

## MULTIFOCAL INTRAOCULAR LENSES THE ART AND THE PRACTICE

The customers were in a mood, most of them grumbling about their ailments. Others complained about the dreary weather, the increasing number of kids zooming along sidewalks on these damn new skateboards, the recent tax increases, and the New York Jets paying Joe Namath the kingly sum of \$427,000 a year to play football, which some saw as a sign that the country was money-crazy and going to Hell..Reaching between the slats, Agnes tickled the pink piggies on his left foot. "Toes."If he was left standing on the porch, the visitor would circle the house, peering in windows where the drapes were not drawn, trying the doors in hope of finding one unlocked. Fearful that Victoria was sick or injured, that perhaps she had slipped on a pat of butter and cracked her Mad against the corner of an open oven door, he might try to force his way inside, break a window. Certainly he would go to the neighbors to call the police..The forger's crossed eyes glowed with reflected light from the screen. He licked his rubbery lips, and his prominent Adam's apple bobbed: "Like to drain my pipes in that Faye Dunaway, huh?".Her life was so blessed that she could have dealt with a horde of locusts, let alone a few mosquitoes.."Me too." He closed the ring box. Took a deep breath. Opened the box again. "Celestina, when I met you, my heart was beating but it was dead. It was cold inside me. I thought it would never be warm again, but because of you, it is. You have given my life back to me, and I want now to give my life to you. Will you marry me?". "Only for a little while. Then he is joining me at the gallery, and after the show's over, we're having dinner together." 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..Kathleen had never heard a religious calling described in such odd words as these, and she was surprised, indeed, to hear a priest refer to God as "strange".The barren white walls, the stark furniture starkly arranged, the rigorous exclusion of bric-a-brac and mementos: this resulted in the closest thing to a true monastic cell to be found outside of a monastery. The only quality of the apartment that identified it as a secular residence was its comfortable size, and if Industrial Woman had been replaced with a crucifix, even size might have been insufficient to rule out residence by some fortunate friar..The friendship, the work, and not least of all the sense of home and belonging that everyone felt within minutes of crossing Agnes's threshold-these things appealed to Celestina and Grace. But they didn't want Paul to feel that his hospitality was unappreciated..The patches were held by the same two elastic strips, so Barty flipped up both at the same time.."It's that bad and worse," Grace said firmly. "Even if they catch him, you're going to live with the quiet fear that he might escape one day. As long as you know he can find you, then you're never going to be completely at peace. And if you love this city so much that you'll put Angel in jeopardy ... then who have you been listening to all these years, girl? Because it hasn't been me." HAVING COMPLETED HER English lesson, Maria Elena Gonzalez went home with a plastic shopping bag full of precisely damaged clothes and a smaller, paper bag containing cherry muffins for her two girls..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..The water shut off, and Junior heard the ratcheting noise of a paper-towel dispenser..During the past few hours, he had changed his life again, as dramatically as he had changed it on that fire tower almost three years ago..For a while he enjoyed being challenged to figure the number of seconds elapsed since a particular historical event. Given the date, he did the calculations in his head, providing a correct answer in as little as twenty seconds, rarely taking more than a minute..This consequence of rape, the baby, was less baby to Celestina than cancer, a malignancy excised rather than a life delivered. She had been no more impelled to study the child than she would have been, charmed to examine the glistening gnarls and oozing convolutions of a freshly plucked tumor. Consequently, she could remember nothing of its squinched face..Mocked by the silvery ping-ting-jingle of the maniac detective emptying his ghostly pockets, Junior ran..On January 3, 1968, Paul was fewer than 250 miles from Spruce Hills, Oregon. He wasn't aware of that town's proximity, however, and he didn't, at the time, have it as his destination..The adoption records on Seraphim White's baby weren't sealed by law, because custody of the child was being retained by family..Adding new growth to his forest of frustration, Tom got up from the study desk, fetched the newspaper from the front doorstep, and went to the kitchen to make his morning coffee. He boiled up a pot of strong brew and sat down at the knotty-pine table with a steaming mug full of black and sugarless solace..He tried to lean back as he dropped, with the hope that he would fall under her, providing cushion if they met with sidewalk instead of lawn..This venerable old building, as solidly constructed as a castle, was well-insulated; noises in other apartments rarely penetrated to Junior's. Never before had he heard a neighbor's voice distinctly enough to comprehend the words spoken-or, in this case, sung..Slow deep breaths. Per Zedd, slow deep breaths. Any state of anxiety, regardless of how powerful, could be ameliorated or even dissipated.Through fog-shrouded hills forested with oaks, maples, madrones, and pepperwoods, through magnificent stands of redwoods that towered three hundred feet, he arrived in Weott on the evening of January 3, 1968, where he stayed the night. If Paul had any northernmost goal for this trip, it was the city of Eureka, almost fifty miles farther-and for no reason, other than to eat Humboldt Bay crabs at their origin, because that was one of his and Perri's favorite foods..He'd never taken too much from any one game. He was a discreet thief, charming his victims with amusing patter. Because he was so ingratiating and seemed only mildly lucky, no one begrudged him his winnings. Soon, he was more flush than he'd ever been as a magician..He halted, made a quick calculation, turned, and moved toward where the back door ought to be. He found it half open.."Your forgiveness won't make any of it right," he said, "nothing could, but it might start to give me a little peace."..When she tried to speak to him, she could no more easily raise her voice than she could extend a hand to him..Paul Damascus remained busy, filling prescriptions, until he was finally able to take a lunch break at

two-thirty..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."..Instead, he encountered an elderly woman getting out of a red Pontiac with a fox tail tied to the radio antenna. A quick glance around confirmed that they were unobserved, so he clubbed her on the back of the head with the butt of his 9-mm pistol..When he woke, he was in a hospital bed, his upper body slightly elevated. The only illumination was provided by a single window: an ashen light too dreary to be called a glow, trimmed into drab ribbons by the..On New Year's Day, the town learned that it had lost its first son in Vietnam. Agnes had known the parents all her life, and she despaired that even with her willingness to help, with all her good intentions, there was nothing she could do to ease their pain. She recalled her anguish as she'd waited to learn if Barty's eye tumors had spread along the optic nerve to his brain. The thought of her neighbors losing a child to war made her turn to Paul in the night. "Just hold me," she murmured..The right side of the girl's face appeared to be more strongly affected by gravity..Turning to face his four trailing escorts, all of whom were hunch shouldered and stiff-necked with tension, Barty said, "What's for dinner?"..The ninth piece was not art, certainly not a work by Grislin, and could disturb no one half as much as it rattled Junior. Upon a black pedestal stood a pewter candlestick identical to the one that had cracked the skull of Thomas Vanadium and had added dimension to the cop's previously pan-flat face..As he passed the living-room archway, he said, "Watch out for tidal waves, Uncle Jacob."..His waitress was a cutie. She flirted with him, and he knew he could have her if he wanted..If the directory proved to be of no help, Junior would proceed next to the registry office at the county courthouse, to review the records of births going back to the turn of the century if necessary. Bartholomew, of course, might not have been born in the county, might have moved here as a child or an adult. If he owned property, he'd show up on the register of deeds. Whether a landowner or not, if he did his civic duty every two years, he would appear on the voter rolls..In the morning, after their first night together, without either of them suggesting what must be done, Barty and Angel went in silence into the backyard and, together, climbed the oak, to watch the sunrise from its highest bower. Three years later, on Easter Sunday in 1986, the fabled bunny brought them a gift: Angel gave birth to Mary. "It's time for a nice ordinary name in this family," she declared..The purpose of life was self--fulfillment, per Zedd, and Junior was so rapidly realizing his extraordinary potential that surely he would have pleased his guru..people that he was innocent and, in fact, constitutionally incapable of premeditated murder..Agnes had believed that through this ordeal, she'd largely spared her child from an awareness of the awful depth of her misery. In this, however, as in so many other instances, the boy proved to be more perceptive and more mature than she'd realized. Now she felt that she had failed him, and this failure ached like a wound..Junior released Neddy and, letting him slide down the wall to the floor, returned to the door to lock it. Reaching for the latch, he suddenly expected the door to fly open, revealing Thomas Vanadium, dead and risen. The ghost didn't appear, but Junior was shaken by the mere thought of such a supernatural confrontation in the middle of this crisis..At the sight of her photograph, she felt herself flush. She hoped none of the pedestrians passing between her and the gallery would look from the photo to her face and recognize her. What had she been..Angel, busy with a cookie through most of this, licked crumbs from her lips and asked Paul, "Do you have a puppy?"..She owned a public-relations firm specializing in artists, and over dinner she rhapsodized about the work of Jack Lientery. His current series of paintings-emaciated babies against backdrops of ripe fruit and other symbols of plenty-had critics swooning.."Get this through your head, you shit-for-brains. I lost a daughter, a precious daughter, my Naomi, the light of my life.".."Because Cain had called him to get a recommendation of a P. I. here in San Francisco," said Kathleen. "To find out what happened to Seraphim White's baby."..Rowena loves you, Phimie had told him, briefly repressing the effects of her stroke to speak with clarity. Beezil and Feezil are safe with her Messages from his lost wife and children, where they waited for him beyond this life..Agnes Lampion would enthral them, for hers was a life of clear significance. That they seemed equally interested in Paul's story, however, surprised him. Perhaps they were merely being kind, and yet with apparent fascination, they drew out of him so many details of his long walks, of the places he had been and the reasons why, of his life with Perri..She strove to appear calm, and she must have succeeded, because neither woman seemed to realize that she was scared almost to the point of paralysis. She moved woodenly, joints stiff, muscles tense..He was nearly forty years old, and a life spent fearing nature could not be turned easily into a romance with her. Some nights he still stared at the ceiling, unable to sleep, waiting for the Big One, and he avoided walks on the shore in respect of deadly tsunamis. From time to time, he visited his brother's grave and sat on the grass by the headstone, reciting aloud the gruesome details of deadly storms and catastrophic geological events, but he found that he had also absorbed from Jacob some of the statistics related to serial killers and to the disastrous failures of manmade structures and machines. These visits were pleasantly nostalgic. But he always came with roses, too, and brought news of Barty, Angel, and other members of the family. When Paul sold his house to move in with Agnes, Tom Vanadium settled into Jacob's former apartment, now a fully retired cop but not yet ready to return to a life of the cloth. He assumed the management chores of the family's expanding community work, and he oversaw the establishment of a tax-advantaged charitable foundation. Agnes provided a list of fine-sounding and self-effacing names for this organization, but a majority vote rejected all her suggestions and, in spite of her embarrassment, settled on Pie Lady Services..Quickly, he searched for the source, but in less than a minute, before he could trace the voice, it faded away. Unlike that night in December, this time the singing didn't resume..Reminding himself that fortune favored the persistent and that he must always look for the bright side, Junior began with the city itself and with those whose surnames were Bartholomew. This was a manageable number..Dr. Zedd's death, just last Thanksgiving, had been a blow to Junior, a loss to the nation, to the entire world. He considered it a tragedy equal to the Kennedy assassination one year previous..And somewhere Selma Galloway, their

neighbor, was not a spinster but a married woman with grandchildren..Celestina was maneuvered aside as the surgical team began resuscitation procedures. Stunned, she backed away from the table until she encountered a wall. In southern California, as dawn of this new momentous day looms.The unmatched suite of bedroom furniture, cheap and scarred, might have been purchased at a thrift shop. A double bed and one nightstand. A small dresser..He had been walking ever since, two and a half years, with brief respites in Bright Beach..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..Junior worried that he might not locate the correct Dumpster among the many. Yet he didn't switch on the flashlight, suspecting that he would be better able to find his way if the conditions of darkness and fog were exactly as they had been earlier. In fact, this proved to be the case, and he instantly recognized the hulking Dumpster when he came upon it..In his apartment once more, enjoying a cognac and a handful of pistachios as Monday changed to Tuesday, he decided that he should make 'preparations for the possibility that he might one day leave incriminating evidence in spite of his precautions. He ought to convert a portion of his assets into easily portable and anonymous wealth, like gold coins and diamonds. Establishing two or three alternate identities, with documentation, also would be wise..Eventually he put the quarter on the nightstand, switched off the lamp, and slipped into bed.. "Wouldn't dream of asking you to make it a habit. Just this one time. If anguish, why not guilt?" It was hard for him to lie. He thought he was awkward at it because he had no practice. Hound knew better. He knew that magic itself resists untruth. Conjuring, sleight of hand, and false commerce with the dead are counterfeits of magic, glass to the diamond, brass to the gold. They are fraud, and lies flourish in that soil. But the art of magic, though it may be used for false ends, deals with what is real, and the words it works with are the true words. So true wizards find it hard to lie about their art. In their heart they know that their lie, spoken, may change the world..The glimmering bay and the shimmering amber candlelight provided the perfect atmosphere for the song that arose now from the piano in the bar..... That discord sets up lots of other vibrations, some of which will return to you in ways you might expect ....Like all ICU waiting rooms, where Death sits patiently, smiling in anticipation, this lounge was clean but drab, and the utilitarian furnishings didn't pamper, as though bright colors and comfort might annoy the ascetic Reaper and motivate him to cut down more patients than otherwise he would have done..No one was surprised by his proposal, her acceptance, and the wedding. Barty and Angel were both eighteen when they were married in June of 1983..No sign of Vanadium. Some of the taller monuments offered hiding places on both sides of the cemetery road, as did the thicker trunks of the larger trees..With the earth still tenuously stable beneath them, they arrived at their fifth destination, a new address on Agnes's mercy list..Yet that evening, when she'd accepted his proposal and asked if he wasn't frightened, he said, "Not anymore.."or the barber. Never was he afraid to fall asleep, and having fallen asleep, he appeared to have only pleasant dreams..Paul shook his head. "Oh, no. People look at our marriage, and they think I gave up so much, but I got back a lot more than I gave.." "But what made you choose that life? You must have committed to the seminary awfully young.."She knew that the front door was locked, too, because Wally had waited to hear the deadbolts clack shut. Nevertheless, she stepped into the hall, where the light wasn't on, walked quickly past Angel's bedroom, came to the entrance to the lamplit living room-and saw a man backing through the open front door, dragging something, dragging a dark and large and heavy rumpled something, dragging a.Ten months later, Simon called again, also regarding Cain, but this time the attorney was the client, and Cain was the target. What Simon wanted Nolly to do was strange, to say the least, and it could be construed as harassment, but none of it was exactly illegal. And for two years, beginning with the quarter in the cheeseburger, ending with the coin-spitting machines, all of it had been great fun..If the sight of his daughter almost drove him to his knees, the sight of his wife, also his first in seven years, lifted him until he was virtually floating across the grass..Both angry and mortified, yet still fearful, a walking multimedia collage of emotions, Junior left the gallery..Junior found no answers before the owner of the diner blocked him from proceeding out of the kitchen into the storeroom and the service alley beyond. Simultaneously sweating and chilled, Junior cursed him, and the confrontation became ugly..Maria Elena Gonzalez--such an imposing figure in spite of her diminutive stature that even three names seemed insufficient to identify her--was still present. Although the crisis had passed, she wasn't ready to trust that nurses and doctors, by themselves, could provide Agnes with adequate care..Hunched over his desk, leaning forward conspiratorially, his piggy eyes glittering like those of an ogre discussing his favorite recipe for cooking children, Nolly said, "I've been able to confirm your suspicions..Among these people was an old man whom they called, among themselves, the Changer. He showed Otter a few spells of illusion; and when the boy was fifteen or so, the old man took him out into the fields by Serrenen to show him the one spell of true change he knew. "First let's see you turn that bush into the seeming of a tree," he said, and promptly Otter did so. Illusion came so easy to the boy that the old man took alarm. Otter had to beg and wheedle him for any further teaching and finally to promise him, swearing on his own true and secret name, that if he learned the Changer's great spell he would never use it but to save a life, his own or another's..As Tom reached Celestina, she said, "Shots." She said, "Gunshots." She held the receiver in one hand and pulled at her hair with the other, as if with the administration of a little pain, she might wake up from this nightmare. She said, "He's in Oregon.."Dear Lord, how she loved her sugarpie, her little M&M. Three years had passed in what seemed like a month, and although there had been stress and struggle, too few hours in every day, less time for her art than she would have liked, and little or no time for herself, she wouldn't have traded being blindsided by motherhood for any amount of wealth, not for anything in the world ... except to have Phimie back. Angel was the moon, the sun, the

stars, and all the comets streaking through infinite galaxies: an ever-shining light..Widening his eyes in calculated surprise, Junior said, "Are you a police officer?" pistol that he'd purchased in late June. The city operated a program to melt confiscated and donated weapons and to remake them into plowshares or xylophones, or into the metal fittings of hookah pipes..Junior had hoped not to be recognized by anyone at this affair. He regretted that he hadn't stuck to his original plan, maintaining surveillance of the gallery from his parked car..Wally's help, not just with the apartment, but with his time and love, had made an incalculable difference..He had learned many things about himself on this momentous day--that he was more spontaneous than he had ever before realized, that he was willing to make grievous short-term sacrifices for long-term gain, that he was bold and daring-but perhaps the most important lesson was that he was a more sensitive person than he'd previously perceived himself to be and that this sensitivity, while admirable, was liable to undo him unexpectedly and at inconvenient times..To the window. The warm room sucked cooling fog out of the night, and she leaned across the sill into the streaming mist..A calico cat appeared at Tom's side, running, pacing him. Cats were witches' familiars. Good luck or bad, this cat?.During the first months, the journeys were eight or ten miles: along the shoreline north and south of Bright Beach, and inland to the desert beyond the hills. He left home and returned the same day..Packed full of aftermath, the movie was too violent for Junior's taste. He had wanted to meet at a showing of Doctor Dolittle or The Graduate. But Google, as paranoid as a lab rat after half a lifetime of electroshock experiments, insisted on choosing the theater..The busboy swept the empty appetizer plates away as the waiter arrived simultaneously with small salads. Fresh martinis followed..Not a word of that would come to Paul, but his frustrating speechlessness might have been for the best. From everything he knew about this hero, such effusive praise would embarrass him..Between new women and needlepoint pillows, he participated in s?ances, attended lectures given by ghost hunters, visited haunted houses, and read more strange books. He even sat for the camera of a famous medium whose photographs sometimes revealed the auras of benign or malevolent presences hovering in the vicinity of her subject, though in his case she could discern no telltale sign of a spirit..Then the police in Spruce Hills would want to know why he had been screwing around with an underage Negro girl if his marriage to Naomi had been as perfect, as fulfilling, as he claimed. Unfair as it seems, there is no statute of limitations on murder. Closed files can be dusted off and opened again; investigations can be resumed. And although authorities would have little or no hope of convicting him of murder on whatever meager evidence they could dig up, he would be forced to spend another significant portion of his fortune on attorney fees.. "I'm sure you would be, yes, but I'm afraid I don't have the patience to teach, I'm a performer, not an instructor. I suppose I could give you the name of a good teacher."..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..From a cutlery drawer, Tom withdrew a knife. The largest and sharpest blade in the small collection..Paul couldn't remember when he began to love her. Not at first sight. But before she contracted polio. Love came gradually, and by the time it flowered, its roots were deep..Tom plucked the quarter off the glass, folded it into his right fist, and then at once opened his hand, which was now empty..This was a test of Junior's gullibility, and he would not give Vanadium the satisfaction of searching his robe for the coin..She lost track of him. Fear knocked, knocked, on the door of her heart, because she was sure that he had vanished the way ships supposedly disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle..Suitcases seemed to be missing. Some clothes, as well. Could mean a weekend vacation..The following morning, he canceled his German lessons. It was an impossible language. The words were enormously long..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."..Startled, Celestina said, "Good grief, you're spooky. How could you know what I'm thinking?"..To have the best chance of becoming a master mechanic, any young apprentice needs a mentor. The art of total card control cannot be learned entirely from books and experimentation..In fifty years, until Angel, Tom had found no other like himself and now a second in little more than a week. "I can't do what you did."..The little hands, so weak now but someday strong: Would they eventually be capable of savagery, as were the father's hands? Misbegotten offspring. This seed of a demonic man whom Phimie herself had called sick and evil. However innocent-looking now, what pain might she eventually in-- on others? What outrages might she commit in years to come? Although Celestina searched intently, she could not glimpse the father's evil in the child..The crazy bitch wielded it with such ferocity that the force of the impact with the floor, rebounding upon her, must have numbed her arms. She stumbled backward, dragging the chair, temporarily unable to lift it..Agnes was able to respond, Paul sprang up and moved away. Other friends knelt and crouched and bent to her, and she lost sight of the pharmacist as he moved off through the dispersing crowd..He opened the solid doors on the bottom of the breakfront, did not find what he was looking for, checked in the sideboard next, and there it was, a small liquor supply. Scotch, gin, vodka. He selected a full bottle of vodka..The upper shelf of the closet held boxes and two inexpensive suitcases: pressboard laminated with green vinyl. He took down the suitcases and put them on the bed..Maria, after a single sip of Chardonnay, fled to the kitchen, ostensibly to check on the apricot flan that she'd brought, but in reality to press a cool and slightly damp dishtowel against her eyes..She always had a generous heart. After disease whittled Perri's flesh, leaving her so frail, her great heart, undiminished by her suffering, seemed bigger than the body that contained it..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..Kitchen to dining room, dining room to hallway, keeping his back to the wall, easing quickly along, then into the foyer. Wait here, listening.. "But nothing equals a quake for killing. Big one in Shaanxi, China, killed eight hundred thirty thousand.".. "Really, Angel," Barty said with genuine concern, "it might be scary. I got another one we could listen to, if you want."..She

walked the corridor until she came to a room with empty beds. Without turning on the lights, she entered, put down the suitcase, and sat in a chair by the window. 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." Frustrated on many levels, Junior hurried to a parking lot one block from the detective's office, where he'd left his new Chevrolet Impala convertible. This Chinese-red machine was even more beautiful when wet with rain than it had looked polished and pristine on the showroom floor. "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." He had been warned about this accuracy issue by the thumbless young thug who delivered the weapon in a bag of Chinese takeout, in Old St. Mary's Church. Junior tended to believe the warning, because he figured the eight-fingered felon might have been deprived of his thumbs as punishment for having forgotten to relay the same or an equally important message to a customer in the past, thus assuring his current conscientious attention to detail. She devoted half her work time to the neighbors-in-need route that Agnes had established and steadily expanded, the other half to her painting. She was in no rush to mount a new show; anyway, she didn't dare renew contact with the Greenbaum Gallery or with anyone at all from her past life, until the police found Enoch Cain. Beside her, the passenger's door barked and shrieked as though alive as though suffering, and these sounds were uncannily like the cries of torment that only Agnes could hear in the haunted chambers of her heart. Now that neither of them had a doubt that the other shared the same need and that eventually they would satisfy each other, Victoria was opting for discretion. Wise woman. In his voice, he heard a tremor that had nothing to do with the hideous deaths in Effingham more than sixteen years previous. Leaving the children under the tree, Tom returned to the house to phone the police. He fiddled with the cylinder until it swung open. Five chambers, a gleaming cartridge in each. The popeyed little toad smirked over there on the far side of his pretentious desk. Later, when the seven of them were gathered at the dinner table, the adults raised glasses of Chardonnay, the children raised tumblers of Pepsi, and Maria gave the toast. "To Bartholomew, the image of his father, who was the kindest man I've ever known. To my Bonita and my Francesca, who brighten every day. To Edom and Jacob, from who ... from whom I've learned so much that has made me think about the fragility of life and made me realize how precious is every day. And to Agnes, my dearest friend, who has given me, oh, so much, including all these words. God bless us, every one." Not one day in anyone's life, so her father taught, is an uneventful day, no day without profound meaning, no matter how dull and boring it might seem, no matter whether you are a seamstress or a queen, a shoeshine boy or a movie star, a renowned philosopher or a Downs syndrome child. Because in every day of your life, there are opportunities to perform little kindnesses for others, both by conscious acts of will and unconscious example. Each smallest act of kindness—even just words of hope when they are needed, the remembrance of a birthday, a compliment that engenders a smile—reverberates across great distances and spans of time, affecting lives unknown to the one whose generous spirit was the source of this good echo, because kindness is passed on and grows each time it's passed, until a simple courtesy becomes an act of selfless courage years later and far away. Likewise, each small meanness, each thoughtless expression of hatred, each envious and bitter act, regardless of how petty, can inspire others, and is therefore the seed that ultimately produces evil fruit, poisoning people whom you have never met and never will. All human lives are so profoundly and intricately entwined—those dead, those living, those generations yet to come—that the fate of all is the fate of each, and the hope of humanity rests in every heart and in every pair of hands. Therefore, after every failure, we are obliged to strive again for success, and when faced with the end of one thing, we must build something new and better in the ashes, just as from pain and grief, we must weave hope, for each of us is a thread critical to the strength—to the very survival—of the human tapestry. Every hour in every life contains such often-unrecognized potential to affect the world that the great days for which we, in our dissatisfaction, so often yearn are already with us; all great days and thrilling possibilities are combined always in this momentous day. His right side, however, had come to rest against an object harder than bagged paper, an angular mass. As the skull-rattling gong faded, allowing more clarity of thought, he realized that an unpleasant, vaguely warm, damp something was pressed against his right cheek.

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