

INTERPRETATIONS OF FASCISM

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..Charmed by the vulnerability of the young, he'd never slept with an older woman. The prospect intrigued him. She would have tricks in her repertoire that younger women were too inexperienced to know..Entering the bedroom, Junior had expected to cast aside his pistol and draw a knife. But he was no longer in a mood for close-up work. Fortunately, he'd managed to hold on to the gun.. "That was five years ago. After more surgeries than I care to remember, I was left with these." He raised his goblin hands again. "There's pain in humid weather, less when it's dry. I can take care of myself, but I'll never be a card mechanic again ... or a magician."..Anyway-and curiously-Industrial Woman increasingly looked to him like Scamp. As various abraded and inflamed mucous membranes constantly reminded him, he'd had more than enough of Scamp for a while. At last the day arrived: Friday, January 12..Think, think. A three-minute drive to the Lampion place. Maybe two minutes, running stop signs, cutting corners..Without using his flashlight, depending only on the moon, he ascended through the cemetery to the service road..A blood test might prove that Junior was the father. Accusations might sooner or later be made against him by bitter and hate-filled members of her family, perhaps not even with the hope of sending him to prison, but solely for the purpose of getting their hands on a sizable pan of his fortune, in the form of child support.. "You're all right, we've got you now." His soft yet reverberant voice was so unearthly that his words seemed to convey an assurance more profound and more comforting than their surface meaning.. "As she comes closer to full term," said Dairies, "she's at great risk of preeclampsia developing into full eclampsia."..Descending the stairs, Edom said, "September 18, 1906, a typhoon slammed into Hong Kong. More than ten thousand died. The wind was blowing with such incredible velocity; hundreds of people were killed by sharp pieces of debris-splintered wood, spear-point fence staves, nails, glass-driven into them with the power of bullets. One man was struck by a windblown fragment of a Han Dynasty funerary jar, which cleaved his face, cracked through his skull, and embedded itself in his brain."..He raised the window in the kitchen and climbed outside, onto the landing of the fire escape. Feeling like a high-roaming cousin to the Phantom of the Opera, bearing the requisite fearsome scars if not the unrequited love for a soprano, Vanadium descended through the foggy night, down two flights of the switchback iron stairs to the kitchen at Cain's apartment.. "I just wanted everyone to come see the spider, that's all. It was a really, really icky interesting bug."..Just as Celestina snapped shut the latches on the suitcase and turned to the door, a nurse's aide entered, pushing a cart loaded with towels and bed linens..He knew what she made of it, all right, and he could see that the others on the porch knew as well, and likewise he could see that all of them wanted to hear him confirm the conclusion at which Agnes had arrived long before he'd come here with Wally this evening. Even in the dining room, before the proof in the rain, Tom had recognized the special bond between the blind boy and this buoyant little girl. In fact, he couldn't have arrived at any conclusion different from the one Agnes reached, because like her, he believed that the events of every day revealed mysterious design if you were willing to see it, that every fife had profound purpose..If the detective believed that Seraphim had been raped, his natural desire to exact vengeance for his friend's daughter might motivate him to commit the relentless harassment that Junior had endured now for four days.. "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."..As though giving voice to her worst fear had made it come true, Agnes was seized by a contraction so painful that she cried out and clutched the paramedic's hands tightly enough to make him wince. She felt a peculiar swelling within, then an awful looseness, pressure followed at once by release..Paul withdrew the pistol from the drawer. The weapon didn't feel as good to him as guns always felt in the hands of pulp heroes..Celestina almost begged off, almost told him that she had no interest in whatever curiosity of medicine or physiology he might have witnessed. The only miracle that would have mattered, Phimie's survival, had not been granted..Uncle Jacob, cook and baby-sitter and connoisseur of watery death, cleaned off the table and washed the dishes while Barty patiently endured a rambling postbreakfast conversation with Pixie Lee and with Miss Velveeta Cheese, whose name wasn't an honorary tide earned by winning a beauty contest sponsored by Kraft Foods, as he had first thought, but who, according to Angel, was the "good" sister to the rotten lying cheese man in the television commercials..Having been so wounded by one death, Celestina could not imagine how Lipscomb could have survived the loss of his entire family. Pity knotted her heart and cinched her throat so that she spoke in little more than a whisper: "Was that the American Airlines. . ."..The dear man cried and kissed her scars and told her that she was as beautiful as any woman alive. They stood then for a while, embracing, his hands upon her back, her breasts against his chest, and twice they kissed, but almost chastely, before she put on her blouse again..Standing at graveside, Junior was in a foul mood. He was weary of pretending to be deep in grief..His first word after mama was papa, which she taught him while showing him pictures of Joey. His third word: pie..Bartholomew's genius might have been intimidating, even off-putting, if he'd not been as much child as child genius. Likewise, he would have been wearisome if impressed by his own gifts..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..No matter. He was a future-focused, focused man. The past is for losers. No, wait, humility is for losers. "The past is the teat that feeds those too weak to face the future." Yes, that was the line from Zedd that Junior had stitched on a needlepoint pillow..Of course, he also might have shot off his own thumbs as double insurance against being drafted and sent to Vietnam..Another small pane of glass burst. A dismaying

crack of wood. His back to her, the maniac raged at the window with the snarling ferocity of a caged beast. "It isn't just the rotten railing," Junior said, still paging through the report, his outrage growing. "The stairs are unsafe." Junior didn't make the mistake of thinking that Magusson's new conciliatory attitude meant they were friends, that confidences could be shared or truths exchanged. The money-grubbing toad's only real friend would always be the one he saw in a mirror. If he discovered that Junior was having a great time post-Naomi, Magusson would store the information until he found a way to use it to his advantage. This trick, however, was far more difficult than walking where the rain wasn't. Sustaining vision took both a mental and physical toll from him. 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. After carefully wiping her fingers on a paper napkin, Maria examined the garments with interest. She carried her living as the seamstress at Bright Beach Dry Cleaners. At the sight of each rent, popped button, and split seam she clucked her tongue. He was as solid as any boy. He was in the day but not in the rain. He was moving toward the back of the car. The terror he hid from her vanished with the recital of their vows. He knew from their first kiss as husband and wife that this was his destiny. What a great adventure they'd had together these past twenty-three years, one that Doc Savage might have envied. "Well, it's true," he said, finally turning the key in the proper direction and firing up the engine. One moment, girl and yellow vinyl ball. The next moment, gone as if they'd never been. During this same period, having subscribed to the opera, Junior attended a performance of Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*. "I already told you anything in your heart is as easy to read as the open page of a book." "I was raised to understand it," said Celestina, and when she looked across the room, she saw that her words had moved her mother. At the front door of the funeral home, as Panglo was showing him out, Jacob leaned close. "Joe Lampion didn't have any gold teeth." "Your dad didn't just like Christmas, he loved Christmas. He started planning for it in June. If there wasn't already a Santa Claus, your father would have taken on the job." "My God," Junior said, pretending that his befuddlement had faded and that his mind had just now clarified, "you think Naomi was murdered, don't you?" Agnes added this stop to her route at the request of Reverend Tom Collins, the local Baptist minister whose folks unthinkingly gave him the name of a cocktail. She was friendly with all the clergymen in Bright Beach, and her pie deliveries favored no one creed. Still on her knees, she raised the weapon and realized that she was going to shoot the maniac in the back, that she had no other choice, because her inexperience didn't allow her to aim for a leg or an arm. The moral dilemma overwhelmed her, but so did an image of Phimie lying dead in bloody sheets on the surgery table. She pulled the trigger and rocked with the recoil. Edom complied, and in the arc of red Bicycle patterns, one card revealed too much white corner, because it was the only one face up. Maria arrived early, expecting to assist with final details in the kitchen. Though honored to be a guest, she wasn't able to stand by with a glass of wine while preparations remained to be made. Vanadium was surely unaware of any connection between Junior and Seraphim White. And now the girl could never talk. 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. Hound meant well in sending the young man to Samory, but he did not understand the quality of Otter's will. Nor did Otter himself. He was too used to obeying others to see that in fact he had always followed his own bent, and too young to believe that anything he did could kill him. In San Francisco, Seraphim Aethionema White lies beyond all hope of resuscitation. So beautiful and only sixteen. "I only told you about that," said Grace, "because it was a very handsome shirt, and I thought you might want to get one for Wally." Caring for her, in every sense of that word, had made him a far happier man than he would otherwise have been—and a far better one. There was a valuable lesson to be learned from the encounter with Renee Vivi: Many things in this life are not what they first appear to be. To Junior, however, the lesson was not worth learning if he had to live with the vivid memory of his humiliation. Junior examined the music collection. The policeman's taste ran to big band music and vocalists from the swing era. PAUL DAMASCUS WAS walking the northern coast of California: Point Reyes Station to Tomales, to Bodega Bay, on to Stewarts Point, Gualala, and Mendocino. Some days he put in as little as ten miles, and other days he traveled more than thirty. 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. She shivered, and Edom, thinking that she had caught a chill ripped off his suit jacket and draped it over her shoulders. Having shuffled all four stacks of cards, Jacob cut two decks and shuffled the halves together, controlling them exactly as he had controlled them on Friday evening. Then the other two halves. Had Junior been chest-deep in wet concrete, he would have been more mobile than he was now. He had no feeling in his legs. Perplexed by their peculiar behavior, even slightly unnerved, Tom answered Maria's question. "I'm afraid there's nothing else I can do, nothing more of a fantastic nature." After adjusting the hairpin that held her lace mantilla, Maria passed from the narthex into the nave. She dipped two fingers in the holy water that glimmered in the marble font, and crossed herself. Everyone confronted Agnes with expressions of puzzlement and expectation, and she looked from one to another. Paul. Maria. Francesca. Bonita. Grace. Edom. Jacob. Finally Celestina. The family didn't exist in anticipation of developments with Barty and Angel, didn't put the pair at the center of their world. Instead, they did the good work, shared the satisfactions that came daily with being part of Pie Lady Services, and got on with life. First room on the left. Move. Kick the door open. The sense of a larger space beyond, no bathroom this time, and darker. Fan the pistol, gripping with both hands. Two quick shots: muffled cough, muffled cough. Junior stood at the window for a long time, not because he was pretending to rest, and not because any of the attending nurses was a looker. He was transfixed, and for awhile he didn't know why. Unwittingly oversell any strong reaction, striking a false note and raising suspicions. Barty followed the movement of her hand, raised his gaze to her eyes, hesitated, and then said questioningly, "No pie?" The bandaged man stormed up from the ruin of the living room, gauze fluttering

around his lips as his hard exhalations seemed to prove that he wasn't a long-dead pharaoh reanimated to punish some heedless archaeologist who had ignored all warnings and violated his tomb. So this wasn't a *Weird Tales* moment..The cop had picked up the .22 pistol, using a pencil through the trigger guard, to prevent the destruction of fingerprints..Because Junior's right arm was encumbered by the bracing board and the intravenous needle, he tugged a mass of tissues from the box with his left hand..Third, Celestina had a daughter. Not a boy named Bartholomew. Seraphim's baby had been a girl. Named Angel. This confused Junior as much as it stunned him..He sat on the edge of the bed and held her right hand. She had passed away such a short time ago that her skin was still warm..One of the hardest things that she had ever done was to leave him then, alone in his room, with the hateful something still quietly growing in his eye. She wanted to move the armchair close to his bed and watch over him throughout the night..Angel interrupted, bursting into the room, gasping for breath. "Come quick! It's incredible. It's wonderful. You've got to see this. And I mean, Barty, you have to see this."..Thereafter, he was repelled at the prospect of kissing her, and their relationship fell apart..The tenderness with which Grace acceded to Phimie's desire, at the expense of her own peace of mind, filled Celestina with emotion. She'd always admired and loved her mother to an extent that no words-or work of art-could adequately describe, but never more than now..efficiency of a nurse, but as a courtesan might perform the task: smiling enticingly, a flirtatious glimmer in.."Well, you're sweet, aren't you? And you're all bright red on the outside and milk chocolate inside," Celestina said, gently tweaking the girl's light brown nose..More good American music. The Supremes were Negroes, sure, but Junior was not a bigot. Indeed, he had once made passionate love to a Negro girl..But first, in early July, he stopped taking French lessons. It was an impossible language. Difficult to pronounce. Ridiculous sentence constructions. Anyway, none of the good-looking women he met spoke French or cared whether he did..A few attractive women were here alone, proof that social mores had changed dramatically in three years. Junior was aware of their hot gazes, their need, and he knew that he could have any of them..Junior was free of superstition. He believed in neither gods nor demons, nor in anything between.."Mr. Cain, if he bothers you, would you want me to have his choke chain yanked?".."You look as if you've seen a ghost," said Vinnie, and Agnes wished the threat were as simple as a restless spirit, groaning and rattling its chains, like Dickens's Marley come to Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas Eve..The moonlight had faded and the gentle waves had ebbed out of his mind's eye. He concentrated, trying to force the phantom sea to flow back into view, but this was one of those rare occasions when a Zedd technique failed him".Three equally modest rooms opened off this lounge. Two housed complete dental units, and the third provided cramped office space shared by the receptionist and the doctor..The masterpiece that Junior purchased was small, a sixteen-inch-square canvas, but it cost twenty-seven hundred dollars. The entire picture-titled *The Cancer Lurks Unseen, Version 1*-was flat black, except for a small gnarled mass, bile-green and pus-yellow, in the upper-right quadrant. Worth every penny..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..Indeed, as Celestina and the kid reached the foot of the steps to this second house, Bartholomew pointed, and the woman turned to look back. She appeared to stare straight at the Mercedes, though the fog made it impossible for Junior to be sure..He had recently learned about the demigods of classic mythology in one of the selections from the *Book-of-the-Month Club*..The guy was carrying a purse, whatever that meant, and when he walked through the door, he had a goofy look on his face, but his expression changed when he saw Junior..Room by room, closet by closet, Junior conducted a search for the detective. The cop was not here.."You better wise up, you tree-humping nitwit," Rudy advised Junior, grabbing the bed railing as if he might tear it off and use it to club his son-in-law senseless..Her metal hands were still crossed defensively over her breasts. The artist had welded large hexagonal nuts to her rake-tine fingers to suggest knuckles, and balanced on one nut was a fourth quarter..For reasons of mice and dust, doors at the Lampion house were never left ajar, let alone open this wide..She thought that she already knew all about humility, about the necessity of it, about the power of it to bring peace of mind and to heal the heart, but in the following few minutes, she learned more about humility than she had ever known before.."Fifteen fifty-six?" Bill frowned. "Hell, the Chinese probably didn't even have mud back then."..Using the brochure as an ice-breaker, Junior circulated through the throng, seeking anyone who'd attended the..The hall was deserted. Then a woman came out of one of the offices and walked toward the gallery, without glancing at him..Maria arranged five place settings instead of four. The fifth--complete with silverware, waterglass, and wineglass-was at the head of the table, in memoriam of Joey..Another pocket. More cartridges. Trying to squeeze just two into the magazine, but his hands shaking and slippery with sweat..He suspected the blame lay with his exceptional sensitivity to violence, death, and loss. Previously it manifested as an explosive emptying of the stomach, this time as a purging of lower realms.."Loved her? Of course I loved her. Naomi was beautiful and so kind ... and funny. She was the best ... the best thing that ever happened to me."..All the way to the nightstand, he expected to discover that the revolver had been taken from the drawer. Yet here it was. Loaded..Instinctively, he knew he should not give massages to Negroes. He sensed that somehow he would be physically or morally polluted by this contact..With Barty's presence, Christmas Eve dinners had become even more agreeable, especially this year when he was almost-three-going-on-twenty. He talked about the visits to friends that he and his mother and Edom had made earlier in the day, about Father Brown, as if that cleric-detective were real, about the puddle-jumping toads that had been singing in the backyard when he and his mother had arrived home from the cemetery, and his chatter was engaging because it was full of a child's charm yet peppered with enough precocious observations to make it of interest to adults..Yet he brooded even at breakfast, in spite of the consolation of clotted cream and berries, raisin scones and cinnamon butter. In better worlds, wiser Tom Vanadiums chose different tactics that resulted in less misery than this, in a far swifter conveyance of Enoch Cain to the halls of justice. But he was none of those Tom Vanadiums. He was only this Tom, flawed "land struggling, and he couldn't take comfort in the fact that elsewhere he had

proved to be a better man..With her brothers, she adjourned to the waiting room, where the three of them sat drinking vending-machine coffee, black, from paper cups..Coughing, spitting saliva that was bitter with toxic chemicals, Paul followed her, slapping frantically at his clothes when fire singed his shirt..Neither guilt nor remorse plagued him. Good and bad, right and wrong, were not issues to him. Actions were either effective or ineffective, wise or stupid, but they were all value neutral..He was simplifying and combining concepts, but he knew no other way to quickly give them a feel for the wonder, the enigma, the sheer spookiness of the world revealed by quantum mechanics.."Yes, I was." She didn't tell him that her fear had not been allayed by his assurances or by his second walk in the rain..After a few racing steps, when the dog realized that Mary hadn't thrown the ball, it whipped around and sprinted back.."I want you to adopt the baby." Before they could react, she hurried on: "I won't be twenty-one for four months yet, and even then they might give me trouble about adopting, even though I'm her aunt, because I'm single. But if you adopt her, I'll raise her. I promise I will. I'll take full responsibility. You don't have to worry that I'll regret it or that I'll ever want to drop her in your laps and escape the responsibility. She'll have to be the center of my life from here on. I understand that. I accept it. I embrace it."..With only a faint twinge of sentimental longing, he drove away from the house that had been his and Naomi's love nest for fourteen blissful months..In all the many ways things are, across the infinity of worlds and all Creation, Barty believed that no woman existed whose beauty exceeded hers or whose heart was better..Junior picked up his pace, pushing through the crowd, repeatedly glancing back, and although he caught only quick squints of the dead cop's face, he could tell that something was terribly wrong with it. Never a candidate for matinee-idol status, Vanadium looked markedly worse than before. The port-wine birthmark still pooled around his right eye. His features were not merely pan-flat and plain, as they had been before, but were ... distorted..When the nurse was gone, alone with his mother as they waited for the orderly to bring a gurney, Barty said, "Come close."..Using this apartment as a base, Nolly and Kathleen had conducted some of the small skirmishes in the first phase of the war, including the ghost serenades. They left the place tidy. Indeed, the only sign that they had ever been here was a packet of dental floss left behind on the sill of a living-room window..Turning to face his four trailing escorts, all of whom were hunch shouldered and stiff-necked with tension, Barty said, "What's for dinner? ".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..OUR LADY OF SORROWS, quiet and welcoming in the Bright Beach night, humble in dimension, without groin vaults and grand columns and cavernous transepts, restrained in ornamentation, was as familiar to Maria Elena Gonzalez--and as comforting-as her own home. God was everywhere in the world, but here in particular. Maria felt happier the instant she stepped through the entrance door into the narthex..Junior hoped that he hadn't been betrayed by eyeshine in the fraction of a second before he closed his eyes to slits..His profession was cocktail piano, though he didn't have to earn a living at it. He had inherited a fine four-story house in a good neighborhood of San Francisco and also a sufficient income from a trust fund to meet his needs if he avoided extravagance. Nevertheless, he worked five evenings a week in an elegant lounge in one of the grand old hotels on Nob Hill, playing highly refined drinking songs for tourists, businessmen from out of town, affluent gay men who stubbornly continued to believe in romance in an age that valued flash over substance, and unmarried heterosexual couples who were working up a buzz to ensure that their rigorously planned adulteries would seem glamorous..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..Maybes were for babies, but Caesar Zedd had failed to provide a profundity with which Junior could ward off the what-ifs as easily as the maybes..Junior could almost feel sorry for this sad, stocky, haunted detective, deranged by years of difficult public service..Waking from a starry night in the Old West into electric light, gazing up into a blur of faces sans cowboy hats, Agnes felt someone moving a piece of ice in slow circles over her bare abdomen. Shivering as the cold water trickled down her sides, she tried to ask them why they were applying ice when she was already chilled to the bone, but she couldn't find her voice..In that slow, flat delivery with which Junior was becoming increasingly impatient, Detective Vanadium said, "We all were, Doctor. It was another election year, remember? More than once during that campaign, I could've chugged ippecac. What else would work if I wanted to have a good vomit?"..September 27, 1962. Barcelona, Spain. A flood killed four hundred forty-five people."..In the park, rocketing along on the roller coaster, Barty had an experience, a reaction to more than the canted turns and steep plunges. He grew excited in much the way that Agnes had seen him excited when grasping a new and arcane mathematical theory. At the end of the ride, he wanted to get back on immediately, and so they did. There are no long waits for the blind at amusement parks: always to the head of the line. Agnes rode twice again with him, and then Paul twice, and finally Angel accompanied him three times. This roller-coaster obsession wasn't about thrills or even amusement. His exuberance gave way to a thoughtful silence, especially after a seagull flew within inches of his face, feathers thrumming, startling him, on the next-to-last rollick along the tracks. Thereafter, the park held little interest for him, and all he would say was that he'd thought of a new way to feel things-by which he meant all the ways things are-a fresh angle of approach to that mystery..When he pushed Naomi, profit was the motive. He killed Victoria and Vanadium in self-defense. Those three deaths were necessary..It was then that village sorcery, and above all women's witchery, came into the ill repute that has clung to it since. Witches paid dearly for practicing..the arts they thought of as their own. The care of pregnant beasts and women, birthing, teaching the songs and rites, the fertility and order of field and garden, the building and care of the house and its furniture, the mining of ores and metals-these great things had always been in the charge of women. A rich lore of spells and charms to ensure the good outcome of such undertakings was shared among the witches. But when things went wrong at the birth, or in

the field, that would be the witches' fault. And things went wrong more often than right, with the wizards warring, using poisons and curses recklessly to gain immediate advantage without thought for what followed after. They brought drought and storm, blights and fires and sicknesses across the land, and the village witch was punished for them. She didn't know why her charm of healing caused the wound to gangrene, why the child she brought into the world was imbecile, why her blessing seemed to burn the seed in the furrows and blight the apple on the tree. But for these ills, somebody had to be to blame: and the witch or sorcerer was there, right there in the village or the town, not off in the warlord's castle or fort, not protected by armed men and spells of defense. Sorcerers and witches were drowned in the poisoned wells, burned in the withered fields, buried alive to make the dead earth rich again..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..During the rest of that first year, he walked to Palm Springs and back, a round trip of more than two hundred miles, and north to Santa Barbara..Finally Vanadium said, "According to the lab report, the baby she was carrying was almost certainly yours.".After undressing for the night, he sat on the edge of the bed for a while, rubbing the coin between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, brooding about Thomas Vanadium. He tried rolling it across his knuckles; he dropped it repeatedly.

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