

## DE VITA ET ELOCUTIONE C PLINII CAECILII SECUNDI

Looking up at the mirror above the sink, he saw reflected not the self-improved and fully realized man that he'd worked so hard to become, but the pale, round-eyed little boy who had hidden from his mother when she had been in the deepest and darkest end of one of her cocaine-assisted, amphetamine-spiced mood swings, before she traded cold reality for the warm coziness of the asylum. As if some whirlpool of time was spinning him backward into the hateful past, Junior felt his hard-won defenses being stripped away..Celestina, the battering Baptist, back in action, came at him again. With one leg broken, another cracked, and the stretcher bar splintered, the chair wasn't as formidable a weapon as it had been. She swung it, Junior dodged, she struck at him again, he juked, and she reeled away from him, gasping..He woke at noon, eyes gummed shut with the effluence of sleep. He felt lousy, but he was in control of himself-and strong enough to fetch his suitcase, which he'd been unable to carry upon arrival.. "Mommy, watch!" He turned in the deluge with his arms held out from his sides. "Not scary!".In truth, he was terrified. Although his need for her company was so profound that it seemed to arise from his marrow, a part of him marveled-and trembled-at his dedicated pursuit of her..Fathoms of silence flooded the line. Still, she listened. He sensed her there, though as if at a great depth..As Celestina settled on the sofa with the phone in her lap, hesitating to dial until she worked up a bit more courage, Angel said to Tom, "So what happened to your face?".With the dead woman's guest on the way, minutes were precious. Attention to detail was essential, however, regardless of how much time was required to properly stage the little tableau that might disguise murder as a domestic accident..In the foyer again, about six feet inside the front door, he stood the wineglass on the floor. He placed the bottle of Merlot beside the glass, the red rose beside the bottle..For all his brilliance, however, he was still a boy who loved to run and jump and tumble. Who swung from the backyard oak tree in a rope-and-tire swing. Who was thrilled when given a tricycle. Who giggled in delight while watching his uncle Jacob roll a shiny quarter end over-end across his knuckles and perform other simple coin tricks..Regrettably, his radiant smile only emphasized, by contrast, the dire shortcomings of the face from which it beamed. Lumpish, pocked, wart-stippled, darkened by a permanent beard shadow with a bluish cast, this countenance was beyond the powers of redemption possessed by the best plastic surgeons in the world, which was no doubt why Nolly applied his resources strictly to dental work..Aside from purchasing the T S. Eliot book, which he hadn't found time to read, Junior was only peripherally aware of current events, because they were, after all, current, while he tried always to focus on the future. The news of the day was but a faint background music to him, like a song on a radio in another apartment..For more than two weeks, Agnes's heart had been a clangorous place, filled with the rattle and bang of hard emotions, but now a sort of quiet had come upon it, a peace that, if it held, might one day allow joy again..Requital. Restitutional apology, which must have been learned in a law school where English was the second language. Even atonement..This time, even San Francisco, under a Chinese-blue sky stippled with a cloisonne of silver-and-gold clouds, couldn't provide solace or calm Celestina's nerves. Her sister's dilemma wasn't as easily put out of mind as any problem of her own might have been-and she herself had never been in such an awful situation as Phimie was now..Holding the mug in his right hand, Tom picked up the coin and rolled it across the knuckles of his left. Paul's quarter, after all. A two-bit temptation to panic. As gifted with physical grace as with good looks, Junior stepped into the bedroom doorway, lithely and with feline stealth. He leaned against the jamb.. "If Phimie wasn't here," Celestina said, "and then she came back, she was somewhere during that minute, wasn't she?".The words of Robert Louis Stevenson, well read, poured another time and place into the room as smoothly as lemonade pouring from pitcher into glass..This was pathetic. Only thickheaded fools, unschooled and unworldly, would be shaken into confession by ham-handed tactics like these..If killing the wrong Bartholomew had broken a dam in Junior and released a lake of tension, whacking the right Bartholomew would set loose an ocean of pent-up stress, and he would feel free as he'd not felt since the fire tower. Freer than he'd been in his entire life..Startled, he braked to a halt. Agnes didn't say anything until Joey had taken three or four deep..His happy expectation thickened into dread when he spotted the ambulance at the curb. And in the driveway stood the Buick that belonged to Joshua Nunn, their family doctor..His previous plan to create a tableau-butter on the floor, open oven door-to portray Victoria's death as an accident was no longer adequate. A new strategy was required..His severed toe lay across the room, on the white tile floor. It stuck up stiffly, nail gleaming, as if the floor were snow and the toe were the only exposed extremity of a body buried in a drift..On Thursday, January 4, he used his John Pinchbeck identity to purchase a new Ford van with a cashier's check. He leased a private garage space in the Pinchbeck name, near the Presidio, and stored the van there..face looked familiar, and he sensed that he had seen it before in a disquieting context, although the man's identity eluded him..Sitting on the edge of the bed, taking his hand, she stared at his sweet little bow of a mouth, whereas before she would have met his eyes. "Tell me.".This show was hopeless, disastrous, stupid, foolish, painful, lovely, wonderful, glorious, sweet..When the nurse was gone, alone with his mother as they waited for the orderly to bring a gurney, Barty said, "Come close.".The upper end of the bed was elevated. Otherwise, Agnes would not have been able to see the room, for she was too weak to raise her head from the pillows.. "Nothing of the kind." Agnes smiled at Barty and wiggled her finger in his grip. "They've always been my salvation. I don't know what I'd do without them.".There were effective actions and ineffective actions, socially acceptable and unacceptable behavior, wise and stupid decisions that could be made. But if you wanted to achieve maximum self-realization, you had to understand that any choice you made in life was entirely value neutral. Morality was a primitive concept, useful in earlier stages of societal evolution, perhaps, but without relevance in the modern age..Uncommonly healthy, he didn't suffer croup, flu, sinusitis, or most of the ailments to which other children were vulnerable..Turning away from the window, Celestina grabbed the girl and pushed

her toward the bed, whispering, "Down, under." Standing at graveside, Junior was in a foul mood. He was weary of pretending to be deep in grief. An hour later, when Barty decided he wanted a soda, he switched off the book and asked Angel if she would like something to drink. "What car?" Celestina asked, stopping at the bottom of the steps and turning to look. "You mean it's like with you in the kitchen, but not if you go into the living room? Your cold has a mind of its own?" "Wouldn't live in the Caribbean if you paid me," Bill said. "All that humidity. All those bugs." "I hope it was all right I let him in, Mr. Cain." Sparky had a capuchin's overbite, too. "He told me it was an emergency." Google didn't realize that he was an object of disgust. He wiggled his eyebrows in what he evidently assumed to be an expression of male camaraderie, and he nudged Junior with one elbow. Anyway, if Celestina escaped, there would be a witness, and it wouldn't matter to a jury that she was a talentless bitch who painted kitsch. She would have seen Junior get out of the Mercedes and would be able to provide at least a half-accurate description of the car in spite of the fog. He still hoped to pull this off without having to give up his good life on Russian Hill. Barty never cried. In the hospital neonatal unit, he'd been a marvel to the nurses, because when the other newborns were squalling in chorus, Barty had been unfailingly serene. To prayer instead, asking for the wisdom to understand why this was happening to her and for the strength to cope with her pain and with her loss. "We want the scary one, 'specially if it has spiders, Pixie Lee said squeakily but defiantly. He wanted to say: The vain, power-mad politicians who milk cheers from ignorant crowds, the sports stars and preening actors who hear themselves called heroes and never object, they should all wither with shame at the mention of your name. Your vision, your struggle, the years of grueling work, your enduring faith when others doubted, the risk you took with career and reputation--it's one of the great stories of science, and I'd be honored if I could shake your band. Kathleen expected this would prove to be true. She herself was not frightened by Thomas Vanadium's appearance; but then she had been prepared for it before she first saw him. And she wasn't a murderer, fearful of retribution, to whom this particular face would seem like Judgment personified. Unbuttoning her blouse, Celestina said, "Traditionally, puppies don't have a role in weddings." Mouth was turned down in half a frown. From the corner of her lips oozed a stream. Angel pointed to a Mercedes parked about forty feet behind the Buick, just as its headlights went off. Jacob didn't know how he could ever bear to look at Agnes when she came home from the hospital. The sorrow in her eyes would kill him as surely as a knife to the heart. Like a spring-loaded novelty snake erupting from a can, Junior exploded up from the chair, nearly knocking it over. The funeral was at two o'clock, after which family and friends of the deceased would gather here in the parsonage for a social, to break bread together and to share their memories of the loved one lost. Edom marveled at Agnes's ability to rise above the past and to transcend so many years of torment. She was able to see the house as simple shelter, whereas to her brothers, it was--and always would be--the place in which their spirits had been shattered. Even living within sight of it would have been out of the question if they had been employed, with options. 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. Although he harbored no fear of coming under suspicion for the murder of Victoria Bressler, he intended to leave Spruce Hills this very night. No future existed for him in such a sleepy backwater. A wider world awaited, and he had earned the right to enjoy all that it could offer him. Prepared for any contingency, Junior listened to the house until he was certain that he needed the knife for no one else. If someone were here in the hallway with him, it couldn't be Angel, because she would be chattering enthusiastically in one voice or another. Uncle Jacob would never tease him like this, and no one else was in the house. The boy-wonder physician turned to Junior again and assumed an expression of compassion so inauthentic that if he'd been playing a doctor on even the cheesiest daytime soap opera, he'd have been stripped of his actor's-union card, fired, and possibly horsewhipped on a live television special. "We'll be doing the procedure this afternoon, so I wouldn't want to give you anything much for the pain just prior to anesthesia and sedation. But don't you worry, Mr. Pinchbeck. Once we've lanced these boils, when you wake up, ninety percent of the pain will be gone." To the alleyway again. Not through the clodhopper-cluttered gallery this time. Around the block at a brisk walk. The front door was unlocked. This was no longer one house; it had been converted to an apartment building. Frowning, Panglo, said, "Terrible, you're right, so many terrible things happen, but I don't see why trains-." "Once out of the coma and stabilized for a few weeks, I was transferred to a hospital in Portland, where I had to undergo eleven surgeries." "A friend's daughter. They say she died in a traffic accident down in San Francisco. She was even younger than Naomi." Lipscomb shifted his gaze from the street below to the source of the rain. "Phimie was not gone long, perhaps a minute-a minute and ten seconds at most--and when she was with us again, it was clear from her condition that the cardiac arrest was most likely secondary to a massive cerebral incident. She was disoriented, paralysis on the right side ... with the distortion of the facial muscles that you saw. Her speech was slurred at first, but then something strange happened. . . ." Angel, "Phimie said thickly, searching her sister's eyes for a sign of understanding. The Finder. Furious, he squeezed off two shots. Passing the living-room archway, Tom saw Jacob in the armchair, under the reading lamp, slumped as if asleep over the book. His crimson bib confirmed that he wasn't just sleeping. They agreed that to the outside world, Barty must continue to appear to be a sightless man--or otherwise either be treated like a freak or be subjected, perhaps unwillingly, to experimentation. In the modern world, there was no tolerance for miracles. Only family could be told of this development. From a distance and through a scattering of trees, Junior wasn't able to discern much about the other funeral, but he was pretty sure many if not most of that crowd were Negroes. He surmised, therefore, that the person being buried was a Negro, too. As quick as a snake strikes, Vanadium was much closer to the bed than he had been when he tossed the coin,

at Junior's side now, leaning over the railing. "Naomi was six weeks pregnant." From the door to the sink, nervously fishing a plastic pharmacy bottle out of a coat pocket, Junior counseled himself to remain calm. Slow deep breaths. What's done is done. Live in the future. Act, don't react. Focus. Look for the bright side..Wait here in the car. Give them time to settle down. At this hour, they would put the kid to bed first. Then Ichabod and Celestina would go to their room, undress for the night..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..with an encircling and suggestive lick, and then licked his lips, too, when the cold steel slipped free of them..Leaving three of the pats in the container, he carefully placed the fourth on the vinyl-tile floor.. "I don't have to graduate in the spring of next year. I can take fewer classes, graduate the spring after. That's no big deal." If Junior was not discreet, and if gossip about the widower Cain and the sexy nurse began to circulate, Vanadium would be on the case again even if it had been closed. The cop was sick, hateful, driven by unknowable inner demons. Although he might for the moment have been reined in by those in higher office, mere gossip of a spicy nature would be excuse enough for him to open the file again, which he'd surely do without informing his superiors..Softened by a Shantung shade, the lamplight was golden on his small smooth face, but sapphire and emerald in his eyes..rearview mirror was not hung with one of those tacky decorative deodorizers. The seats, regularly treated with leather soap, were softer and more supple than they had been when the car had shipped out of..This soiling of Naomi's memory was a sadness so poignant, so terrible, that he wondered if he could endure it. He felt his mouth tremble and go soft, not with the urge to throw up again, but with something like grief if not grief itself. His eyes filled with tears.. "Just now." Although Angel tried to sound nonchalant, she was trembling. "I'm not sure I can do it again." Only a few theater goers attended the matinee. No one sat near, so Google and Junior openly swapped packages: a five-by-six manila envelope to Google, a nine-by-twelve to Junior.. "I'm no hero," Paul insisted. "I just got your mom out of there in the process of saving myself." On this morning in March, minutes after the pie caravan had departed, Edom got his Ford Country Squire out of the garage and drove to the nursery, which opened early. Spring was drawing near, and much work needed to be done to make the most of the rosarium that Joey Lampion had encouraged him to restore. He happily contemplated hours of browsing through plant stock, tools, and gardening supplies..Perhaps the paramedic had given him an injection, a sedative. the howling ambulance rocked along on this most momentous day, Junior Cain wept profoundly but quietly--and achieved temporary peace in a dreamless sleep..Desperately trying to collect her wits, Agnes gazed out at the deluged graveyard, where the mournful trees and massed monuments were blurred by purling streams ceaselessly spilling down the windshield..Vanadium owned so few clothes that the two bags had sufficient capacity to accommodate half the contents of the closet and dresser.. "December 1, 1958, in Chicago, Illinois, a parochial-school fire killed ninety-five." 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." The living room no longer doubled as sleeping quarters. Perri's hospital bed had been taken away. Paul's bed had been moved to a room upstairs, where for the past three nights, he had tried to sleep..Grace, Celestina, and Paul expressed amusement and amazement at Angel's critical judgment..She held his face in both hands and kissed each of his beautiful jewel eyes. "You ready?" "Or at least, if the police knew the truth at that time, they hadn't yet gone public with it. I had no reason to mention it to you back then. I didn't even know Vanadium was missing." "I don't know." He was silent a moment. "That's what's going to be interesting." Junior was not immune to traditional logic, but in this case he recognized the superior wisdom of Zedd's philosophy. His dread of Bartholomew and his gut-level animosity toward a child he'd never met defied all reason and exceeded simple paranoia; therefore, it must be purest, infallible animal instinct.. "All right," Celestina said, "yes, of course." She could see no harm in humoring Phimie. "Angel. Angel White. Now, you calm down, you relax, don't stress yourself." WITH A CRASH as loud as the dire crack of heaven opening on Judgment Day, the Ford pickup broadsided the Pontiac. Agnes couldn't hear the first fraction of her scream, and not much of the rest of it, either, as I.Barty paced off the downstairs hallway to the kitchen, thinking about Dr. Jekyll and the hideous Mr. Hyde..A deep-set casement window. Two latches on the right side, one high, one low. Detachable hand crank lying on the foot-deep sill. Mechanism socket in the base casing..Simon Magusson-capable of representing the devil himself for the proper fee, but also capable of genuine remorse-visited Vanadium in the hospital, soon after learning that the detective had awakened from a coma. The attorney shared the conviction that Cain was the guilty party, and that he'd also murdered his wife..Eventually, dinner over, cleanup finished, when Maria and the uncles had gone, Agnes and Barty faced the stairs together. She followed, holding his cane, which he said he preferred not to use in the house, prepared to catch him if he stumbled..He knocked the pepper shaker on its side, and then with a groan put it upright once more..He carried the mug to the sink, poured the brew down the drain and saw the cooler standing in the corner. He hadn't noticed it before. A medium-size, molded-plastic, Styrofoam-lined ice chest, of the type you filled with beer and took on picnics..His breath was warm against her throat: "And I want to go back home to see some faces." Her voice was soft, almost a whisper, and charged with anxiety; but under other circumstances, it would have been sexy.

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