

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

"Why? What was he going to get out of it?" Six paces past that marker floorboard, Barty had the strangest feeling that someone was in the hallway with him. An hour later, when Barty decided he wanted a soda, he switched off the book and asked Angel if she would like something to drink. Vanadium was no ordinary cop, as he himself had said. In his obsession, convinced that Junior had murdered Naomi and impatient with the need to find evidence to prove it, what was to stop the detective if he decided to deal out justice himself? What was to prevent him from walking up to the Suburban right now and shooting his suspect pointblank? "As she comes closer to full term," said Dairies, "she's at great risk of preeclampsia developing into full eclampsia." He jammed the 9-mm pistol under his belt, grabbed Ichabod by the feet, and dragged him quickly toward the door to Apartment 1. Smears of blood brightened the pale limestone floor in the wake of the body. The Bright Beach Library was open until nine on Friday evening. Arriving an hour before closing, they returned the Heinlein novels that Barty had already read and checked out the three that he wanted. In a spirit of optimism, they borrowed a fourth, Podkayne of Mars. For a while, Junior half convinced himself that the quarter in his cheeseburger, in December '65, was a meaningless coincidence, unrelated to Vanadium. His short tour of the kitchen, in search of the perpetrator, had given him reason to believe the diner's sanitary standards were inadequate. Recalling the greasy men on that culinary death squad, he knew that he'd been fortunate not to discover a dead rodent spread-eagle on the melted cheese, or an old sock. Fortunately, at least the desk was cigarette-scarred, because it came with the office. It had been the property of a skip-tracer named Otto Zelm, who'd made a good living at the kind of work Nolly avoided out of boredom: tracking down deadbeats and repossessing their vehicles. On a stakeout, Zelm fell asleep in his car, while smoking, thereby triggering the payoff of both life- and casualty-insurance policies, and freeing the lease on this furnished space. people that he was innocent and, in fact, constitutionally incapable of premeditated murder. There was an otter in our brook. This is, of course, the purpose of art: to disturb you, to leave you uneasy with yourself and wary of the world, to undermine your sense of reality in order to make you reconsider all that you think you know. The finest art should shatter you emotionally, devastate you intellectually, leave you physically ill, and fill you with loathing for those cultural traditions that bind us and weigh us down and drown us in a sea of conformity. Junior had learned this much, already, from his art appreciation course. Agnes's chilled bones. Pushing a tangle of wet hair away from her face, she realized that her hands were shaking. By the time he arrived at his apartment, Junior could think of no better action to take, so he phoned Simon Magusson, his attorney in Spruce Hills. Junior discovered more tears than could have been found in ten thousand onions. His wife and his unborn baby. He had been willing to sacrifice his beloved Naomi, but maybe he would have found the cost too high if he had known that he was also sacrificing his first-conceived child. This was too much. He was bereft. Precisely what type of prodigy Barty might be was initially not easy to deduce. He revealed many talents rather than just one. During those spells when she was too shaky to draw, she stood at the window, gazing at the storied city. I have trusted in thy mercy, she thought desperately, reaching for comfort to Psalms 13:5. Otter said nothing. Turning around in his seat, watching with amusement as Celestina fumbled nervously with the currency, the cabbie said, "You're not scared, not you. Sitting back there so silent most all the way, you weren't thinking about being famous. You were thinking about that girl of yours." The upper end of the bed was elevated. Otherwise, Agnes would not have been able to see the room, for she was too weak to raise her head from the pillows. Then Agnes said, "Well, it's clear to me that you won't be able to talk out your life in just one year. Should be a two-year grant." Junior drove them a little crazy by pretending not to understand their intent as they circled the issue like novice snake handlers warily looking for a safe grip on a coiled cobra. Outside, he discovered that some worthless criminal wretch had broken into his Suburban during the night. The suitcase and Book-of-the-Month selections were gone. The creep even swiped the Kleenex, the chewing gum, and the breath mints from the glove compartment. That Olympian purge had, however, made him appear to be both emotionally and physically devastated by the loss of his wife. He couldn't have calculated any stratagem more likely to convince most. Anyway, the thing that scared her was not the monstrous father of this child. The fearsome thing was the decision that she had made a few minutes ago, in the unused hospital room on the seventh floor. At her touch, she felt a tension go out of the doctor. His hands slipped from his face, and he turned to her, shuddering not with fear but with what might have been relief. He wondered what it would be like to make love to Renee and kill her. Only once had he killed without good reason. And that had been one of the infuriating Bartholomews. Prosser in Terra Linda. A man. On that occasion, no erotic element had been involved. This would be a first. Apparently Maria wished that she'd brought a rosary to dinner. With the fingers of her right hand, she pinched the knuckles of her left, one after the other, as if they were beads. could spring the new deadbolts as easily as the old. Therefore, on the interior of the front and back doors, Junior added sliding bolts, which couldn't be picked from outside. For the first time since walking to La Jolla to meet Jonas Salk, Paul planned a journey with a specific purpose. Visibly nonplussed by Junior's blithe failure to terminate the handshake when the shaking stopped, the fussy Neddy didn't want to be so rude as to yank his hand loose, or to cause a scene regardless of how small, but Junior, smiling and pretending to be as socially dense as concrete, failed to respond to a polite tug. So Neddy waited, allowing his hand to be held, and his face, previously as white as piano keys, brightened to a shade of pink that clashed with his red boutonniere. He told her that he loved her, and she slipped away upon his words. As she went, the haggard look of the terminal leukemic patient passed from her, and before the gray mask of death replaced it, he saw the beauty he had preserved in memory when he was three, before they took his eyes, saw it so briefly, as if something transforming welled out of her, a perfect light, her essence. Too late. The parsonage was fully engulfed. With luck, they would save the

church..Earlier in the week, Junior had looked up Thomas Vanadium in the telephone directory. He expected the number to be unlisted, but it was published. What he wanted more than a number was an address, and he found that as well.. "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."..Dr. Lipscomb inclined his head slightly toward the pianist, in the manner of a stem headmaster about to emphasize a lesson with a sharp twist of the offending boy's ear. "Miss White and the baby will have vacated these premises by the end of the week-unless you insist on bothering them with your chatter. For every minute you harass them, their departure will be extended one day."..Moving out of the doorway, into the bedroom, he said, "What book would that be?"..In spring, summer, and fall, they brightened the grave with the roses that Edom grew in the side yard. In this less rose-friendly season, these Christmas bouquets had been purchased at a flower shop..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..An unfortunately bumpy ride for the deceased: along the hallway, through the foyer, across the entry threshold, down the porch steps, across a lawn dappled with pine shadows and yellow moonlight, to the graveled driveway. No complaints..But he was more than she had ever imagined her boy to be, more than merely a prodigy..A quick review of these book spines revealed that the treasured Zedd collection wasn't here..Now, trouble. Different from what he'd experienced before but just as powerful and terrifying. He didn't need to regurgitate, but he desperately needed to evacuate..Now Junior threw back the covers and sprang out of bed. In double briefs, he restlessly roamed the hotel room..As hard of head as she was hard of heart, Victoria had not sustained serious brain damage, only a concussion..The disease hadn't corrupted her heart, and it had left her face untouched, as well. Lovely, she was, as she had always been.. "It was... the only dream that mattered," Joey said. "You ... loving me. It was a good life because of you."..In the neatly ordered bedroom, he removed his shoes. Stretching out on the bed, he stared at the ceiling, feeling useless..The hospital room was softly lighted, and shadows roosted on all sides like a flock of slumbering birds..The patches were held by the same two elastic strips, so Barty flipped up both at the same time..Had he ever thought he could get away with this? He must have been delusional, temporarily mad..Junior was impressed and delighted by her clever assumption of it strictly professional voice and demeanor, which convincingly masked her intense desire. Sweet Victoria was a worthy coconspirator..Having been an object of Thomas Vanadium's fixation, Junior felt fortunate to have survived. He shuddered..Shrieking like carrion-eating birds waiting for their wounded dinner to die, the Hackachaks twice drew stern warnings from nurses. They were told to quiet down and respect the patients in neighboring rooms..That same day, he dared to visit two galleries. Neither of them had a pewter candlestick on display..He turned the knob. The door eased inward, but he pushed it open only a fraction of an inch.. "Wish I could describe his face. Frosty the Snowman was never that white. The surveillance van is parked right there, two spaces south of the vending machines--"..As the nurse gave Junior the injection, Parkhurst said, "You're an exceptionally sensitive man, Enoch. That's a quality to be much admired in an often unfeeling world. But in your current condition, your sensitivity is your worst enemy."..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..That saving smile once more returned lost harmony to the scarred and broken face. "Not me. From my perspective, psychology is just one more of those easy sources of false meaning-like sex, money, and drugs. But I will admit to knowing a thing or two about evil.".. "Vomiting. I'm told it was an exceptionally violent emetic episode." "He spewed like a fire hose," Vanadium said matter-of-factly.. "What's this?" the man asked her, as Sinatra swooped through "Come Fly with Me."..On Tuesday evening, September 7, after half an hour in the lotus position, thinking about nothing whatsoever but a white pin with two black bands at its neck and the number I painted on its head, Junior went to bed at eleven o'clock and set his alarm for three in the morning, when he intended to shoot himself..Prosser-fifty-six, a widower, an accountant-had a thirty-year-old daughter, Zelda, who was an attorney in San Francisco. Junior had driven to Terra Linda previously, to research the accountant; he already knew Prosser had no connection to Seraphim's fateful child..The second ring was followed by a click, and then a familiar droning voice said, "Hello. I'm Thomas Vanadium-"..This thought startled Agnes, disturbed her-yet, inexplicably, it also poured a measure of warm comfort into her chilled heart..He prepared his knives and guns. Blades and bullets. Fortune favors the bold, the self-improved, the self-evolved, the focused..He slipped the card out from under the change, turned it over. A joker. Printed in red block letters across the card was a name, BARTHOLOMEW..Yet Agnes feared him, for reasons similar to those that might cause a superstitious primitive to tremble in the presence of a witch doctor. Although he was a healer, his dark knowledge of the mysteries of cancer seemed to give him godlike power; his judgment carried the force of fate, and his was the voice of destiny..The symptoms that terrified Phimie-the headache, crippling abdominal pain, dizziness, vision problems-had entirely relented. Possibly they had been more psychological than physical in nature..He considered himself to be a thoroughly useless man, taking up space in a world to which he contributed nothing, but he did have a talent for baking. He could take any recipe, even one from a world-class pastry chef, and improve upon it.. "Those were Rowena's affectionate names for the boys when they were babies. Her private nonsense names for them, because she said they were like two beautiful little elves and ought to have elfin names."..Hesitantly, the ivory tickler shook hands. "I'm ... uh ... I'm Ned Gnathic. Everyone calls me Neddy."..Junior had almost fumbled his fork when he recognized the tune. His heart raced. His hands were suddenly clammy..At first light, a nurse arrived to

perform preliminary surgical prep on Barty. She pulled the boy's hair back and captured it under a tight fitting cap. With cream and a safety razor, she shaved off his eyebrows..Agnes leaned forward in her chair: knees together, clasped hands resting on her knees, forehead against her hands..She could have used the chair. Sitting, however, she wouldn't be able to see his face..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.. "Of all the things I might be meant to do with my life," he told Agnes, "I believe nothing will matter more than the small part I've had in bringing together these two children." Bartholomew was dead but didn't know it yet. Pistol in hand, cocoon in tatters, ready to spread his butterfly wings, Junior pushed the door to the apartment inward, saw a deserted living room, softly lighted and pleasantly furnished, and was about to step across the threshold when the street door opened and into the hall came Ichabod..The poor girl's blood pressure soared in spite of the medication. She suffered a violent seizure..Junior had come to the gumshoe four days ago, with business that might have made a reputable investigator uncomfortable. He needed to discover whether Seraphim White had given birth at a San Francisco hospital earlier this month and where the baby might be found. Since he wasn't prepared to reveal any relationship to Seraphim, and since he resisted devising a cover story on the assumption that a competent private detective would at once see through it, his interest in this baby inevitably seemed sinister..Celestina stared at the small, brown face, opening herself to the anger and hatred with which she had regarded this child in the operating room..When she didn't at once accept his generosity, he said, "All my life, I've lived just to get through the day. First survival. Then achievement, acquisition. Houses, investments, antiques ... There's nothing wrong with any of that. But it didn't fill the emptiness. Maybe one day I'll return to medicine. But that's a hectic existence, and right now I want peace, calm, time to reflect. Whatever I do from here on . . . I want my life to have a degree of purpose it's never had before. Can you understand that?" Paul said, "I wanted you ... I don't know ... I just wanted you to see her. I wanted to say ... to say. . .". She lay beside her boy in the darkness, gazing at the covered window, where the faint glow of the moon pressed through the blind, suggesting another world thriving with strange life just beyond a thin membrane of light..Nolly finally disturbed the quiet: "Well, sir ... you're quite a psychologist." Recently, Wally administered to Angel a set of apperception tests for three-year-olds, and the results indicated that she might not ever be a math whiz or a verbal gymnast, but that she might be highly talented in other ways. Her appreciation of color, her innate understanding of the derivation of secondary hues from the primary colors, her sense of spatial relationships, and her recognition of basic geometric forms regardless of the angle at which they were presented were all far beyond what was exhibited by other kids her age. Wally said she was visually, rather than verbally, gifted, that she would undoubtedly exhibit increasing precociousness in matters artistic, that she might follow Celestina's career path, and that she might even prove to be a prodigy.. "Some places, it has to be like that." some places it has to be that your eyes are okay?" Nor could she begin to imagine the nature of the disaster that had befallen him, leaving his face looking blasted and loose at all its hinges. She had last seen him at Phimie's funeral. A few minutes ago at her doorstep, she'd recognized him only because of his port-wine birthmark..The cord wasn't long enough to allow Celestina to take the telephone handset with her, so she put it down on the nightstand, beside the lamp..Celestina stared out for a moment, and then turned her head to look at Tom, with both the shade of the night and the sparkle of the metropolis still captured in her eyes. "What was that all about?" The accountant lived in a white Georgian house on a street lined with huge old evergreens..With a nervous twitch of his avian head and a wary frown, the watcher broke eye contact and slipped into the chattering crowd, lost as quickly as a slender sandpiper skittering among a herd of plump seagulls..Leaving three of the pats in the container, he carefully placed the fourth on the vinyl-tile floor..Room by room, closet by closet, Junior conducted a search for the detective. The cop was not here..Paul Damascus remained busy, filling prescriptions, until he was finally able to take a lunch break at two-thirty..From the devil to the sacred and then beyond, Junior drove north on State Highway 160, which was proudly marked as a scenic route, although in these predawn hours, all lay bleak and black. Following the serpentine course of the Sacramento River, Highway 160 wove past a handful of small, widely separated towns..More likely than not, this was a lie, and the detective was, setting him up. Suddenly Junior wished that he had denied dreaming..Focus. Get Ichabod all the way inside. Act now, think later. No, no, proper focus requires an understanding of the need to ize: scrutinize, analyze, and prioritize. Get the bitch, get the bitch! Slow deep breaths. Channel the beautiful rage. A fully evolved man is self-controlled and calm. Move, move, move!.By the time this operation concluded and the sulphurous Mr. Cain was brought to some form of justice, Simon might have spent twenty or twenty-five percent of the fee that he'd collected from the liability settlement in the matter of Naomi Cain's death. The attorney put a substantial price on his dignity and reputation..Though they had expected the cause of the explosion, both Paul and Harrison were halted by shock at the sight of all this ruination. They had expected to find the car jammed into the wall of the house, never this far inside. The speed required to penetrate this distance into the structure beggared Paul's skills of calculation and made him wonder if even recklessness and alcohol were sufficient to produce, such a catastrophe..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." Foreword.After staring at the coins for a long moment, Kathleen said, "I don't think any mystery writer has ever done a series of novels about a priest detective who's also a magician." As one, those around the table raised their eyes to the ceiling and smiled at the sound of the downpour. Barty, with patches over his empty sockets, also looked up with a smile..Junior leaned forward and slid the packet of cash across the desk, toward the detective. "There's more where this came from." He fished the sound-suppressor from a jacket pocket, drew the pistol from his shoulder holster, and began to screw the former to the latter. He misthreaded it at

first because his hands had begun to shake..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..No scent of gasoline fouled the air. Apparently, the tank had not burst. Sudden immolation seemed unlikely-but only an hour ago so had Joey's untimely death.. "If there's a presentation, I assume then I'm the presentee," he said, taming his chair sideways to the table and taking her into his lap. "Just remember, I never wear neckties." On Tuesday, January 2, Junior met with the drug dealer who had introduced him to Google, the document forger, and he arranged to purchase a 9-mm handgun with custom-machined silencer..A sense of mystery overcame Agnes, unnerving but not entirely or even primarily unpleasant.. "It's just that you never know what anyone's hand has been up to recently," Jacob explained. "That respectable banker down the street might have thirty dismembered women buried in his backyard. The nice church-going lady next door might be sleeping in the same bed with the rotting corpse of a lover who tried to jilt her, and for a hobby she makes jewelry from the finger bones of preschool children she's tortured and murdered." Junior spoke the three words aloud and felt a strange resonance between them and his dim memories of Reverend White's voice on that long-ago night. Yet the link, if any actually existed, remained elusive..He took a long shower, as hot as he could tolerate, until his muscles felt as soft as butter..In San Francisco, Seraphim Aethionema White lies beyond all hope of resuscitation. So beautiful and only sixteen..to believe that any man with such a hard gut slung over his belt, with a bull neck..At the head of the line, Paul waved a red handkerchief out of the window of the station wagon..To the alleyway again. Not through the clodhopper-cluttered gallery this time. Around the block at a brisk walk..In time, his hand tightened feebly on hers. And a while after that hopeful sign, his eyelids fluttered, opened..He had been stowed in a storeroom of one of the old palaces that Losen had appropriated. It had no window, its door was cross-grained oak barred with iron, and spells had been laid on that door that would have kept a far more experienced wizard captive. There were men of great skill and power in Losen's pay. Hound did not consider himself to be one of them. "All I have is a nose," he said. He came daily to see that Otter was recovering from his concussion and dislocated shoulder, and to talk with him. He was, as far as Otter could see, well-meaning and honest. "If you won't work for us they'll kill you," he said. "Losen can't have fellows like you on the loose. You'd better hire on while he'll take you." When the nurse was gone, alone with his mother as they waited for the orderly to bring a gurney, Barty said, "Come close." 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..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..Junior intended to pack only a single bag, leaving most of his clothes behind. He could afford a fine new wardrobe..Yet, with no recollection of rising from his chair, he found that he had shouldered his backpack and crossed the room. The three men looked up expectantly..Behind her, he said, "And is that my gray cardigan? What did you do to my cardigan?" He wasn't afflicted with parenthood envy. A baby was the last thing he would ever want, aside from cancer. Children were nasty little beasts. A child would be an encumbrance, a burden, not a blessing.

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