He was able to play peekaboo in his fifth month instead of his eighth, stand while holding on to something in his sixth instead of eighth. Zedd endorses self-pity, but only if you learn to use it as a springboard to anger, because anger-like hatred—can be a healthy emotion when properly channeled. Anger can motivate you to heights of achievement you otherwise would never know, even just the simple furious determination to prove wrong the bastards who mocked you, to rub their faces in the fact of your success. Anger and hatred have driven all great political leaders, from Hitler to Stalin to Mao, who wrote their names indelibly across the face of history, and who were-each, in his own way-eaten with self-pity when young...This momentous day, he thought, and he shook with sudden terror at the inevitability of new beginnings...To her mother, Celestina said, "What did you mean when you said you'd heard all about Barty here?" "So do I," said the visitor, and Junior almost frowned at this peculiar response, wondering what was meant in addition to what was merely said...Heart racing, but reminding himself that strength and wisdom arose from a calm mind, Junior stood in the center of the small kitchen, slowly turning to study every angle of the room...He knew of his despair by this exhilarating wrath, Junior turned away from the mirror, looking for the bright side once more. Perhaps it was the bathroom window..."And in a lot of somewheres," said Barty, "things are worse for us than here. Some somewheres, you died, too, when I was born, so I never met you, either." Celestina said, "Phimie wasn't a mind reader. That's science fiction, Dr. Lipscomb." "Where did it go?" Grace asked her granddaughter, making as much effort as she could to lighten the mood for the girl's sake...From the bathroom, Junior gathered an electric razor and toiletries. He added these to the suitcases...Stepping forward, Agnes said, "When Barty holds my hand and walks me through the rain, I get wet even while he stays dry. The same for all the rest of us here...except Angel." "This card to mean also is family love, and is love from many friends, not just to be kissy-kissy love," Maria elucidated...No longer able to judge the boy's degree of sleepiness by his eyes, she relied on him to tell her when to stop reading. At his request, she closed the book after forty-seven pages, at the end of Chapter 2..."As she comes closer to full term," said Dairies, "she's at great risk of preeclampsia developing into full eclampsia..."What aren't you telling us?" her mother pressed, intuiting the existence of a larger story, if not the amazing nature of it...Soon he dispensed with picture books and progressed to short novels for more accomplished readers, and then rapidly to books meant for young adults. Tom Swift adventures and Nancy Drew mysteries captivated him through the summer and early autumn...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...A pang of regret pierced her, that her boy's precocity should deny him this fine fantasy, as her morose father had denied it to her. "He's real," she asserted...he wasn't wholly without feeling, of course. A poignant current of sadness eddied in his heart, a sadness at the thought of the love and the happiness that he and the nurse might have known together. But it was her choice, after all, to play the tease and to deal with him so cruelly...The detective shrugged, "The girl might've had her baby at a third rate hospital, one with poor control of patients' records and a less professional staff. Or the kid might have been placed for adoption through some baby brokerage in it strictly for the money. Then there would've been opportunities to learn something. But as soon as I discovered it was St. Mary's, I knew we were screwed." "Me, me," Celestina said. "In fact, fiancés should come first."...Then he closed his eyes, held the revolver in both hands, and at point-blank range, he shot the dead woman twice...His first overnight journey, in June of '65, was to La Jolla, north of San Diego. He carried too large a backpack and wore khaki pants when he should have worn shorts in the summer heat...Although she knew how, and although she knew the pointlessness of asking why, Agnes asked, "Why? Oh, Lord, why must a blind boy climb a tree?" Finally: "A trial lawyer, whether specializing in criminal or civil matters, is like an actor, Mr. Cain. He must believe deeply in his role, in the truth of his portrayal, if he's to be convincing. I always believe in the innocence of my clients in order to achieve the best possible settlement for them..."When he reached the Suburban and closed his right hand around the handle on the driver's door, he felt something peculiar against his palm. A small, cold object balanced there...On a shelf above one of the clothes rods stood a small piece of Mark Cross luggage, an elegant and expensive two-suiter. The rest of the high shelf was empty-enough space for as many as three more bags...As Junior stood at Seraphim's grave, his breath smoked from him in the still night air, as though he were a dragon...Glancing at his wristwatch with alarm, Edom bolted up from his chair. "Look at the time! Agnes gave me a lot to do, and here I am rattling on about earthquakes and cyclones..."On the lawn, Koko, their four-year-old golden retriever, was lying on her back, all paws in the air, presenting the great gift of her furry belly for the rubbing pleasure of young Mistress Mary..."We don't sell no pizza," Angel said, because lately they had received a few calls for a new pizzeria with a phone number one digit different from theirs...One manly woman. Several womanly men. But no blocky figure that could have been the crazed cop even in disguise...Otter shrugged...When he reported for a physical and a reassessment of his draft classification, on Wednesday, December 15, he left the insert in his hitching shoe; however, he limped like old Walter Brennan, the actor, hitching around the ranch in The Real McCoys...Agnes winced. Already, another contraction. Mild but so soon after the last. She clasped her hands around her immense belly and took slow, deep breaths until the pain passed...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...Luck favored Paul: The hero was here, having breakfast. He and two other men were deep in conversation at a comer table...Thrilled to have inspired this awe in her, he closed the book. "Remember what we talked about a long time ago? You asked me how come, if I could walk where the rain wasn't..." When she went upstairs at 2:10 in the morning, she found the boy fast asleep in the soft lamplight, Tunnel in the Sky at
his side. What might have become a waiting game of epic duration was ended when the door to the room swung inward, and a doctor in a white lab coat entered from the corridor. He was backlit by fluorescent glare, his face in shadow, like a figure in a dream. "And you're saying fear can fill his emptiness as well as sex or booze?" Kathleen wondered. On mechanic, he again glanced meaningfully at Edom, who felt a response was expected. When he opened his mouth, he could think of nothing to say, except that at Sanriku, Japan, on June 15, 1896, a 110 foot-high wave, triggered by an undersea quake, killed 27,100 people, most while they were in prayer at a Shinto festival. Even to Edom, this seemed to be an inappropriate comment, so he said nothing. ..Sheena Hackachak, at forty-four, was more beautiful than any current movie star. She looked twenty years younger than her true age, and she so resembled her late daughter that Junior felt a rush of erotic nostalgia at the sight of her...Surprisingly, he received a lot of gratification from voicing this insult, even though Vanadium was too dead to hear it. "It's chilly and foggy and late, and there might be villains afoot at this hour," he intoned with mock gravity. "The two of you are Lipscomb women now, or soon will be, and Lipscomb women never go unescorted through the dangerous urban night." With the great tree ninety degrees to his left, he was able to locate the back-porch steps at forty-five degrees. He pointed with the cane, which otherwise he had not used. "The porch?"...The game, one wheel rattling. The young orderly behind it, dressed all in white. And the nurse again...Maybe are for babies, Zedd tells us in Act Now, Think Later. Learning to Trust Your Instincts...When you construct or reconstruct a world that never existed, a wholly fictional history, the research is of a somewhat different order, but the basic impulse and techniques are much the same. You look at what happens and try to see why it happens, you listen to what the people there tell you and watch what they do, you think about it seriously, and you try to tell it honestly, so that the story will have weight and make sense...As his drying tears became stiff on his cheeks, Junior decided that he would most likely have to kill Vanadium to be rid of him and fully safe. No problem. And in spite of his exquisite sensitivity, he was convinced that wasting the detective would not trigger in him another bout of vomiting. If anything, he might pee his pants in sheer delight...Fourth and last, he was surprised that Kickmule was a legitimate surname. This information wasn't of immediate importance to him, but if ever his Gammoner and Pinchbeck identities were compromised and he required false ID in a new name, he would call himself Eric Kickmule. Or possibly Wolfgang Kickmule. That sounded really tough. No one would mess with a man named Kickmule...She stood just inside the front door of the apartment, admiring herself in a full-length mirror, waiting patiently for Celestina, who was packing dolls, coloring books, tablets, and a large collection of crayons into a zippered satchel..."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." Edom, who had never made it big, medium, or little, watched his sister blur before him. He strove to contain the shimmering hotness in his eyes. His love was not for magic, and his pride was not in any skill he possessed, for he possessed none worth noting. His love was for his good sister; she was his pride, too, and he felt that his small life had precious meaning as long as he was able to drive her on days like this, carry her pies, and occasionally make her smile..."Better. Fear doesn't require him even to seduce a woman or to buy a bottle of whiskey. He just needs to open himself to it, and he will be filled like a glass under a faucet. As difficult as this may be to comprehend, Cain would choose to be neck-deep in a bottomless pool of terror, desperately trying to stay afloat, rather than to suffer that unrelieved hollowness. Fear can give shape and meaning to his life, and I intend not merely to fill him with fear but to drown him in it." In spite of its dazzling, the detective's smile was nonetheless melancholy, proof that he was sincere when he said that Seraphim's baby was beyond their reach...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...Almost thirty years from the seminary--even farther from it if measured by degrees of lost innocence, by miles of rough experience Tom Vanadium set out to kill a man. Given the chance to disarm Cain, given the opportunity to merely wound him, he would nevertheless go for the head shot or the heart shot, play jury and executioner, play God, and leave to God the judgment of his stained soul...Celestina screamed--"Here! In here!--"as she slapped the magazine into the butt of the pistol...Although Junior had not answered, Vanadium said, "Yes, I thought you heard it." Besides, Junior was reluctant to kill Vanadium, for real this time, and risk discovering- that the detective's filthy-scrabby-monkey spirit would in fact prove to be a relentless haunting presence that gave him no peace..."When the Iroquois Theater in Chicago burned on December 30, 1903" he said aloud, testing his memory, "during a matinee of Mr Blue Beard, six hundred two people perished, mostly women and children." But the boy played no tricks against his father. He took his beatings in silence and learned to hide his gift..."This is going to be an enormous settlement," the attorney promised. "And there's more good news. County and state authorities have agreed to close the case on Naomi's death. It's now officially an accident. "Our little girl's going to walk backward her whole life if you drive in reverse all the way to the hospital." During the drive, he alternated between great gales of delighted laughter and racking sobs wrought by pain and self-pity. The voodoo Baptist was dead, the curse broken with the death of he who had cast it. Yet Junior
must endure this final devastating plague. Outside, he realized he hadn't paid for his juice and waffles. When he turned back to the coffee shop, he saw, through one of the windows, an associate of Salk's picking up the check from his table. Of course, Angel might have been playing around with the talking book. Or, even though she'd left the dolls downstairs, she might have been filling the time until Barty's return by having a nice chat with Miss Pixie and Miss Velveeta. She had other voices, too, for other dolls, and one for a sock puppet named Smelly. Bartholomew had been able to focus his eyes much sooner than the average baby was supposed to be able to focus. To a surprising extent, he was already engaged in the world around him. So. Two monks they were; one in the service of everlasting light, the other in the service of eternal darkness. Four blocks from his office, on a street more upscale than his own, Nolly came to the Tollman Building. Built in the 1930s, it had an Art Deco flair. The public areas featured travertine floors, and a WPA-ers mural extolling the machine age brightened a lobby wall. Angel. A less exotic synonym for her own name. Seraphim's angel. The angel of an angel. This Detroit-built gondola would swiftly navigate the Styx without a black-robed gondolier to pole it onward, of the deceased. This memorial was modest, neither large nor complicated in design. Nevertheless, often the carvers in this line of business followed days after the morticians, because the stones to which they applied their craft demanded more labor and less urgency than the cold bodies that rested under them. Wild exhilaration burst through him like pyrotechnics blazing in a night sky, reminiscent of the rush of excitement that followed his bold action on the fire tower. Happily, Junior had no emotional connection to Prosser, as he'd had to beloved Naomi; therefore, the purity of his. Agnes had lifted him to this perch. Now she smoothed his hair, straightened his shirt, and retied his loosened shoelaces, finding it even harder than she had expected to say what needed to be said. She thought she might require Dr. Chan's presence, after all. The hospital room was softly lighted, and shadows roosted on all sides like a flock of slumbering birds. 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. A cold wetness just above the crook of his left elbow. A sting. A touriquet of flexible rubber tubing had been tied around his left arm, to make a vein swell more visibly, and the sting had been the prick of a hypodermic needle. 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. When at last he spoke, real grief, quiet but profound, softened his voice: "March first, three years ago, my wife and two sons-Danny and Harry, both seven, twins-were coming home from visiting her parents in New York. Shortly after takeoff ... their plane went down." Or at least, if the police knew the truth at that time, they hadn't yet gone public with it. I had no reason to mention it to you back then. I didn't even know Vanadium was missing. She remembered a gift tag bearing a hand-printed message: With our compliments. Thanks for your business. This is Detective Bellini, with the San Francisco Police Department. Is everything all right there? They wanted to go up to Barty's room, but she refused them, because there was nothing more they could do for the boy than they had done for her. "He wants to finish reading Starman Jones, and I'm not letting anything interfere with that. We're leaving for Newport Beach at seven in the morning, and you can see him then."Evidently, Jacob had made a quick trip to his apartment over the garage and, with no thought for mice and dust, had not closed the back door. Junior said, "You've caused me a lot of trouble, you know. He'd been building a beautiful rage all night, thinking about what he'd been through because of the girl's temptress mother, whom he saw so clearly in this pint-size bitch. "So much trouble." As best he could, he examined his clothes. They were better pressed than he expected, and not noticeably soiled. She searched the child's unfocused eyes for some sign of the hateful father's wickedness. In fact, though he strained hard to recall their conversations, he could dredge up nothing that Seraphim had said during therapy, as if he'd been stone-deaf in those days. The only things he retained were sensual impressions: the beauty of her face, the texture of her skin, the firmness of her flesh under his ministering hands. Angel. Phimie said urgently, and then, with an effort that made a blood vessel swell. A residual tension drained out of Junior. He was somewhat surprised that he had still been concerned about the song. He could recall clearly when he had known that he would marry her: during his first year of college, when he'd returned home for the Christmas break. Away at school, he had missed her every day, and the moment that he saw her again, an abiding tension left him, and he felt at peace for the first time in months. Junior was free of superstition. He believed in neither gods nor demons, nor in anything between. He and the homicide detective had been friends for almost thirty years, since Max had been a uniformed rookie on the SFPD and Vanadium had been a young priest freshly assigned to St. Anselmo's Orphanage here in the city. Before choosing police work, Max had contemplated the priesthood, and perhaps back then he had sensed the cop-to-be in Tom Vanadium. As Junior was about to knock again, the door flew inward, and over Sinatra having fun with "When My Sugar Walks Down the Street," Victoria said, "You're early, I didn't hear your car--" She was speaking as she pulled the door open, and she cut herself off in midsentence. When she stepped up to the threshold and saw who stood before her. When at last the caller spoke again, her voice sounded a kingdom away: "Will you tell Bartholomew ... ?" No, no. But being around him so much, inevitably I absorb some details. He's a compelling speaker when the subject interests him.. The night seemed to be longer than a Martian month. Agnes dozed, fitfully, waking more than once, sweaty and shaking, from a dream in which her son was taken from her in pieces: first his eyes, then his hands, then his ears, his legs. For just one hour, which was not too taxing, he walked in the idea of a world where he had healthy eyes, and shared the vision of other Barty's in other places, so he would be able to see his bride as she walked down the aisle and as, beside him, she took their vows with him, and as she held out her hand to receive the ring. In a cabinet above the bench, Junior found a pair of clean, cotton gardening gloves. He tried them on, and they fit well enough. Junior got in the car once more, slammed the door, and said, "Panfaced, double-chinned, half-bald, puke-collecting creep." She herself had been too nervous to eat anything. She'd held the same
glass of untasted champagne throughout the evening, clutching it as though it were a mooring buoy that would prevent her from being swept away in a storm. Finally he switched on the light, and illuminated Neddy at ease, silent in death as never in life: lying on his back, head turned to the right, swollen tongue lolling obscenely. “No member of the society ever violates a secret confidence,” Agnes assured him. A pink spot in the center of Victoria’s forehead marked the point of impact. Soon it would be an ugly bruise. The skull bone did not appear to have been crattered. His leonine head and bold features, framed by golden hair, should have conveyed strength, but the impression he might have made was compromised by a fringe of bangs that curled across his forehead, a style unfortunately reminiscent of effete emperors of ancient Rome. “Really, Angel,” Barty said with genuine concern, “it might be scary. I got another one we could listen to, if you want.” “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. Beautiful she was, both of face and form, even with her mouth gaping wide and her eyes rolled back in her skull. How bright her future might have been if she had not chosen to deceive. A tease was, in essence, a deceiver—promising what she never intended to deliver. Agnes called their two-car parade a Christmas caravan, which appealed to Barty’s sense of magic and adventure. Repeatedly he turned in his seat and rose to his knees to look back at his uncle Edom, waving vigorously. LATE TUESDAY AFTERNOON in Bright Beach, as a darker blue and iridescent tide rolled across the sky, seagulls rowed toward their safe harbors, and on the land below, shadows that had been upright at work all day now stretched out, recumbent, preparing for the night. 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. Darkrose and Diamond. He slid his plate aside. From a pocket, he withdrew a quarter, which always served him as well with children as with murderers. “The girl’s baby,” said Nolly, “was placed with Catholic Family Services for adoption.” Under the spoon to catch drips, she conveyed the shimmering sliver to Agnes’s mouth. Some information she’d withheld from him: that the cancer might already have spread, that he might still die even after his eyes were removed—and that it hadn’t yet spread, it might soon do so. At 3:22 in the morning, December 13, following a busy day of conducting ghost research, seeking Bartholomews in a telephone book, and working on his needlepoint, Junior awakened to singing. A single voice. No instrumental accompaniment. A woman. “I hope it was all right I let him in, Mr. Cain.” Sparky had a capuchin’s overbite, too. “He told me it was an emergency.” In her campaign to keep her weight gain to a minimum, anorexia was her ally. She learned to find pleasure in hunger pangs. This was the same woman who had been stripping the second bed when Celestina arrived earlier. Now she was here to remake the first. Desperately trying to collect her wits, Agnes gazed out at the deluged graveyard, where the mournful trees and massed monuments were blurring by purling streams ceaselessly spilling down the windshield. “Do you know him?” Edom asked, gazing longingly now at the open door, from which Jacob had turned away. “Obadiah Sephardar?” “And, of course, you’ll need to make arrangements for the body,” said Dr. Lipscomb. “Sister Josephina will provide you with a room, a phone, privacy, whatever you need, and for however long you need.” Beseechingly, with no intention of intimacy, he took Celestina’s hands in his. “For years, as an obstetrician, I brought life into the world, but I didn’t know what life was, didn’t grasp the meaning of it, that it even had meaning. Before Rowena, Harry, and Danny went down in that airplane, I was already empty. After losing them, I was worse than empty. Celestina, I was dead inside. Phimie gave me hope. I can’t repay her, but I can do something for her daughter and for you, if you’ll let me.” Exactly. The shock. The devastating loss. Junior felt it now, anew, and was afraid he might betray himself with tears, although he seemed to be done with vomiting. The bandaged man stowed 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. Sapphires and emeralds, dazzling gems set in clearest white, ebony pupils at the center. Beautiful mysteries, these eyes, but no different now than they had ever been, as far as she could tell. She asked him how many fingers she was holding up, and he said four, and four it was. Then two fingers. Then seven. Her hands so pale, the palms both bruised. Matching her fierce attention with a sudden intensity of his own, Joey said, “Bartholomew.” He felt some guilt at this—but only a little. His sister had done much for him; but jobless, ruled by his obsessions, hobbled by too much of his father’s dour nature, there wasn’t a lot that he could do for her. Just this benign deceit with the cards. The second time, armed with the previously calculated fact that each regular year contains 3,153,600 seconds, and that a leap year contains an additional 86,400, she vetted Barty’s answer in only four minutes. Thereafter, she accepted his numbers without verification. “September 20, 1902, Birmingham, Alabama, church fire—one hundred fifteen dead.” March 4, 1908, Collinwood, Ohio, school fire, one hundred seventy-six dead.” If there had been footsteps, they had fallen silent the moment Junior froze to listen for them. Even over the hard drumming of his heart, he would have heard any noise. The pillow fog seemed to smother sound in the alleyway more effectively than ever. Out of Phimie’s humiliation, terror, suffering, and death had come Angel, whom Celestina had first and briefly hated, but whom now she loved more than she loved Wally, more than she loved herself or even life itself. Phimie, through Angel, had brought Celestina both to Wally and to a fuller understanding of their father’s meaning when he spoke of this momentous day, an understanding that brought power to her. Her daughter and for you, if you’ll let me.”
wanted, and then she saw that the window on his side of the car was shattered, too, and that the door beyond him was badly torqued, twisted in its frame. Worse, the side of the Pontiac had burst inward when the pickup plowed into them. With a steel snarl and sheet-metal teeth, it had bitten into Joey, bitten deep, a mechanical shark swimming out of the wet day, shattering ribs, seeking his warm heart. The kids insisted on knowing what was meant by the line about the chicken, and this led to the laying of a coopful of Why-did-the-chicken-cross-the-road jokes, which Edom and Jacob had memorized in childhood as an act of rebellion against their humorless father.