

AMIGURUMI HAKELFIEBER FUR DEN FRUHLING

Looking up at the mirror above the sink, he saw reflected not the self-improved and fully realized man that he'd worked so hard to become, but the pale, round-eyed little boy who had hidden from his mother when she had been in the deepest and darkest end of one of her cocaine-assisted, amphetamine-spiced mood swings, before she traded cold reality for the warm coziness of the asylum. As if some whirlpool of time was spinning him backward into the hateful past, Junior felt his hard-won defenses being stripped away..Tom received a fierce hug, too, and a sisterly kiss, and he was grateful for them. He had been a loner for too long, as a hunter of men pretty much had to be when on a long hard road of recuperation and then on a mission of vengeance, even if he called it a mission of justice. During the few days he'd spent guarding Celestina and Grace and Angel in the city, and subsequently during the week with Wally, Tom had felt that he was part of a family, even if it was just a family of friends, and he had been surprised to realize how much he needed that feeling..In his mind's eye, Junior saw the coin in transit of the blunt fingers, moving more swiftly than previously because its passage was lubricated by blood..As though frightened of the gentle certainty in Celestina's eyes, the doctor turned away from he, and toward the window once more..If this insurance payoff was not mere coincidence, if it was the wealth that had been foretold, then how far behind the fortune did the knave travel? Years? Months? Days?.Wally and Celestina went to dinner at the Armenian restaurant from which he'd gotten takeout on the day in '65 that he rescued her and Angel from Neddy Gnathic. Red tablecloths, white dishes, dark wood paneling, a cluster of candles in red glasses on each table, air redolent of garlic and roasted peppers and cubeb and sizzling soujouk-plus a personable staff, largely of the owners' family-created an atmosphere as right for celebration as for intimate conversation, and Celestina expected to enjoy both, because this promised to be a most momentous day in more ways than one..Holding the pistol, fully extending his right arm in execution style, the gunman approached the fallen minister..With a thin hiss of disgust, Junior pulled away from the thing, whatever it was, withdrew the flashlight from his belt, and listened intently for sounds in the alleyway. No voices. No footsteps. Only distant traffic noises so muffled that they sounded like the grunts and groans and low menacing growls of foraging animals, displaced predators prowling the urban mist..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..Some acts were distasteful, too, such as searching the lunatic lawman for his car keys and his badge..He had sworn this vow before. An argument could be made that he had broken it..Under a declining moon, he fled discreetly three blocks to his Suburban, parked on a parallel street. He encountered no traffic, and on the way, he stripped off the gardening gloves and discarded them in a Dumpster at a house undergoing remodeling..The hateful window. The hateful, frozen window. Celestina wrenched on the crank with all of her strength, and felt something give a little, wrenched, but then the crank popped out of the socket and rapped against the sill..The walls were barren. The only art in these rooms was a single sculpture. Junior was taking university extension courses in art appreciation and almost daily haunting the city's countless galleries, constantly deepening and refining his knowledge. He intended to refrain from acquiring a collection until he was as expert on the subject as any director of any museum in the city..Returning his attention to his own shoes, Jacob said, "So ... what am I supposed to do about this?".The rain was colder than it had been earlier, almost as icy as sleet. Or perhaps she was far hotter than before and felt the chill more keenly on her fevered skin. Each droplet seemed to hiss against her face, to sizzle against her hands, with which she tightly gripped her swollen abdomen as if she could deny Death the baby that it had come to collect..Clinging to the desperate hope of an ultimate reunion, he put the gun away, went to the kitchen, and made a grilled-cheese sandwich: cheddar, with dill pickles on the side..Eventually, when he had gone through the entire directory, if he'd had no success, he would phone each red-checked listing and ask for Bartholomew. A few hundred calls, no doubt. Some would involve long-distance charges, but he could afford the toll..The disease hadn't corrupted her heart, and it had left her face untouched, as well. Lovely, she was, as she had always been..She traded silence for silence. Then: "Kiddo, I'm still totally confused by this stuff.".Tom stared down into the oceanic depths of the city, through the reefs of buildings, to the lamp-fish cars schooling through the great trenches..If blood tests revealed that Junior wasn't the father, Vanadium would have a motive. It wouldn't be the right motive, because Junior truly hadn't known either that his wife was pregnant or that she was possibly screwing around with another man. But the detective would be able to sell it to a prosecutor, and the prosecutor would convince at least a few jurors..stopped by to help Agnes, and some offered to stay with her at night. She gratefully accepted assistance with the housecleaning, laundry, and shopping, but she declined the all-night company because of her dreams..Wally-Dr. Walter Lipscomb, who delivered Angel and who became her godfather-never worried when the girl seemed to be developing too slowly, counseling that every child was an individual, with his or her particular learning pace. Wally's double specialty--obstetrics and pediatrics-gave him credibility, of course, but Celestina had worried, anyway..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..Unable to speak, the girl kissed her and then gently placed her head against Agnes's breast, capturing forever in memory the pure sound of her heart.. "I was raised to understand it," said Celestina, and when she looked across the room, she saw that her words had moved her mother..The currents of irrational fear, which bring periodic turbulence to virtually every childhood, didn't disturb the smoothly flowing river of Barty's first three years. He showed no fear of the doctor or the dentist.. "That's enough?" "Silly man." "Cain looks like a movie star." "Does he have nice teeth?" she asked. "They're good. Not perfect." "So kiss me, Mr.

Perfect." Barty read aloud as Agnes drove, because she'd enjoyed the novel only from page 104. He wanted to share with her the exploits of Jim and Frank and their Martian companion, Willis. Convinced he was alone and unobserved, Junior leaned into the car and shifted it out of park. He released the hand brake. They were dining by candlelight. Vanilla-scented bougies stood on the sideboard, across the room, glimmering in glass chimneys, but Barty pointed instead to five squat red candles distributed through the centerpiece of pine sprays and white carnations. The chest respirator, which Joshua had evidently applied, lay discarded on the bedclothes beside her. She seldom required this apparatus to assist her breathing, and then only at night. "-though this Tom now has a rhinoceros-smacked face, this other Tom, in his own world, has an ordinary face. Poor him, so ordinary." "All right. Well ... Jesuits are encouraged to pursue education in any subject that interests them, not theology alone. I was deeply interested in physics." 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. ANGEL WAS DRESSED in as much red as the devil himself: bright red shoes, red socks, red leggings, red skirt, red sweater, and a knee length red coat with a red hood. For a moment, Lipscomb continued, "her voice became clear, no longer slurred. She raised her head from the pillow, and her eyes fixed on me, all the confusion gone. She was so ... intense. She said ... she said, 'Rowena loves you.' As Barty stepped across the threshold into the upstairs hall, Miss Pixie Lee said, "You're sweet, Barty. A SEVERE THIRST INDICATED to Agnes that she wasn't dead. There would be no thirst in paradise. Clearly, the musician recognized him, which seemed unlikely, even extraordinary, considering that they'd never spoken to each other, and considering that Junior must be only one of thousands of customers who had passed through that lounge in the past three years. On this occasion, however, he couldn't have focused on a book even if he'd had the strength to hold it. The fierce paroxysms that clenched his guts also destroyed his ability to concentrate. He possessed vast files on tragic fires, and most of them were committed to memory. In Vienna's magnificent Ring Theater, December 8, a blaze claimed 850 lives. On May 25, 1887, 200 dead at the Opera Comique, Paris. November 28, 1942, in the Coconut Grove nightclub in Boston when Jacob was only fourteen years old and already. The day before Christmas, along the California coast. Although sun gilded the morning, clouds gathered in the afternoon, but no snow would ease sled runners across these roofs. Suddenly remembering the doctor's assurance to Neddy that they would be out of this building by week's end, Celestina said, "But we've nowhere to go." The blinds were raised, the windows bare. Usually, she liked the smoky, reddish-gold glow of the city at night, but this once it made her uneasy. "Maria brought that from Mexico," Barty said. "She thought it was pretty funny. So do I. It's a hoot. Mom says it isn't really blasphemous, because it wasn't meant to be by the people who made it, and because Jesus would want you to have cookies, and, besides, it reminds us to be thankful for all the good things we get." And somewhere Selma Galloway, their neighbor, was not a spinster but a married woman with grandchildren. After following his uncle's movements, Barty looked at the table again. "Pie, pie, pie, pie, pie, pie." She couldn't explain her anxiety to him, because he believed in the supremacy of laws, in the justice that might be delivered in this life, in a comparatively simple reality, and he would not comprehend the gloriously, frighteningly, reassuringly, strangely, and deeply complex reality Agnes occasionally perceived-usually peripherally, sometimes intellectually, but often with her heart. This was a world in which effect could come before cause, in which what seemed to be coincidence was, in fact, merely the visible part of a far larger pattern that couldn't be seen whole. Now, here, lying on a bed in the emergency room of a Sacramento hospital, on a Saturday afternoon only six weeks before the camellia festival, Junior suffered under the care of a resident physician who was so young as to raise the suspicion that he was merely playing doctor. When she was finished with the dishtowel, she returned to the dining room, and though dinner was underway, she called for another toast. Raising her glass, she said, "To Maria, who is more than my friend. My sister. I can't let you talk about what I've given you without telling your girls that you've given back more. You taught me that the world is as simple as sewing, that what seem to be the most terrible problems can be stitched up, repaired." She raised her glass slightly higher. "First chicken to be come with first egg inside already. God bless." "Oh, yes, I recall it now. Polar bears eating tourists in Union Square, wolf packs prowling the Heights." Only one member of the distant funeral party did not disperse toward the line of cars on the service road. A man in a dark suit headed downhill, between the headstones and the monuments, directly toward Naomi's grave. Anyway, if Celestina escaped, there would be a witness, and it wouldn't matter to a jury that she was a talentless bitch who painted kitsch. She would have seen Junior get out of the Mercedes and would be able to provide at least a half-accurate description of the car in spite of the fog. He still hoped to pull this off without having to give up his good life on Russian Hill. A surprising number of the women who had been his lovers were recreational drug users, and over the past couple years, he had met several dealers who supplied them. From the least savory of these, he purchased five thousand dollars' worth of cocaine and LSD to establish his credibility, after which he inquired about forged documents. Glancing at her in the rearview mirror, the driver said, "Pretty exhilarating, huh? Your first big show?" He traveled prairies and mountains and valleys, passed fields rich in every imaginable crop, crossed great forests and wide rivers. He walked in fierce storms when thunder crushed the sky and lightning tore it, walked in wind that skinned the bare earth and sheared green tresses from trees, and walked also in sun-scrubbed days as blue and clean as ever there had been in Eden. The glittering room appeared unchanged. Even the piano player seemed to be the man who'd been at the keyboard back then, though his yellow-rose boutonniere and probably his tuxedo, as well, were new. From time to time, customers had crossed the cocktail lounge to drop folding money into a fishbowl atop the piano, tips for the musician. A few had requested favorite -tunes. The head of the hospital bed was elevated, and Perri lay on her back. Her eyes-were closed. The sleeves of the pajama top were pushed up, revealing more of the disease's vicious work. The muscles of her useless left arm had atrophied; the once graceful hand curled in upon itself, as though holding an invisible object, perhaps the hope

she never abandoned..Never before had she put faith in any form of prognostication. In the whispery falling of those twelve cards, however, she heard the faint voice of truth, not quite a coherent truth, not as clear a message as she might have wished, but a murmur that she couldn't ignore.."Some men," she said, "wouldn't be able to sustain desire when their hands touched my back. I'll understand if you're one of them. It's not beautiful to the eye, and rough as oak bark to the touch. That's why I brought you here, so you'd know this before you consider where you want to go from ... where we are now."O foolish writer. Now moves. Even in storytime, dreamtime, once-upon-a time, now isn't then..Once, she left the TV and came to Tom, where he sat talking with Paul. "It's like Gunsmoke and The Monkees are next to each other on the TV, both at the same time. But the Monkees, they can't see the cowboys-and the cowboys, they can't see the Monkees."After the amusement park, no hospital for the Pie Lady. With Wally near, she had a doctor all her own, capable of giving her the anticancer drugs and transfusions that she required. While radiation therapy is prescribed for acute lymphoblastic leukemia, it is much less useful to treat myeloblastic cases, and in this instance, it wasn't deemed helpful, which made treatment at home even easier..When Angel came in search of Barty, breathless with excitement, he was chatting with Tom Vanadium in the foundation's office above the garages. Years ago, the two apartments had been combined and expanded when the garages under them were doubled in size, providing better living quarters for Tom and working space, as well..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..For a finder's fee, Junior was put in touch with a papermaker named Google. This was not his real name, but with his crossed eyes, large rubbery lips, and massively prominent Adam's apple, he was as perfect a Google as ever there had been..Bartholomew didn't merely have something to do with babies. Bartholomew was a baby..As he entered, the visitor's back was to Junior, and he moved toward the table, where dead Victoria sat with her head on her folded arms. She looked for all the world as though she were just resting.."Yes, I'm nicely rounding myself into an early grave," he said almost cheerfully. "And I must admit to enjoying it."Swinging toward the open door, he saw that the dead detective was true to his word: He wasn't here..The cop had unzipped the top of her jogging suit and pulled up the roomy T-shirt.From late morning until dinner, people arrived and departed, raised toasts to a merry Christmas and to peace on earth, to health and to happiness, reminisced about Christmases past, marveled about the first heart transplant performed this very month in South Africa, and prayed that the soldiers in Vietnam would come home soon and that Bright Beach would lose no precious sons in those far jungles..With Angel at breakfast, instead of just Uncle Jacob, at least Barty had someone to talk to, even if she did insist on speaking more often through her dolls than directly. Apparently, the dolls were on the table, propped up with bowls. The first, Miss Pixie Lee, had a high-pitched, squeaky voice. The second, Miss Velveeta Cheese, spoke in a three year-old's idea of what a throaty-voiced, sophisticated woman sounded like, although to Barty's ear, this was more suitable to a stuffed bear..Turning in Celestina's lap, Angel said, "Smell," and held the index finger of her right hand under her mother's nose..During the ten days since Joey's passing, a great many people had conveyed their condolences to Agnes, but until this man, she'd known all of them..But he was more than she had ever imagined her boy to be, more than merely a prodigy..She wanted to go to San Francisco with Celestina, to have the baby in the city, where the father-and not incidentally her friends and Reverend White's parishioners-would never know she'd given birth. The more her parents and sister argued against this plan, the more agitated Phimie became, until they worried that they would jeopardize her health and mental stability if they didn't do as she wished..the grass, silent because he is barely conscious, too badly beaten to protest or to plead for mercy, but also."Hasn't the sheriff's department already reached a determination of accidental death?" Parkhurst asked. "They're good men, good cops, every last one of them," said Vanadium, "and if they've got more pity in them than I do, that's a virtue, not a shortcoming. What could Mr. Cain have taken to make himself vomit?".Maria said, "It is ... the only thing ... I can do for him now, for you. I be nobody, not.Fortunately, the chill fog didn't bum away from the Mercedes, considering that it facilitated the stalking of Celestina. The mist swaddled the white Buick in which she rode, increasing the chances that Junior might lose track of her, but it also cloaked the Mercedes and all but ensured that she and her friend wouldn't realize that the pair of headlights behind them were always those of the same vehicle..Clutching the purse as though determined to resist robbery even in death, the guy dropped, sprawled, shuddered, and lay still. He'd gone down with no shout of alarm, with no cry of mortal pain, with so little noise that Junior wanted to kiss him, except that he didn't kiss men, alive or dead, although a man dressed as a woman had once tricked him, and though a dead pianist had once given him a lick in the dark..From out of the fog and darkness came the slap of running feet on bricks. He was sprinting toward the back of the house..A spirit-shredding bleakness clawed at her, but she couldn't permit it to leave her in tatters. If she traded hope for despair, as her brothers had done, Bartholomew would be finished before he'd begun. She owed him optimism, lessons in the joy of life..The only light came from a reading lamp. An adjustable brass shade directed the light down onto a chair..As a young man, he had performed first in nightclubs catering to Negroes and in theaters like Harlem's Apollo. During World War II, he'd been part of a USO troupe entertaining soldiers throughout the Pacific, later in North Africa, and following D-Day, in Europe..Maybe every accidental death was suspicious to Vanadium. His obsessive hounding of Junior might be his standard operating procedure..Junior suspected that no one other than this man's mother called him Tom. He was probably "Detective" to some and "Vanadium" to most who knew him..Yes, she did, she had one, but not much of one, and compared to the McIntosh in Google's throat, this was just a bitty crab apple, easy to overlook, not excessive for a woman..Although she had never seen snow other than in pictures and on film, this deep-settled silence seemed to speak of failing flakes, of white muffling mantles, and she wouldn't have been in the least surprised if, stepping outside, she had found herself in a glorious winter landscape, cold and crystalline, here on the always-snowless hills and

shores of the California Pacific..-and whenever the good Pharaoh was here in San Francisco, a few times each year, he always stopped by St. Anselmo's to entertain the boys--".Briefly, Junior felt humiliated. He wanted to drag the detective out of the car and stomp on his smug, dead face..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..Look at it this way, Aggie. All the pies, all the things you do-that's betting on life. And now you've just been given the great blessing of being able to place larger bets."."Who is this?" he demanded, although for a demand, the words came out too thin, too squeaky..For forty-eight hours, he pumped himself full of prescription antihistamines, immersed himself in bathtubs brimming with numbingly cold water, and lathered himself with soothing lotions. In misery, gripped by self-pity, he dared not think about the 9-mm pistol that he had stolen from Frieda Bliss..She searched the child's unfocused eyes for some sign of the hateful father's wickedness..after he is rolled onto his back by his father, now, here, roses by the fistful jammed in his face, crushed and ground..Angel, on the window seat, wore nothing but white. White sneakers and socks. White pants. White T-shirt. Two white bows in her hair..Paul checked the back of the Suburban, since he fancied himself the wagonmaster. He wanted to be sure that the goods were loaded in such a way that they were unlikely to slide or be damaged. "Packed tight. Looks just fine," he declared, and closed the tailgate door..We've mapped three routes to the top," Angel said, "and each offers different challenges. Barty's eventually going to climb all of them, but he's starting with the hardest."..You struck a discord that can be heard, however faintly, all the way to the farthest end of the universe.....After a minute, he slipped his hand into his pocket. The quarter was still there..He thought he heard the tick-scrape-rattle-clink of Industrial Woman on the prowl. In the living room. Now the hall. Approaching..After a silent moment of surprise, Nork or Knacker, or Hisscus, said, "Your sentiment is understandable, Mr. Cain, but it's customary in these matters--".He paid cash to the locksmith, and included in the payment were the two dimes and the nickel Vanadium had left on his nightstand..His thought had been that Reverend White might find in Agnes, Bright Beach's beloved Pie Lady, a subject who would inspire a sequel to the sermon that had so deeply affected Paul-who was neither a Baptist nor a regular churchgoer-when he had heard it on the radio more than three years ago..Tom was alone. The place should be silent. Hanna Rey, the housekeeper, wasn't scheduled to arrive until ten o'clock..He knew how you felt about having too much life insurance. So he didn't disclose it to you."..there in more genteel and gilded ages, and her flights of imagination sometimes acquired such vivid detail that they were eerily like memories..He fiddled with the cylinder until it swung open. Five chambers, a gleaming cartridge in each..That's just ... an old joke," she heard herself saying, as from a distance. "You didn't really walk between the drops?"..He bought cracker sandwiches, some filled with cheese and some with peanut butter, redskin peanuts, chocolate bars, and Coca-Cola. Although this was an unhealthy meal, cheese and peanut butter and chocolate shared a virtue: they were all binding..The odds against this phenomenal eleven-card draw must be millions to one, which seemed to give the predictions validity..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..This momentous day," Thomas Vanadium said quietly, stiff gazing into the grave, "seems full of terrible endings. But like every day, it's actually full of nothing but beginnings."..Clutching the blanket, she thought of the funerary lap robes that red the legs of the deceased in their caskets, for she felt sometimes cove half dead. Both feet in this world-yet walking beside Joey on a strange road Beyond..Those words, in a vertiginous spiral, spooled through the memory tapes in Junior's mind, as clear and powerfully affecting-and every bit as alarming-as the memory flash of the ordeal in the Dumpster. He couldn't recall where he'd heard them, who had spoken them, but revelation trembled tantalizingly along the rim of his mind..After just twenty-one days, the boy's adaptation to blindness was amazing but clearly the gathered audience stood in anticipation of something more remarkable than his unhalting progress and unerring sense of direction..I know what you're thinking," her mother said, reaching across the table and placing one hand over Celestina's. "I know how useless you feel, how helpless, how small, but you must remember this . . .His exceptional sensitivity remained a curse. He had been more profoundly affected by Victoria's and Vanadium's tragic deaths than he had realized. Wrenched, he was..Good day, sir," Lipscomb said, closing the door in Neddy's face, possibly compressing his nose and bruising his boutonniere..To the open casement window, into the men's room. Still seething with rage. Angrily cranking shut the twin panes while lazy tongues of fog licked through the narrowing gap..The window didn't face the street. It overlooked a five-foot-wide passageway between this house and the next. The police might not spot him leaving..As if he'd been presented with many previous photos under these circumstances, Jonas Salk accepted the picture. "Your daughter?"..Judging by the smeariness of the letters and by the fact that some had run before they dried, the writing instrument hadn't been a felt-tip marker, as Vanadium first thought. A spattering of red droplets on the closed lid of the toilet and across the beige marble floor, all dry now, gave rise to a suspicion.

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