

THE DAWN OF MUSIC SEMIOLOGY ESSAYS IN HONOR OF JEAN-JACQUES NATTIEZ

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She might have put drops in his eyes, told him to leave the books alone for a while, and sent him into the backyard to play. She might have counseled herself not to be one of those alarmist mothers who detected pneumonia in every sniffle, a brain tumor behind every headache..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..Friday, after dinner, when he'd heard enough of Maria's method of fortune-telling to know that four decks were required, that only every third draw was read, and that aces-especially red aces-were the most propitious cards to receive, Jacob had taken great pleasure in preparing for Barty the most favorable first eight cards that could possibly be dealt. This was a small gift to cheer Agnes, on whose heart Joey's death weighed as heavily as iron chains..Given a child-size harmonica, he extemporized simplified versions of songs he heard on the radio. The Beatles' "All You Need Is Love." The Box Tops' "The Letter." Stevie Wonder's "I Was Made to Love Her." After hearing a tune once, Barty could play a recognizable rendition..He supposed Victoria might have a visitor. Perhaps a relative or a girlfriend. Not a man. No. She knew who her man was, and she would have no other while she waited for the chance to surrender to him and to consummate the relationship that had begun with the spoon and the ice in the hospital ten days previously..Assuming this criticism was amusing hyperbole, Junior laughed, but Sklent squinted those virtually colorless eyes, and Junior's laugh withered in his throat. "Well, maybe that's how it'll work out," he said, wanting to be on Sklent's good side, but he was at once sorry he'd spoken those words in front of witnesses..place settings. He returned with them to the kitchen and put them in the lower oven, as though Victoria were using it as a plate warmer..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..He wasn't entirely sure what all he hoped to find. Perhaps an envelope or a cash box with folding money, which a fleeing murderer would surely pause to take with him. Suspicions might be raised if he left it behind. Perhaps a savings-account passbook..This time, however, the singing lasted longer than before, long enough for him to become suspicious of the heating ducts. These rooms had ten-foot ceilings, and the ducts opened high in the walls..Think, think. A three-minute drive to the Lampion place. Maybe two minutes, running stop signs, cutting corners..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 paramedic put aside the needle, having used it, and grabbed the paddles of a..He added verisimilitude to his threats by concluding with a few hard punches where they wouldn't show, in her breasts and belly, and then he, went home to Naomi, to whom he'd been married, at that time, less than five months..At a gun shop, Junior purchased two hundred rounds of ammunition. Later, that many cartridges seemed excessive to him. Later still, he purchased another two hundred..Another machine beside the first, stocked with copies of a sexually explicit publication for gays, fired a quarter that hit Junior's forehead. The next snapped against the bridge of his nose..Nevertheless, Junior was thrilled to hear the name Bartholomew, and to know that the boy of whom Celestina spoke was the Bartholomew of Bartholomews, the menacing presence in his unremembered dream, the threat to his fortune and future that must be eliminated..His patience exhausted, the pianist wrenched his hand out of Junior's grip. He glanced around nervously, certain that they must be the center of attention, but of course the reception guests were lost in their witless conversations, or they were gaga over the maudlin paintings, and no one was aware of this quiet little drama..NORTHBOUND ON THE coastal highway, headed for Newport Beach, Agnes saw bad omens, mile after mile..Considering the protection that it would afford him in a world full of warmongers, Junior considered the loss of the toe, while tragic, to be a necessary disfigurement. To his doctors and nurses, he made jokes about dismemberment, and in general he put on a brave face, for which he knew he was much admired..The vending machines were designed to accept quarters, not to eject them. They didn't make change. Mechanically, this barrage wasn't possible..So quick, this violence, over even as it began. Because he had no interest in aftermath, however, Junior suffered no disappointment at the briefness of the thrill. The past was past, and as he closed the front door and stepped around the body, he focused on the future..She. Heretofore, Celestina hadn't given a thought to the gender of the baby, because, to her, it had been less a person than a thing..Once, he had been a superb driver. For the past decade, his performance behind the wheel depended on his mood..She could see now what she hadn't seen when running with him through the cemetery, because she was looking directly at him. Yet even seeing did not make it easy to believe.."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."..Junior didn't believe in gods, devils, Heaven, Hell, life after death. He put his faith in one thing: himself..As long as Junior continued to fake sleep, the cop couldn't be absolutely sure that any deception was taking place..He had met her in a university adult-extension course titled "Increasing Self-Esteem Through Controlled Screaming." Participants were taught to identify harmful repressed emotions and dissipate them through the authentic vocal imitations of a variety of animals..As if vengeful spirits weren't trouble enough, he had for three years been struggling unwittingly against the terrible power of the minister's curse, black Baptist voodoo that made his life miserable. He knew now why he had been plagued by violent nervous emesis, by epic diarrhea, by hideously disfiguring hives. The failure to find a heart mate, the humiliation with Renee Vivi, the two nasty cases of gonorrhea, the disastrous meditative catatonia, the inability to learn French and German, his loneliness, his emptiness, his thwarted attempts to find and kill the bastard boy born of Phimie's womb: All these

things and more, much more, were the hateful consequences of the vicious, vindictive voodoo of that hypocritical Christian. As a highly self-improved, fully evolved, committed man who was comfortable with his raw instincts, Junior should be sailing through life on calm seas, under perpetually sunny skies, with his sails always full of wind, but instead he was constantly cruelly battered and storm-tossed through an unrelenting night, not because of any shortcomings of mind or heart, or character, but because of black magic. Disbelieving his eyes, Junior reached across his body with his left hand and picked up the quarter. Although it had been lying in his right palm, it was cold. Icy. As he'd been instructed, Vanadium felt along the return edge of the carved limestone casing to the right of the window until he located a quarter-inch-diameter steel pin that protruded an inch. The pin was grooved to facilitate a grip. An insistent, steady pull was required, but as promised, the thumb-turn latch on the inside disengaged. The water shut off, and Junior heard the ratcheting noise of a paper-towel dispenser. By telephone, he had been prepared for this boy. Strange as it was to find a Bartholomew in their lives, given Enoch Cain's peculiar obsession, Tom nonetheless agreed with Celestina that the wife killer could have no way to know about this child-and could certainly have no logical reason to fear him. The only thing they had in common was Harrison White's sermon, which had inspired this boy's name and might have planted the seed of guilt in Cain's mind. Junior approached the headstone from behind, circled it, and shone the flashlight on the chiseled facts. This analgesic was among several prescription substances that he had stolen, over time, from the drug locker at the rehab hospital where he once worked. Some he had sold; these he had retained. The bright side was easy to see. If Vanadium's reputation among other cops and among prosecutors was that of a paranoid, a pathetic after phantom perpetrators, his unsupported belief that Naomi. That night her sleep was deeper than it had been in a long time, deep as she had expected sleep would never be again, and she was not plagued by any dreams at all, not a dream of children suffering, nor of tumbling in a car along a rain-washed street, nor of thousands of windblown dead leaves rattling-hissing along a deserted street and every leaf in fact a jack of spades. Unbuttoning her blouse, Celestina said, "Traditionally, puppies don't have a role in weddings." "You know where it comes from," her mother said with a yawn that betrayed her exhaustion after a night with no sleep and too much drama. Pulling herself up in the bed, peering at him suspiciously, she said, "You've gone and memorized old Emily." It occurred to her that the knave had come, as foretold by the cards on that night long ago. She had expected the knave to be a man with sharp eyes and a wicked heart, but the curse was cancer and not a man at all. This wasn't thrill killing-which, now that he'd had time to think about it, he realized was beneath him, even if in the service of personal growth. This would be murder for good, justifiable cause. He hurried into the bedroom and switched on the nightstand lamp, without concern for whether the light might be seen from the street. By the time he ordered cr?me brulee for dessert, he was able to laugh at himself. Had he expected to see a ghost enjoying a cocktail and free cashews at the bar? The universe was vast and Barty small, yet the boy's immortal soul made him as important as galaxies, as important as anything in Creation. This Agnes believed. She couldn't tolerate life without the conviction that it had meaning and design, though sometimes she felt that she was a sparrow whose fall had gone unnoticed. Barty sat on the edge of the doctor's desk, legs dangling, holding Red Planet, his place marked by an inserted finger. Cradling the baby, the nun turned with it to Celestina, folding back a thin blanket to present her with a good look at the tiny girl. When Agnes pressed for a diagnosis, Dr. Chan quietly pleaded the need to gather more information. After Barty had seen the oncologist and had additional tests, he and his mother would return here in the afternoon to receive a diagnosis and counseling in treatment options. To prove himself, he read a little of Dickens when she requested it, a passage from Great Expectations. Then a passage from Twain. Agnes dropped to one knee before the boy and held him gently by the shoulders. "Let me look." "No member of the society ever violates a secret confidence," Agnes assured him. He groaned. "That just doesn't cut it, Mom. If I gotta be blind, I think I should get to say peed off." Surprised, Tom leaned in his chair to look more directly at the blind boy. On the telephone, Celestina had mentioned only that Barty was a prodigy, which didn't quite explain the aptness of the oak-tree metaphor. Supposing that this new enthusiasm was an attempt to uncover skullduggery in Seraphim's accident, then the girl would be doing Junior a service even after her demise. Whether or not the traffic accident was an accident, Junior hadn't had anything to do with it. The physician saw the look and understood it. A blush pinked his long, pale face. "Celestina, you're quite beautiful, and I'm sure you've learned to be wary of men, but I swear that my intentions are entirely honorable." He was uncomfortable, achy, thirsty, but he remained utterly still and observant. After a while, he realized that the sense of oppression with which he'd awakened was not entirely a psychological symptom: Something heavy lay across his abdomen. And it was cold-so cold, in fact, that it had numbed his middle to the extent that he hadn't immediately felt the chill of it. Shivers coursed through him. He clenched his jaws to prevent his teeth from chattering and thereby alerting the man in the chair. Although he never took his eyes off the corner, Junior became preoccupied with trying to puzzle out what was draped across his midsection. The mysterious observer made him sufficiently nervous that he couldn't order his thoughts as well as usual, and the effort to prevent the shivers from shaking a sound out of him only further interfered with his ability to reason. The longer that he was unable to identify the frigid object, the more alarmed he became. He almost cried out when into his mind oozed an image of Naomi's dead body, now past the whitest shade of pale, as gray as the faint light at the window and turning pale green in a few places, and cold, all the heat of life gone from her flesh, which was not yet simmering with any of the heat of decomposition that would soon enliven it again. A sense of mystery overcame Agnes, unnerving but not entirely or even primarily unpleasant. In the physician's eyes, a yearning to believe. In his face, a squint of skepticism. "You might as well beat a cloud for raining," said Otter's mother. Edom and Jacob came to the house, asking what Dr. Chan had said, and Agnes lied to them. "There are some test results we won't have until Monday, but he thinks Barty is going to be all right." The nurse raised her eyes from Agnes to this other person. "Yes a chip of ice would be all right." She struggled, wept, pretended disgust, faked shame, swore to bring the police down on him. Another man, not as highly skilled at reading men as Junior, might have thought the girl's resistance was genuine, Sat her charges of rape were sincere. Any other man might have backed off, but Junior was neither fooled nor confused. Besides, the possibilities repulsed him. The very thought of a splendid-looking woman like Victoria submitting to a grotesque like Vanadium would have withered his soul if he had possessed a soul. Not that he failed to perform well. As always, he was a bull, a stallion, an insatiable satyr. None of his lovers complained; none had the energy for complaint when he'd finished with them. Memory of the Spartan decor of Thomas Vanadium's house lingered with Junior, and he addressed his living space with the detective's style in mind. He installed a minimum of furniture, though all new and of higher quality than the junk in Vanadium's residence: sleek, modern, Danish-pecan wood and nappy oatmeal-colored upholstery. Junior considered leaving before Vanadium-still seventy-five yards away-arrived. He was afraid he would appear to be fleeing. 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..In her arms she held Bartholomew. The infant was not heavily bundled, for the weather was unseasonably mild..After carefully wiping her fingers on a paper napkin, Maria examined the garments with interest. She carried her living as the seamstress at Bright Beach Dry Cleaners. At the sight of each rent, popped button, and split seam she clucked her tongue..Maria's mother, visiting from Mexico, was babysitting, so Maria came without her children, as a guest, joining Agnes and the laugh-a-minute Isaacson twins, chroniclers of destruction. They ate in the dining room, rather than at the kitchen dinette, with a lace-trimmed tablecloth, the good china, crystal wineglasses, and fresh flowers..He gently drew the covers over his wife's ruined body, to her thin shoulders, but arranged her right arm on top of the blankets. He straightened and smoothed the folded-back flap of the top sheet..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.. "Well, you ought to be," Grace said, taking her pies out to the Suburban that Wally had bought solely for this enterprise..He spat on his right thumb, scrubbed the thumb against one of the dried drips on the floor, rubbed thumb and forefinger together, and brought the freshened spoor to his nose. He smelled blood..Ever since he'd searched Vanadium's house, over fourteen months ago, Junior had enjoyed learning about other people by touring their homes in their absence. Because he was unwilling to risk arrest for breaking and entering, these explorations were rare, other than in the homes of women whom he'd dated long enough to justify swapping keys. Happily, in this golden age of trust and easy relationships, as little as a week of hot sex could lead to key-level commitment..Koko skidded to a halt, perplexed, looked left, looked right, floppy ears lifted slightly to catch any sound of Mistress Mary..Books were stacked high on a nearby table, favorite novels and volumes of verse, all of which Agnes had read before. With time so limited, she preferred the comfort of the familiar to the possibility that new writers and new stories would fail to please. Paul read to her often, as did Angel. Tom Vanadium sat with her, too, as did Celestina and Grace..Turning his attention to Barty, Obadiah broke into a smile, revealing a gold upper tooth. "Something here is sweeter than that lovely pie. What's the child's name?".Now, here, all three on the street and vulnerable at once-the man, Celestina, the bastard boy..Tom said, "Now I'm going to add a human touch and a spiritual spin to all this. When each of us comes to a point where he has to make a significant moral decision affecting the development of his character and the lives of others, and each time he makes the less wise choice, that's where I myself believe a new world splits off. When I make an immoral or just a foolish choice, another world is created in which I did the right thing, and in that world, I am redeemed for a while, given a chance to become a better version of the Tom Vanadium who lives on in the other world of the wrong choice. There are so many worlds with imperfect Tom Vanadiums, but always someplace ... someplace I'm moving steadily toward a state of grace."..The time had come for him to think more seriously about his situation and his future. Self-improvement remained a laudable goal, but his efforts needed to be more focused..At nearly forty years of age, Edom still dreamed of that grim summer afternoon, although not as often as in the past. When it troubled his sleep these days, it was a nightmare that gradually metamorphosed into a dream of tenderness and hope. Until the last few years, he'd always awakened when the roses were being jammed into his mouth or when the thorns flicked through his eyelashes, or when Agnes began to strike their father with the Bible, thus seeming to assure worse punishment. This additional act, this transition from horror to hope before he woke, had been added when Agnes was pregnant with Barty. Edom didn't know why this should be so, and he didn't try to analyze it. He was simply grateful for the change, because he woke now in a state of peace, never with worse than a shudder, no longer with a hoarse cry of anguish..Celestina's question had been about Phimie, but they had told her about the baby, and she was alarmed by their evasion..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..When he located the new grave, approximately where he'd guessed that it would be, he was surprised to find a black granite headstone already set in place, instead of a temporary marker painted with the.STILL WEARING HIS white pharmacy smock over a white shirt and black slacks, striding purposefully along the streets of Bright Beach, under a malignant-gray twilight sky worthy of a Weird Tales cover, with ominous accompanying rhythm provided by wind-clattered palm fronds overhead, Paul Damascus headed home for the day..Angel moved her hand to Barty's right eye, and again he didn't twitch with surprise when her fingers lightly touched his closed and sagging lid. "I won't let you forget."..For a while, Junior profited enormously from Tammy's investment advice, and the sex was great. As a thank-you for the hefty trading commissions she earned-and not incidentally for all the orgasms-Tammy gave him a Rolex. He didn't mind her four cats, didn't even care when the four grew to six, then to eight..Naked, dripping, he roamed the apartment. As on the night of December 13, the voice seemed to arise from thin air: ahead of him, then behind him, to the right, but now to the left..In the neatly ordered bedroom, he removed his shoes. Stretching out on the bed, he stared at the ceiling, feeling useless..At this extreme end of town, no streetlamps lit the pavement. With only moonlight to reveal him, he wasn't likely to be recognized if anyone happened to glance out a window..He had recently learned about the demigods of classic mythology in one of the selections from the Book-of-the-Month Club.

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