

TANAKA THE MAKING OF POSTWAR JAPAN

As beautiful as they were, none of these women satisfied him as profoundly as Naomi had satisfied him..Number three on the charts was "Mr. Lonely," by Bobby Vinton, an American talent from Canonsburg, Pennsylvania. Junior sang along..Magusson considered the assaults on Victoria and on Vanadium to be hideous crimes, of course, but he also viewed them as affronts to his own dignity and reputation. He expected a felonious client, rewarded with four and a quarter million instead of jail time, to be grateful and thereafter to walk a straight line..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..He paid cash to the locksmith, and included in the payment were the two dimes and the nickel Vanadium had left on his nightstand..The one piece he had purchased was by a young Bay Area artist, Baval Poriferan, about whom art critics nationwide were in agreement: He was destined for a long and significant career. The sculpture had cost over nine thousand dollars, an extravagance for a man trying to live on the income of his hard-won and prudently invested fortune, but its presence in his living room immediately identified him, to cognoscenti, as a person of taste and cutting-edge sensibilities..Here, four days past Christmas, after two days of torment, Agnes knew the worst, that her treasured son must go eyeless or die, must choose between blindness or cancer of the brain..Because of his blindness and his intellectual gifts, Barty was home schooled; besides, no teacher was a match for his autodidactic skills, nor could anyone possibly inspire in him a greater thirst for knowledge than the one with which he had been born. Angel went to this same informal classroom, and her sole fellow student was also her teacher. They aced the periodic equivalency tests that the law required. Their constant companionship seemed to be all play, yet was filled with constant learning, too..He loved Naomi, of course, and never could deny her. Although he had been especially sweet to her that night, if he had known that they would have less than a year together before fate tore her from him, he might have been even sweeter..Did she poison herself as well? Was it her intention to kill him and commit suicide?.Her name was Victoria Bressler, and she was an attractive blonde. She would never have been serious competition for Naomi, because Naomi had been singularly stunning, but Naomi, after all, was gone.."I can try, your highness." "Nah. Every secret society has a secret handshake. We'll have this instead." Her face was still close to his, and she rubbed noses with him..Through the big window beyond her, the charry branches of the massive oak tree formed a black cat's cradle against the sky, leaves quivering slightly, as though nature herself trembled in trepidation of what Junior Cain might do..She had lighted one candle for each of eleven apostles, none for the twelfth, Judas, the betrayer. Consequently, after burning a fragment of the cards in each votive glass, she was left with one piece..Neddy talked when Celestina paused for breath, talked over her when she didn't pause, heard only his own mellifluous voice and was pleased to conduct both sides of the conversation, wearing her down as surely as-though far more rapidly than-the sand-filled winds of Egypt diminished the pharaohs' pyramids. He talked through the first polite "Excuse me" of the tall man who stepped into the open doorway behind him, through the second and third, and then with an abruptness that was as miraculous as any cure at the shrine of Lourdes, he fell silent when the visitor put a hand on his shoulder, eased him gently aside, and entered the apartment..From time to time, he halted, leaning against the walker as if in need of rest. He took care occasionally to grimace-convincingly, not too theatrically---and to breathe harder than necessary..Junior levered up, scrambled up, vaulted over, and crashed into the deep bin, with every intention of landing on his feet. But he overshot, slammed his shoulder into the back wall of the container, fell to his knees, and sprawled facedown in the trash..get his hackles up if we, at the state level, still want to poke around a little..Along Junior's hairline, on his cheeks, his chin, and his upper lip, a double score of hard little knots had risen, angry red and hot to the touch. Having previously experienced a particularly vicious case of the hives, Junior realized this was something new-and worse. To the pilot, he replied, "Allergic reaction." When he noticed a blonde staring at him from a nearby booth, he smiled and winked at her. Although she was not attractive enough to meet his standards, there was no reason to be impolite..As early as this evening, here at her son's bedside, Agnes began dimly to sense that certain of these amusing conversations with Barty might not be as fanciful as they seemed, that he was expressing in a childlike way some truth that she had assumed was fantasy..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..Sitting on a stool at the counter, he ordered a cheeseburger, coleslaw, french fries, and a cherry Coke.."Honey," she said, crouching to peer at him through the vertical slats of the playpen, "what're you doing?" Instead of gaping at her as though she had been possessed by an inarticulate demon, Wally urgently fumbled a small box out of his jacket pocket and blurted, "Will you marry me?" "Was a priest," he corrected. "Might be again. At my request, I've been under a dispensation from vows and suspension from duties for twenty-seven years. Ever since those kids were killed." This was not the same card he'd found at his bedside, under two dimes and a nickel, on the night following Naomi's funeral. He had torn that one and had thrown it away.."Getting her into her shoes and coat sooner than Monday required a bribe," Wally said..She figured that she could stay home, devoting herself to Barty, for perhaps three years before she would be wise to find work..In the tree, the girl grinned. "Even if he stays up there until dawn, he'll still be coming down in the dark, won't he. Oh, we'll be fine, Aunt Aggie..Fortunately, the chill fog didn't bum away from the Mercedes, considering that it facilitated the stalking of Celestina. The mist swaddled the white Buick in which she rode, increasing the chances that Junior might lose track of her, but it also cloaked the Mercedes and all but ensured that she and her friend wouldn't realize that the pair of headlights behind them were always those of the same vehicle..Reluctant to leave Joey's body with the oddly jumpy mortician, Jacob nevertheless

crossed the porch of the Victorian style funeral home and left without glancing back. He walked one mile home, alert to passing traffic, especially cautious at intersections. Their station wagon stood along the service road, at least a hundred yards from the grave. With no wind to harry it, the rain fell as plumb straight as the strands of beaded curtains, and beyond these pearly veils, the car appeared to be a shimmering dark mirage. For a long time, she stood beside the bed, holding his hand, confident that on some level he was aware of her presence, though he gave no indication whatsoever that he knew she was there. Junior was reminded of a scene in an old movie, something Naomi wanted to watch, a love story set during the Black Plague: a horse drawn cart rolling through the medieval streets of London or Paris, the driver ringing a hand bell and crying, "Bring out your dead, bring out your dead!" If contemporary San Francisco had provided such a convenient service, he wouldn't have had to toss Neddy Gnathic in the Dumpster in the first place. He hit Celestina with the big question, the huge question, just as she paused in her babbling to suck in a deep breath, the better to spout even more nonsense, whereupon this panicky inhalation caught in her breast, caught so stubbornly that she was certain she would need the attention of paramedics to start breathing again, but then Wally popped open the box, revealing a lovely engagement ring, the sight of which made the trapped breath explode from her, and then she was breathing fine, although snuffling and crying and just generally a mess. "I love you, Wally." Calcimine moonlight cast an arctic illusion over the boneyard. The grass was as eerily silver as snow at night, and gravestones tilted like pressure ridges of ice in a fractured wasteland. In the car again, a block from home, Barty said, "Maybe you could just not tell Uncle Edom and Uncle Jacob until Sunday night. They won't handle it real well. You know?" This room didn't face the street by which Cain would approach the building, so Vanadium switched on the lights. He spent fifteen minutes examining the mundane contents of the cupboards, searching for nothing in particular, merely getting an idea of how the suspect lived-and, admittedly, hoping for an item as helpful to a conviction as a severed head in the refrigerator or at least a plastic-wrapped kilo of marijuana in the freezer. In the bedroom, as he opened a suitcase on the bed, he saw the quarter. Shiny. Heads-up. On the nightstand. "This is Detective Bellini, with the San Francisco Police Department. Is everything all right there?" You struck a discord that can be heard, however faintly, all the way to the farthest end of the universe. Another pocket. More cartridges. Trying to squeeze just two into the magazine, but his hands shaking and slippery with sweat. Yet when he put her down in the upstairs hall, she cried out for her husband--"Harry!" "-and tried to plunge once more into the narrow stairwell. Joey was standing just outside, gazing in at her. His blue eyes were seas where sorrow sailed. On Christmas Eve, 1996, the family gathered in the middle of the three houses for dinner. The living-room furniture had been moved aside to the walls, and three tables had been set end to end, the length of the room, to accommodate everyone. Among those present before the caravan returned were a few who should have known better than to allow this madness. Tom Vanadium, Edom, Maria. They stared up at the boy, tense and solemn, and Agnes could only suppose that they, too, had arrived after the fact, with the boy already beyond easy recall. For a moment, Junior drew a blank on Renee. Reluctantly, he trolled the past and fished up the painful memory: the gorgeous transvestite in the Chanel suit, heir or heiress to an industrial-valve fortune. On the third of June, he found another useless Bartholomew, and on Saturday, the twenty-fifth, two deeply disturbing events occurred. He switched on his kitchen radio only to discover that "Paperback Writer," yet another Beatles song, had climbed to the top of the charts, and he received a call from a ea woman. The full nature of the nightmare continued to elude him, but he became convinced that good reason for his fear existed, that the dream had been more than a dream. He had a nemesis named Bartholomew not merely in dreams, but in the real world, and this Bartholomew had something to do with ... babies. Junior realized that killing Renee this very night would be an unthinkable waste. Instead, he could marry her first, enjoy her for a while, and eventually arrange an accident or suicide that left him with all-or at least a significant portion of her assets. "It isn't that, Daddy. You remember, when we were all together the day before yesterday, how afraid Phimie was of this man. Not just for herself ... for the baby." He considered himself to be a thoroughly useless man, taking up space in a world to which he contributed nothing, but he did have a talent for baking. He could take any recipe, even one from a world-class pastry chef, and improve upon it. Using a three-step folding stool, he was able to get near enough to one of the vent plates in the living room to determine whether it might be the source of the song. just then the singing stopped. As the storm failed to dampen Joey, so the rotating red-and-white beacons on the surrounding police vehicles did not touch him. 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. In a rocking chair, holding her tiny son in her arms, Agnes cried quietly. Often, Barty slept through her weeping. Awakened, he smiled or squinched his face into a puzzled frown. And God has four hundred billion billion fingers, and He plays a really hot version of "Hawaiian Holiday. Bob gently encouraged him to return by degrees from the deep meditative state, return, return, return. 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. After checking her carotid artery and detecting no pulse, Junior returned to the sofa in the living room. He fluffed the little pillow and left it precisely as he had found it. What good was she to anybody, what good could she ever hope to be, if she couldn't even save her little sister? ON THE FOLLOWING Tuesday afternoon in Bright Beach, across a sky as black as a witch's cauldron, seagulls flew out of an evil brew toward their safe roosts, and on the land below, humid shadows of the. Agnes was so weary, her eyes so sore and grainy, that even this soft radiance stung. She almost closed her eyes and gave herself to sleep again, that little brother of Death, which was now her only solace. What she saw in the lamplight, however, compelled her attention. As he raced into the future, the past caught up with him in the form

of intestinal spasms, and by the time that he had driven only three miles, whimpering like a sick dog, he made an emergency stop at a service station to use the rest room. Grace, having just finished washing a sinkful of dishes, stood monitoring the application of the icing and drying her hands, when the telephone rang. She picked it up, and as she said, "Hello," the front of the house exploded. Suddenly she realized—Good Lord!—that someone else had a had inside her, up the very center of her, massaging her uterus in the same lazy pattern as that made by the piece of melting ice on her belly. "There's no clear evidence of birth defects, but a couple tests reveal some worrisome anomalies. We'll know when we see the child." But she knew. Barty, buoyant as ever, seemed not to be much worried about the problem with his vision. He appeared to expect that it would pass like any sneezing fit or cold. "Consider what I told you," Dr. Salk urged. "Your Perri would want you to think about it." Barty paced off the downstairs hallway to the kitchen, thinking about Dr. Jekyll and the hideous Mr. Hyde. "yuh," so she nodded as vigorously as she was able to do, and tightened her grip on Celestina's hand. 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. Junior could neither speak nor even mewl in agony. All the saliva had been draining forward, out of his open mouth, for so long that his throat was parched and raw. He felt as though he had munched on a snack of salted razor blades that were now stuck in his pharynx. His rattling wheeze sounded like scuttling scarabs. The third-floor apartment directly over Enoch Cain's unit had been leased by Simon Magusson, through his corporation, ever since it became available in March of '66, twenty-two months ago. Awed, dropping to one knee before Barty, Tom fingered the sleeve of the boy's shirt. Although he related well to the theme of moral relativism and personal autonomy in a value-neutral world, Junior grew apprehensive about each impending scene of violence, and closed his eyes against the prospect of blood. He resented having to endure ninety minutes of the film before Google finally settled into the seat beside him. The restaurant wasn't fancy. A coffee shop. Aromatic bacon sizzling, eggs frying. The warm cinnamony smell of fresh pastries, the bracing scent of strong coffee. Clean, bright surroundings. 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. As though he were home to a species of termites that preferred the taste of men to that of wood, Vanadium felt a squirming in his marrow. "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." Celestina checked her wristwatch and saw that she was running late. With Angel's short legs and layers of red, there was no point in trying to hurry. Taking no chances, Junior swung the candlestick again, bending down as he did so. The second impact was not as solid as the first, a glancing blow, but effective. The black service road seemed to come out of nowhere, then to vanish into a void, and Junior suddenly felt dangerously isolated, alone as he had never been, and vulnerable. He hadn't paid close attention to those patrons seated at the bar behind him. Now, he turned in his chair to study them. "In cases like this, the malignancy is often more advanced in one eye than the other. If the size of the tumor requires it, we remove the eye containing the greatest malignancy, and we treat the remaining eye with radiation." "That's the roaster tower," said Licky. "Where they cook the cinnabar to get the metal from it. Roasters die in a year or two. Where to, dowser?" Although he was seventy-six, Tom still worked for Pie Lady Services. They had no set retirement age for staff, and Father Tom expected to die at his work. "And if it's a pie-caravan day, just leave my old carcass where I drop until you make all the deliveries. I won't be responsible for anyone missing a promised pie." The walk-in closet, which Vanadium next explored, contained fewer clothes than he expected. Only half the rod space was being used. A lot of empty hangers rang softly, eerily against one another as he conducted a casual examination of Cain's wardrobe. Lipscomb women gladly obey the wishes of Lipscomb men—unless they disagree, of course, or don't disagree but are just feeling mulish. Softened by a Shantung shade, the lamplight was golden on his small smooth face, but sapphire and emerald in his eyes. "Wouldn't live in the Caribbean if you paid me," Bill said. "All that humidity. All those bugs." Celestina expected to be taken to a waiting room, but instead the nun escorted her to surgical prep. Running footsteps, heading toward the ambulance. Apparently Kenny. The second paramedic. She was so hot that the ice melted quickly. A thin trickle slid down her throat, but not enough to take the Sahara out of her voice when she said, "More." She had expected horror, although perhaps not a horror quite as stark as this, and she had also expected to be crushed by it, destroyed, because although she was able to survive any misery that might be visited upon her, she didn't think that she possessed the fortitude to endure the suffering of her innocent child. Yet she listened, and she received the terrible burden of the news, and her bones did not at once turn to dust, though unfeeling dust was what she now preferred to be. The possibility that he'd left a clear fingerprint on the watch crystal had to be judged remote. And the band had been too textured to take a print useful to the police. "I'm really not sad, Mom. I'm not. I don't like it this way, being blind. It's ... hard." His small voice, musical as are the voices of most children, touching in its innocence, spun a fragile thread of melody in the dark, and seemed too sweet to be speaking of these bitter things. "Real hard. But being sad won't help. Being sad won't make me see again." The gray pewter appeared to be mottled with a black substance. Perhaps char. As though it had been soiled in a fire. dent? You do believe that? Because I don't see ... I don't know how could work with someone who thought I was capable of . . . "

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