out of a coat pocket, Junior counseled himself to remain calm. Slow deep breaths. What's done is done. Live in the future. Act, don't react. Focus. Look for the bright side..They were in the rain, the solid-glassy-pounding-roaring rain, every bit as much as Gene Kelly had been when he danced and sang and capered along a storm-soaked city street in that movie, but whereas the actor had been saturated by the end of the number, these two children remained dry. Tom's eyes strained to resolve this paradox, even though he knew that all miracles defied resolution.. "You'd never cheat me. I know you. We'd have Christmas twice a year and parties for half birthdays." Like a disc fish with silvery scales, the coin lay in the cup of Junior's palm. Directly over his life line..The sensual memories of his torrid evening with Seraphim had left Junior aroused. Unfortunately, the only female nearby was Industrial Woman, and he wasn't that desperate..Yet he didn't fault himself for a lack of sensitivity. He'd met this woman only once before. He wasn't emotionally invested in her as he had been in sweet Naomi..Instead, he was given a small color brochure featuring samples of the artist's work. It also contained the same photograph of her smiling face that graced the window..She hung her head, covered her face with her chilled hands, and wondered how her mother could sustain faith in God when such terrible things could happen to someone as innocent as Phimie..Eventually she discovered within herself all the light that she needed to find her way through the crucial hours immediately ahead. At last she knew what she must do, but she was not certain that she possessed the fortitude to do it..In fifty years, until Angel, Tom had found no other like himself and now a second in little more than a week. "I can't do what you did." 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..Paul was nearest to that corner when he halted Grace in her rush toward certain death. Before he quite realized what he was doing, he found that he'd flung open the door and climbed half the single long flight of steps, as surefooted as Doc Savage or the Saint, or the Whistler, or any of the other pulp-fiction heroes whose exploits had for so long been his adventures by proxy..The longer he crouched, head cocked, breathing silently through his open mouth, the more convinced Junior became that he had heard a man approaching. Indeed, the terrible conviction grew that someone was standing immediately in front of the dumpster, head cocked, also breathing through his open mouth, listening for Junior even as Junior listened for him.. "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..Dropped cartridges gleamed on the carpet. Stoop to snatch them up? No. That was asking for a skull-cracking blow.. "Other Bartys and other Agneses in other houses like this-all here together now." After checking her carotid artery and detecting no pulse, Junior returned to the sofa in the living room. He fluffed the little pillow and left it precisely as he had found it..Concerned that Junior's crying jag would trigger spasms of the abdominal muscles and ultimately another attack of hemorrhagic vomiting, the nurse had with her a tranquilizer. She wanted him to use the apple juice to wash down the pill..According to the brief biographic note with the picture, Celestina White was a graduate of San Francisco's Academy of Art College. She had been born and raised in Spruce Hills, Oregon, the daughter of a minister..Although Paul had seen Tom Vanadium's clever coin trick, he didn't understand the rest of their conversation, and he assumed that for everyone else-except Angel's mother-it was equally impenetrable. But taking their clue from the risen Celestina, all those present had fallen silent..As Agnes slipped excess pillows out from behind him and eased him down into the covers, Barty half woke, muttering about how the police were going to kill poor LummoX, who hadn't meant to do all that damage, but he'd been frightened by the gunfire, and when you weighed six tons and had eight legs, you sometimes couldn't get around in tight places without knocking something over..As she tucked the bedclothes around him again, she said, "Barty, I don't think you should let anyone else see how you can walk in the rain without getting wet. Not Edom and Jacob. Not anyone at all. And anything else special that you discover you can do ... we should keep it a secret between you and me." As usual, Vanadium had spoken in a monotone, putting no special emphasis on those two words. Yet Junior sensed that the detective harbored doubts about the explanation of the girl's

death..Weird, this kid. Making him uneasy. All in white, with her incomprehensible yammering about talking books and talking dogs and her mother driving pies, and working on a damn strange drawing for a little girl..Junior examined the music collection. The policeman's taste ran to big band music and vocalists from the swing era..The strand was inclined toward the lake. He closed the door and got out of the way as the Studebaker rolled forward, gathering speed..In August, he developed an interest in meditation. He began with concentrative meditation-the form called meditation "with seed"--in which you must close your eyes, mentally focus on a visualized object, and clear your mind of all else..He slid his chair sideways to the secretary and leaned forward with the gun in both hands.."But I had greater facility with cards than most magicians. I trained with Moses Moon, greatest card mechanic of his generation." "I'm Sister Josephina." She slipped Celestina's purse off her shoulder--"You can trust this with me"-.This device, which could automatically pick any lock with just a few pulls of its trigger, was sold strictly to police departments, and its distribution was tightly controlled. On the black market it commanded such a high price that Junior could have bought the better part of a small Sklent painting for the same bucks..The following morning, he canceled his German lessons. It was an impossible language. The words were enormously long..Junior stepped back and squeezed off two shots, aiming for the lock. One round tore a chunk out of the jamb, but the other cracked through the door, shattering more than wood, and the brass knob wobbled and almost fell out.."Well, the blood wasn't dark and acidic, so it didn't come from his stomach. It was bright and alkaline. It could have arisen in the esophagus, but most likely it's pharyngeal in origin."The middle finger on his right hand throbbed under the pair of Band-Aids. He'd sliced it earlier, while using the electric sharpener to prepare his knives, and the wound had been aggravated when he'd had to strangle Neddy Gnathic. He would never have cut himself in the first place if there had been no need to be well-armed and ready for Bartholomew and his guardians..Dusk had arrived, strangling the day, and the throttled sky hung low, as blue-black as bruises. The streetlights had come on. Gouts of red light from pulsing emergency beacons alchemized the rain from teardrops into showers of blood..In the kitchen, Barty sat at the table, and Paul's heart pinched at the sight of the boy in padded eyepatches..These past ten days had been the most difficult of her life, harder even than those following Joey's death. Back then, although she had lost a husband and a gentle lover and her best friend all at once, she'd had her undiminished faith, as well as her newborn son and all the promise of his future. She still had her precious boy, even though his future was to some extent blighted, and her faith remained with her, too, though diminished and offering less solace than before..Tossing the knave onto the table, Agnes said, "Barty doesn't seem too impressed with this devil." "Did he say I'd met him?" Jacob asked, squinting past Edom toward the bright sunlight at the open door..In the kitchen, he fussily avoided the blood and stepped around Victoria to switch off both ovens. He killed the gas flame under the large pot of boiling water on the cook top..No, impossible. He had killed Victoria almost a year and a half before this phone call. When you were dead, you were gone forever..As Junior blew his nose and blotted his eyes, Vanadium said, "I believe YOU actually loved her in some strange way."He stood at a window, staring down into the street, his profile to her, and in his silence he searched for the words to describe the "something extraordinary" that he had mentioned earlier.."Better hold on tight to her," Wally warned Celestina, braking to a halt at the intersection. "She'll float up and away, then we'll have to call the fire department to get her down."Celestina, surprised by Lipscomb's arrival, was still mentally numb from Neddy's harangue. "Doctor, I didn't know you were coming."The kiss was lovely, long and easy, full of restrained passion that boded well for nights to come in the marriage bed..One problem: Nolly Wulfstan, Quasimodo without a hump, probably repaired to this convenient club after work, to down a few beers, because this was surely as close as he would ever get to a halfway attractive woman. The detective would think that he and Junior were here for the same reason-to gawk at nearly naked babes and store up enough images of bobbling breasts to get through the night-and he would not be able to comprehend that for Junior the attraction was the dance, the intellectual thrill of experiencing a new cultural phenomenon..Reminding himself that nature was merely a dumb machine, utterly devoid of mystery, and that the unknown would always prove familiar if you dared to lift its veil, Junior discovered he could move. Each of his feet seemed to weigh as much as one of Wroth Griskin's cast bronzes, but he crossed the sidewalk and went into Galerie Coquin..At those cutting-edge galleries where he attended receptions, no one got in without a printed invitation. And even with the authentic paper in hand, you might still be refused entry if you failed to pass the cool test. The criteria of cool were the same as at the current hottest dance clubs, and in fact the bouncers controlling the gate at the finest avant-garde galleries were those who worked the clubs..She lived with her parents then. They had converted the dining room to a bedroom for her..KATHLEEN IN THE candlelight, her ginger eyes a glimmer with images of the amber flame. Icy martinis, extra olives in a shallow white dish. Beyond the tableside window, the legendary bay glimmered, too, darker and colder than Kathleen's eyes, and not a fraction as deep..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..For a while, Junior profited enormously from Tammy's investment advice, and the sex was great. As a thank-you for the hefty trading commissions she earned-and not incidentally for all the orgasms-Tammy gave him a Rolex. He didn't mind her four cats, didn't even care when the four grew to six, then to eight..Near midnight, she returned to her apartment. Lights out, in bed, staring at the ceiling, she was unable to sleep..Instead, her father asked, "Is this emotion talking, Celie, or is this brain as much as heart?" "I wouldn't just whack anyone, not even a worm bucket like Cain, any more than I would commit suicide. Remember, I believe in eternal consequences."..Sometimes Celestina marveled at how intimately and inextricably the tendrils of tragedy and joy were intertwined in the vine of life. Sorrow was often the root of future joy, and joy could be the seed of sorrow yet to come. The layered patterns in the vine were so complex, so enrapturing in their lush detail and so fearsome in their wild inevitability, that she could fill uncountable canvases, through many lifetimes as an

artist, striving to capture the enigmatic nature of existence, in all its beauty dark and bright, and in the end merely suggest the palest shadow of its mystery..Commit and command. It doesn't matter so much whether the course of action to which you commit is prudent or hopelessly rash, doesn't matter whatsoever whether society at large thinks it's a "good" thing that you're doing or a "bad" thing. As long as you commit without reservation you will inevitably command, because so few people are ever willing to commit to anything, right or wrong, wise or unwise, that those who plunge are guaranteed to succeed more often than not even when their actions are reckless and their cause is idiotic..Using the straight edge of a ruler to guide his eye down each column, Junior searched for Bartholomew, ignoring surnames. He had already checked to see if anyone in the county had Bartholomew for a last name; no one in this directory did..Holding a shaker in each hand, Tom walked them forward, causing them to diverge slightly at first, but then moving them along exactly parallel to each other..In Room 724, standing alone at her sister's bedside, watching the girl sleep, Celestina told herself that she was coping well. She could handle this unnerving development without calling in either of her parents..In his masterpiece *The Beauty of Rage: Channel Your Anger and Be a Winner*, Zedd explains that every fully evolved man is able to take anger at one person or thing and instantly redirect it to any new person or thing, using it to achieve dominance, control, or any goal he seeks. Anger should not be an emotion that gradually arises again at each new justifiable cause, but should be held in the heart and nurtured, under control but sustained, so that the full white-hot power of it can be instantly tapped as needed, whether or not there has been provocation..Vanadium continued in his characteristic drone, a tone at odds with the colorful content of his speech: "A man takes one look at his wife's body, starts to sweat harder than a copulating hog, spews like a frat boy at the end of a long beer-chugging contest, and chucks till he chucks up blood-that's not the response of your average murderer.".When Junior tried to lift Victoria, her voluptuousness lost its appeal. As dead weight, she was heavier than he expected..After Bellini left, Tom questioned Celestina extensively, with an emphasis on Phimie's rape. Although the subject was painful, she was grateful for the questions. Without this distraction, in spite of her well of hope, she might have allowed her imagination to fashion terror after terror, until Wally had died a hundred times over in her mind.. "No. It's, stopped. The thing now is to prevent a recurrence of the emesis, which could trigger more bleeding. He's getting antinausea medication and replacement electrolytes intravenously, and we've applied ice bags to his midsection to reduce the chance of further abdominal-muscle spasms and to help control inflammation.".The water shut off, and Junior heard the ratcheting noise of a paper-towel dispenser..He was Father Tom again, having recommitted to his vows three years previous. At his request, the Church had assigned him as the chaplain of Pie Lady Services..might be grumpy and would certainly be torpid, bleary-eyed, and uncommunicative. Angel awake was always fully awake, soaking up color texture-mood, marveling in the baroque detail of Creation, and generally lending support to the apperception--test prediction that she might be an art prodigy..Before he searched the bedroom, Vanadium walked quickly back through the rooms that he had already inspected, suddenly remembering the three bizarre paintings of which Nolly, Kathleen, and Sparky had spoken, and wondering how he could have overlooked them. They were not here. He was able to locate, however, the places on the walls where the art works had hung, because the nails still bristled from the pocket plaster, and picture hooks dangled from the nails.

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