

## PALMERIN OF ENGLAND VOL 3 OF 4

Now, here, all three on the street and vulnerable at once—the man, Celestina, the bastard boy..Heaven, and his words touched a tenderness in her, overlaying an arc of pain across the curve of her smile..He left the party and stood in the street for a while, taking slow deep breaths, letting the brisk night air clean the pot smoke out of his lungs, slow deep breaths, suddenly sober in spite of the beer he'd drunk, slow deep breaths, as chilled as a slab of beef in a meat locker, but not because of the cold night..He didn't want to risk marrying weapon and silencer here in the hall, where he might be seen. Besides, complications could arise from being splattered with Neddy's blood. Aftermath was disgusting, but it was also highly incriminating. For the same reason, he was loath to use a knife..As Barty climbed to the porch without benefit of the railing and held out his right hand, Paul Damascus said, "Tom, we're wondering if Barty can extend to you the protection he gives to Angel in the rain. Maybe he can ... since the three of you share this ... this awareness, this insight, or whatever you want to call it. But he won't know until he tries.."which was beginning to come into view, was as sharp as pins and needles, sheer torture to her eyes.."All under here's worked out long since" Licky said. And Otter had begun to be aware of the strange country under his feet: empty shafts and rooms of dark air in the dark earth, a vertical labyrinth, the deepest pits filled with unmoving water. "Never was much silver, and the watermetal's long gone. Listen, young'un, do you even know what cinnabar is?"..He stabbed Prosser, however, merely to relieve his frustration and to enliven the dull routine of a life made dreary by the tedious Bartholomew hunt and by loveless sex. In return for more excitement, he'd assumed greater risk, to mitigate risk, he must have insurance..After examining Phimie, who was nauseous, Daines prescribed an anticonvulsant, an antiemetic, and a sedative, all intravenously..The old man assumed the solemn and knowing expression of one guarding mysteries, a sphinx without headdress and mane. "If I told you, dear lady, it wouldn't be magic anymore. Merely a trick.."The girl smiled, as stunningly beautiful as he remembered her, but she was no longer fifteen, as she had been when last he'd seen her. Since her death in childbirth nearly three years ago, she'd matured and grown lovelier than ever..She repeated this ritual eleven more times--"For Andrew, for James, for John"--frequently glancing into the nave behind her, to be sure that she was unobserved.."I was twenty-three. At St. Anselmo's I was the prefect of one dormitory floor. The floor on which all the murders occurred. After that ... I decided maybe I could better protect the innocent if I were a cop. For a while, the law gave me more to hold on to than faith did.."Across the room, the girl on the window seat showed no awareness of his arrival. She sat sideways to him in the niche, with her back against one wall, knees drawn up, a big sketch pad braced against her thighs, working intently with colored pencils..He hadn't learned much from the call other than that they hadn't found Vanadium in his Studebaker at the bottom of Quarry Lake.."If I ever get there, I'll be back," she promised the gathered family. "Imagine how much we'll have to talk about. Maybe I'll even get some new pie recipes from Over There.." "I think we could wind up as crazy as he is, if we tried long enough to puzzle out his twisted logic.."Celestina succumbed to a fit of giggles. Before she could control them, she used up two Kleenex to blow her nose and to blot the laughter from her eyes..Before they set out for the amusement park, Agnes pulled him aside, held him close, and said, "Listen, kid of mine, I'm not giving up. Don't think I ever would. Let's have fun today. This evening, you and I and Angel will convene a meeting of the North Pole Society of Not Evil Adventurers"-the girl had become the third member years ago" and all truths will be told and secrets known. ".No time for horror, disgust. Every second mattered now, and every minute might cost another life..Shortly after six o'clock, Saturday morning, she stirred from a fretful dream and saw Barty sitting up in bed, reading..If blood tests revealed that Junior wasn't the father, Vanadium would have a motive. It wouldn't be the right motive, because Junior truly hadn't known either that his wife was pregnant or that she was possibly screwing around with another man. But the detective would be able to sell it to a prosecutor, and the prosecutor would convince at least a few jurors..quiet pool, sweet with the fragrance of jasmine. Under the huge spreading oak. Grass oiled to a glossy green by the..Six paces past that marker floorboard, Barty had the strangest feeling that someone was in the hallway with him.."Do you know him? " Edom asked, gazing longingly now at the open door, from which Jacob had turned away. "Obadiah Sepharad? ".By eleven months, his vocabulary had expanded to nineteen words, by Agnes's count: an age when even a precocious child usually spoke three or four at most..By Sunday evening, a combination of factors—deep commitment to the philosophy of Zedd, explosive testosterone levels, boredom, self-pity, and a desire to be a risk-taking man of action once more—motivated Junior to splash a little Hai Karate behind each ear and go courting. Shortly after sunset, with a single red rose and a bottle of Merlot, he set off for Victoria Bressler's place..On the nightstand waited a glass of water on a coaster and a pharmacy bottle containing several capsules of a potent painkiller..After following the blacktop fifty feet, Junior headed downhill through the close-cropped grass, between the tombstones. He switched on his flashlight and trod cautiously, for the ground sloped unevenly and, in places, remained soggy and slippery from the rain..Not that she ever gave any indication that her brothers were other than a source of pride for her. She treated them always with respect, tenderness, and love—as if unaware of their shortcomings..The house was empty, silent. Hanna worked only days. Nellie Oatis, Perri's companion, was not employed here anymore..Standing at graveside, Junior was in a foul mood. He was weary of pretending to be deep in grief..Now came a slight but real risk of being heard inside: He pulled the trigger. The flat steel spring in the lock-release gun caused the pick to jump upward, lodging some of the pins at the shear line. The snap of the hammer against the spring and the click of the pick against the pin tumblers were soft sounds, but anyone near the other side of the door would more likely than not hear them; if she was one room removed, however, the noise would not reach her..Previously, Miss Pixie Lee had been from Texas, but Angel had recently heard that Georgia was famous for its peaches, which at once captured her

imagination. Now Pixie Lee had a new life in a Georgia mansion carved out of a giant peach..Instead, he was given a small color brochure featuring samples of the artist's work. It also contained the same photograph of her smiling face that graced the window..Uncommonly healthy, he didn't suffer croup, flu, sinusitis, or most of the ailments to which other children were vulnerable..The lunatic lawman was not at any of the tables. Junior was sure of that, because indulging his appreciation for lovely women, he had roamed the room repeatedly with his gaze..As though the fog were a paralytic gas, Junior stood unmoving in the middle of the sidewalk. He really didn't want to climb into that Dumpster..Of the curiosities Junior uncovered, Frieda's weapons interested him most. Guns were stashed throughout the apartment: revolvers, pistols, and two pistol-grip shotguns. Sixteen altogether..Tom Vanadium was too unnerved by the Cain scare to be interested in the newspaper anymore. The strong black coffee, superb before, tasted bitter now..If he had cut himself intentionally for the express purpose of writing the name in blood, then the reservoir of anger was deeper still and pent up behind a formidable dam of obsession.. "Maria brought that from Mexico," Barty said. "She thought it was pretty funny. So do I. It's a hoot. Mom says it isn't really blasphemous, because it wasn't meant to be by the people who made it, and because Jesus would want you to have cookies, and, besides, it reminds us to be thankful for all the good things we get." Celestina was unable to talk reason to him, and even her mother, Grace, who was living here for the interim and who was always oil on the stormiest of waters, couldn't bring a moment's calm to the velvet squall that was Neddy Gnathic in full blow. He had learned about the baby five days ago, and he had been building force ever since, like a tropical depression aspiring to hurricane status.. "Wally gave her tests. She's got an exceptional understanding of color, spatial relationships, and geometric forms for a child her age. She may be a visual prodigy."..As long as Junior continued to fake sleep, the cop couldn't be absolutely sure that any deception was taking place..Although he was a stranger, arriving unannounced, and something of an eccentric by anyone's definition, Paul was received by Grace and Harrison White with warmth and fellowship. At their doorstep, raising his voice to compete with the wailing weather, he hurriedly blurted out his mission, as if they might reel back from his wild windblown presence if he didn't talk quickly enough: "I've walked here from Bright Beach, California, to tell you about an exceptional woman whose life will echo through the lives of countless others long after she's gone. Her husband died the night their son was born, but not before naming the boy Bartholomew, because he'd been so impressed by 'This Momentous Day. And now the boy is blind, and I hope you'll be able and willing to give some comfort to his mother." The Whites failed to reel backward, didn't even flinch from his unfortunately explosive statement of purpose. Instead, they invited him into their home, later invited him to dinner, and later still asked him to stay the night in their guest room..Hound shrugged. He didn't choose to tell Losen that people hated him disinterestedly..She was not going to be as forthright with Barty as she had insisted that Joshua Nunn be with her, in part because she was too shaken to risk forthrightness..In Oregon, standing at Junior Cain's bedside, turning a quarter across the knuckles of his left hand, Thomas Vanadium asks about the name that his suspect had spoken in the grip of a nightmare..She took a deep breath. She lifted her head, straightened her shoulders, and went inside, where a new life waited for her..The blue vault above, cloudless now, was the most threatening sky that Edom had ever seen. The air was astonishingly dry so soon after a storm. And still. Hushed. Earthquake weather. Before this momentous day was done, great temblors and five-hundred-foot tidal waves would rock and swamp the coast..The modulated electronic brrrrr was similar to the sound of the telephone in Vanadium's cramped study, on Sunday night. Junior was transported back to that place, that moment in time..In fact, although weak and achy, Junior felt mentally refreshed and wonderfully alert..Even at this post midnight hour, the lounge would sometimes be as crowded with worried loved ones as at any other time of the day. This morning, however, the only life under the threat of the scythe appeared to be Wally's; the sole vigil being kept was for him..Her eyes, lustrous pools, brimmed with the need to know, but she respected the deal. "I only half understood all that, and I don't even know which half, but in some strange way, it feels true. Thank you. I will think about it tonight, when I can't sleep." She stepped close and kissed him on the cheek. "Who are you, Tom Vanadium?"..At home, Agnes had no appetite, but she fixed Barty a cheese sandwich, spooned potato salad into a dish, added a bag of corn chips and a Coke, and served this late dinner on a tray, in his room, where he was already in bed and reading Tunnel in the Sky..Following little Bartholomew's murder, however, people might remember the man who had been asking after the mother, Celestina. Junior wasn't just any man, either; irresistibly handsome, he left an indelible impression on people, especially on women. Inevitably, the cops would be knocking on his door, sooner or later..Whether or not the visitor in the client's chair had ever known much romance, he unquestionably had experienced too much adventure and more than his share of tragedy. Thomas Vanadium's face was a quake-rocked landscape: cracked by white scars like fault lines in a strata of granite; the planes of brow, cheeks, and jaws canted in odd relationships to one another. The hemangioma that surrounded his right eye and discolored his face had been with him since birth, but the awful damage to his bone structure was the work of man, not God..By nature, she was unable to hold fast to resentment, couldn't nurture a grudge, and was incapable of vengeance. She had forgiven even her father, who had put her through hell for so long, who had blighted the lives of her brothers, and who had killed her mother. Forgiving was not the same as condoning. Forgiving did not mean that you had to exonerate or forget..FOR JUNIOR CAIN, the Year of the Horse (1966) and the Year of the Sheep (1967) offered many opportunities for personal growth and self-improvement. Even if by Christmas Eve, '67, Junior would not be able to take a dry walk in the rain, this nevertheless was a period of great achievement and much pleasure for him.. "I'm not sad," Tom said, "because though I have this face here in this world, I know there's another me-in fact, lots of other Tom Vanadiums-who don't have this face at all. Somewhere I'm doing just fine, thank you."..Piano music drifted into the restaurant from the adjacent bar, so soft and yet sprightly that it made the clink of silverware seem like music, too..squint-eyed, sharp-faced night clerk must not have been the

owner, because he wasn't the type to have dreamed up cute spellings for the sign out front. Judging by his appearance and attitude, he was a former Nazi death-camp commandant who fled Brazil one step ahead of the Israeli secret service and was now hiding out in Oregon..As mentally demanding and stressful as it was to maintain this borrowed sight, the harder thing was looking once more upon her face, after all these years of blindness, only to see her gaunt, so pale. The vital, lovely woman whose image he had guarded so vigilantly in memory would be nudged aside hereafter by this withered version..EACH MOMENTOUS DAY, the work was done in memory of his mother. At Pie Lady Services, always, they sought new recipes and new ways to brighten the corner where they were..This was different earthquake weather from that of ten days ago, when he'd made the pie deliveries alone. Then: blue sky, unseasonable warmth, low humidity. Now: low gray clouds, cool air, high humidity..Raised by a father to whom any form of amusement was blasphemy, Agnes had never seen a magician perform until she was nineteen, when Joey Lampion, then her suitor, had taken her to a stage show. Rabbits plucked out of top hats, doves conjured from sudden plumes of smoke, assistants sawn in half and mended to walk again; every illusion that had been old even in Houdini's time was a jaw-dropping amazement to her that evening. Now she remembered a trick in which the magician had poured a pitcher of milk into a funnel fashioned from a few pages of a newspaper, causing the milk to vanish when the funnel, still dry, was unrolled to reveal ordinary newsprint. The thrill that had quivered through her that evening measured I on the Richter scale compared to the full 10-point sense of wonder quaking through her at the sight of Barty as dry as if he'd spent the afternoon perched fireside..The maniac kicked once more, but because of the bracing dresser, the door wouldn't budge, so he kicked harder, again without success..Nolly's gums were in great shape, too: firm, pink, no sign of recession, snug to the neck of each tooth..After a bit Otter nodded left, away from the grey stone tower. They walked on towards a long, treeless valley, past grass-grown dumps and tailings.. "You'd never cheat me. I know you. We'd have Christmas twice a year and parties for half birthdays." The girl's appetite was sharp, even though the food was soft and bland. Soon, she slept..An overflow crowd of mourners had attended the services at St. Thomas's Church, standing shoulder to shoulder at the back of the nave, through the narthex, and across the sidewalk outside, and now everyone appeared to have come to the cemetery, as well..An IV rack stood beside the bed, dripping fluid into his vein, replacing the electrolytes that he had lost through vomiting, most likely medicating him with an antiemetic as well. His right arm was securely strapped to a supporting board, to prevent him from bending his elbow and accidentally tearing out the needle..More walls than not, in both rooms, were lined with bookshelves and file cabinets. Here he kept numerous case studies of accidents, man-made disasters, serial killers, spree killers: proof undeniable that humanity was a fallen species engaged in both the unintentional and calculated destruction of itself..Celestina extended her left hand, which shook so badly that she nearly knocked over both their wineglasses. "I will." Traumatized by the violence in her mother's bedroom, not fully aware of what happened to Wally, Angel had been tearful and anxious. A thoughtful physician gave her a glass of orange juice spiked with a small dose of a sedative, and a nurse provided pillows. Bedded down on two pillow-padded chairs, wearing a rose-colored robe over yellow pajamas, she gave herself as fully to sleep as she always did, sedative or not, which was every bit as fully as she gave herself to life when she was awake..Indeed, the winter storm had dampened neither his hair nor his clothes. The rain appeared to slide away from him a millimeter before contact, as though the water and the man were composed of matter and antimatter that must either repel each other or, on contact, trigger a cataclysmic blast that would shatter the very foundation of the universe..Tom had no idea who Perri might be, but something in the way Grace asked the question and the way she regarded Paul suggested that she knew something about Perri that had won her deep respect and admiration..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..The operator attempted to calm him, but he remained hysterical. Between gasps and sharp squeals of pretended pain, he shakily rattled off his name, address, and phone number..Nolly shuddered. "The wilds of Oregon. I don't intend ever to go there until it's civilized." Junior had heard of this invention, but until now he'd never seen one. He supposed that an obsessive like Vanadium might go to any lengths, including this exotic technology, to avoid missing an important call..He rolled his head back and forth on the pillow. "Nope. It's still just something you gotta feel." "You can learn em." With the uniformed troopers was a stocky, late-fortyish, brush-cut man in black slacks and a gray herringbone sports jacket. His face was almost pan flat, his first chin weak, his second chin stronger than the first, and his function unknown to Junior. He would have been the least likely man to be noticed in a ten-thousand-man convention of nonentities, if not for the port-wine birthmark that surrounded his right eye, darkening most of the bridge of his nose, brightening half his forehead, and returning around the eye to stain the upper portion of his cheek..Too much, far too much to contend with, and so unfair: finding the Bartholomew needle in the haystack, hives, seizures of vomiting and diarrhea, losing a toe, losing a beloved wife, wandering alone through a cold and hostile world without a heart mate, humiliated by transvestites, tormented by vengeful spirits, too intense to enjoy the benefits of meditation, Zedd dead, the prospect of prison always looming for one reason or another, unable to find peace in either needlework or sex..I also wanted information on various things that had happened back then, before Ged and Tenar were born. A good deal about Earthsea, about wizards, about Roke Island, about dragons, had begun to puzzle me. In order to understand current events, I needed to do some historical research, to spend some time in the Archives of the Archipelago..A man with beautiful celadon eyes, his face beaded with jewels of rain, reached through the cut-away door and removed the blanket from Agnes..By the time he got to the cooler, he could see this wasn't smoke, after all. It dissipated too quickly. Cool against his hand. The cold steam from dry ice.."August, 1931. Along the Huang He River in China. Three million seven hundred thousand people died in a great flood," Edom said..Sparky wasn't a bad guy, not

easily bought, and if he'd been asked to sell out any tenant other than Cain, he probably wouldn't have done so at any price. He greatly disliked Cain, however, and considered him to be "as strange and creepy as a syphilitic monkey." Finished, she gave him a mirror, so he could admire his new bicuspid cap. After five years of dentistry, paced so as not to tax Nolly's tolerance, Kathleen had done well what nature had done poorly, giving him a perfect bite and a supernatural smile. This final cap was the last of the reconstruction. Among themselves, the authorities spoke more often than not in murmurs. Or perhaps Junior was too distracted to hear them clearly. Yet the coin was as real as dead Naomi broken on the stony ridge at the foot of the fire tower. Although a believer, Agnes was not at the moment able to spread the flowers and ferns of faith over the hard, ugly reality of death. Cowled and skeletal, Death was here, all right, scattering his seeds among all her gathered friends, one day to reap them. When she was finished with the dishtowel, she returned to the dining room, and though dinner was underway, she called for another toast. Raising her glass, she said, "To Maria, who is more than my friend. My sister. I can't let you talk about what I've given you without telling your girls that you've given back more. You taught me that the world is as simple as sewing, that what seem to be the most terrible problems can be stitched up, repaired." She raised her glass slightly higher. "First chicken to be come with first egg inside already. God bless." On the fourth floor, at Dr. Klerkle's suite, the hall door stood ajar. Past office hours, the small waiting room was deserted. With Angel at breakfast, instead of just Uncle Jacob, at least Barty had someone to talk to, even if she did insist on speaking more often through her dolls than directly. Apparently, the dolls were on the table, propped up with bowls. The first, Miss Pixie Lee, had a high-pitched, squeaky voice. The second, Miss Velveeta Cheese, spoke in a three year-old's idea of what a throaty-voiced, sophisticated woman sounded like, although to Barty's ear, this was more suitable to a stuffed bear. When he judged that he was near the porch steps, he probed with his cane. Two paces later, the tip rapped the lowest step. Agnes's sharp intake of breath caused Edom to look up from his nephew's name. Pale, she was, her eyes as haunted as old mansions. He couldn't easily refuse the assignment. Later that year, President Lyndon Johnson, with strong backing from both the Democratic and the Republican Parties, was expected to sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and currently it was dangerous for clearheaded believers in the primacy of self to express their healthy instincts, which might be mistakenly perceived as racial prejudice. He could be fired. Jolene started to refill his coffee mug-then thought better of it. "Maybe you don't need more caffeine, Edom." "But before you leave St. Mary's," the physician said, "I'd like a few mutes of your time. It's very important to me. Personally." "Sometimes she wrote little paragraphs to God, very touching and humble notes of gratitude, thanking Him for bringing you into her life." The rain was colder than it had been earlier, almost as icy as sleet. Or perhaps she was far hotter than before and felt the chill more keenly on her fevered skin. Each droplet seemed to hiss against her face, to sizzle against her hands, with which she tightly gripped her swollen abdomen as if she could deny Death the baby that it had come to collect. When he woke in- the morning, he raised his head from the pillow to look at the alarm clock-and saw the twenty-five cents on his nightstand. Two dimes and a nickel. Onward he came, past the left front fender, gleefully hopping up and down, as if on a pogo stick, still waving. Tuesday, January 9, having cashed out a number of investments during the past ten days, Junior made a wire transfer of one and a half million dollars to the Gammoner account in the Grand Cayman bank. Two soft-boiled eggs, one slice of bread neither toasted nor buttered, a glass of apple juice, and a dish of orange. The blocking dresser, which doubled as a vanity, was surmounted by a mirror. One bullet drilled through the plywood backing, made a spider-web puzzle of the silvered glass, lodged in the wall above the bed-thwack-and kicked out a spray of plaster chips. He'd acted boldly, recklessly, without scoping the territory to be sure Prosser was alone. The accountant lived by himself, but a visitor might be present. Angel didn't want to go, maybe because the boogeyman schemed beneath the bed in some of her nightmares. Although the mummifying fog wound white mysteries around even the most ordinary objects and wrapped every citizen in anonymity, Vanadium preferred to approach the apartment building with utmost discretion. Whatever the length of his stay in this place, he would never arrive or depart through the front door or even through the basement level garage-until perhaps his last day. Junior's heart knocked so hard and fast that he wouldn't have been surprised if Vanadium, at the far end of the room, had begun to tap his foot in time with it. EDOM AND THE PIES, into the blue morning following the storm, had a schedule to keep and the hungry to satisfy. Now, after removing the four decks of cards from the pressboard packs in which they had come, Jacob lined them up side by side on the scarred maple top of the table. Celestina screamed-"Here! In here!"--as she slapped the magazine into the butt of the pistol. To see his newborn baby girl, Barty shared the sight of other Bartys, and he so adored this little wrinkled Mary that he sustained his vision all day, until a thunderous migraine became too much to bear and a sudden frightening slurring of speech drove him back to the comfort of blindness.

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