

THE GRASSES OF ILLINOIS

Curiously, reciting these facts usually calmed him, as though speaking of disaster would ward it off. Since Friday, however, he had found no comfort in his usual routines. "Good heavens, Vinnie, I know that," she assured him as she lifted Barty—hardly bigger than a bag of sugar—from the bassinet. She settled with the baby into a rocking chair. He kept a few paperbacks of Caesar Zedd's work in the bathroom, so that time spent on the john wouldn't be wasted. Some of his deepest insights into the human condition and his best ideas for self-improvement had come in this place, where Zedd's luminous words seemed to shine a brighter light into his mind upon rereading. Bartholomew had been able to focus his eyes much sooner than the average baby was supposed to be able to focus. To a surprising extent, he was already engaged in the world around him. Harmonizing with Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard, he drove to the granite quarry three miles beyond the town limits. Evidently, either Frank Sinatra was an enthusiasm that Victoria and the detective shared, or the nurse purchased some of the crooner's records expressly for their dinner engagement. AFTER UNDERGOING TESTS for brain tumors or lesions, to ascertain whether his seizure of violent emesis might, in fact, have a physical cause, Junior was returned to his hospital room shortly before noon. Confused, Panglo held out his right hand, but Jacob said, "Sorry, no offense, but I don't shake with anyone." "So where he threw the quarter," Barty said, as Angel listened intently and nodded her head, "wasn't really into Gunsmoke, 'cause that's not a place, it's just a show. See, maybe he threw it into a place where I'm not blind, or into a place where he doesn't have that messed-up face, or a place where for some reason you never came here today. There's more places than anybody could ever count, even me, and I can count pretty good. That's what you feel, right—all the ways things are?" "Paul told us the night he first came to the parsonage. About Agnes here ... and what had happened to Barty. And all about his late wife, Perri. I feel like I know Bright Beach already." The unmatched suite of bedroom furniture, cheap and scarred, might have been purchased at a thrift shop. A double bed and one nightstand. A small dresser. Now, here on this sunny ridge in Oregon, miles from any train and farther still from any nuns, Junior applied this artistic insight to his own situation, overcame his squeamishness, and regained some momentum of his own. He approached his fallen wife, stood over her, and stared down into her fixed eyes as he said, "Naomi!". After a long time the door opened and several men came in. He could do nothing against them as they gagged him and bound his arms behind him. "Now you won't weave charms nor speak spells, young'un," said a broad, strong man with a furrowed face, "but you can nod your head well enough, right? They sent you here as a dowser. If you're a good dowser you'll feed well and sleep easy. Cinnabar, that's what you're to nod for. The King's wizard says it's still here somewhere about these old mines. And he wants it. So it's best for us that we find it. Now I'll walk you out. It's like I'm the water finder and you're my wand, see? You lead on. And if you want to go this way or that way you dip your head, so. And when you know there's ore underfoot, you stamp on the place, so. Now that's the bargain, right? And if you play fair I will." They wanted to go up to Barty's room, but she refused them, because there was nothing more they could do for the boy than they had done for her. "He wants to finish reading Starman Jones, and I'm not letting anything interfere with that. We're leaving for Newport Beach at seven in the morning, and you can see him then." He was too sensitive a soul to be able to take either a handsaw or a power saw to a corpse. In the six weeks since conception, she must have missed at least one menstrual period. She hadn't complained of morning sickness, but surely she'd experienced it. It was highly unlikely that she'd been unaware of her condition. Of course, Angel might have been playing around with the talking book. Or, even though she'd left the dolls downstairs, she might have been filling the time until Barty's return by having a nice chat with Miss Pixie and Miss Velveeta. She had other voices, too, for other dolls, and one for a sock puppet named Smelly. 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. "I'm captivated more by painting than I am by most dimensional work," Junior explained. "Really, the only sculpture I've acquired is Poriferan's." "I was hoping you might know," said Edom, studying the collar of Jacob's green flannel shirt. Dressed entirely in a shade of pink that darkened to rouge when wet, Angel squealed and deserted Barty. Spotted-streaked-splashed, with false tears on her cheeks, with a darkly glimmering crown of rain jewels in her hair, she raced up the steps as though she were a princess abandoned by her coachman, and allowed herself to be scooped into her grandmother's arms. Reading the dates on the headstone, he saw that the minister's daughter had died on the seventh of January, the day after Naomi had fallen from the fire tower. If ever asked, Junior would have no trouble accounting for his whereabouts on that day. Then the police in Spruce Hills would want to know why he had been screwing around with an underage Negro girl if his marriage to Naomi had been as perfect, as fulfilling, as he claimed. Unfair as it seems, there is no statute of limitations on murder. Closed files can be dusted off and opened again; investigations can be resumed. And although authorities would have little or no hope of convicting him of murder on whatever meager evidence they could dig up, he would be forced to spend another significant portion of his fortune on attorney fees. Neddy cooperated by not deigning to look back. Eventually, he stopped a young man who, judging by the name tag on the lapel of his blazer, was a gallery employee. They put their heads together in conversation, and then the musician headed through an archway into the second showroom. She slipped into her shoes and stood for a moment watching his lips move as he gave thanks for his blessings and as he asked that blessings be given to others who needed them. During the first year of her illness, she had been slowly weaned off an iron lung. Until she was seventeen, she required the chest respirator, but gradually gained the strength to breathe unassisted. At first all had gone well. Agnes, Maria, and Edom were rightly amazed. A thrill of wonder and big smiles all around the table. They were enthralled by the astoundingly favorable fall of cards, a breathtaking mathematical

improbability..Jacob Isaacson--twin brother of Edom-knew nothing negative about Panglo, but he didn't trust him. If the mortician had been caught prying gold teeth from the dead and carving satanic symbols in their buttocks, Jacob would have said, "It figures." If Panglo had saved bottles of infected blood from diseased cadavers, and if one day he ran through town, splashing it in the faces of unsuspecting citizens, Jacob would not have raisers one eyebrow in surprise..As he stepped out of the street, Don't Walk shortened to Walk, and when he checked for pursuit, he found it. Here came Vanadium, who would have been shivering in want of a topcoat if his flesh had been real..In spite of the gloom, the boy's miraculous accomplishment was evident: his clothes and hair were dry as though he'd worn a coat and hood..Although Celestina felt a little paranoid, being so security-minded in this safe neighborhood, nevertheless she searched, out the master control button and engaged the power locks.. "Lock it anyway. And don't hang up. Stay on the line until the patrolmen get there."..At those cutting-edge galleries where he attended receptions, no one got in without a printed invitation. And even with the authentic paper in hand, you might still be refused entry if you failed to pass the cool test. The criteria of cool were the same as at the current hottest dance clubs, and in fact the bouncers controlling the gate at the finest avant-garde galleries were those who worked the clubs..Lifting his martini, theatrically gesturing to the tablecloth where the glass had stood, as though the lack of coins proved that he, too, had sorcerous power, Nolly said, "Another round of this magical concoction? ".Incredibly, the thief left behind the most valuable items: the collection of hardcover first editions of Caesar Zedd's complete body of work. The box stood open, its contents having been explored in haste, but not a single volume was missing..During the night, he had awakened, seen her in the chair, and covered her with a blanket..Then quickly from Spruce Hills to Eugene by car, from Eugene to Orange County Airport by a chartered aircraft, from Orange County to Bright Beach in a stolen '68 Oldsmobile 4-4-2 Hurst, while the advantage of surprise remained with him. Carrying a newly acquired, silencer-fitted 9-mm pistol, spare magazines of ammunition, three sharp knives, a police lock-release gun, and one piece of steaming luggage, Junior had arrived late the previous evening..When the highway passed through a sunless ravine, he had broken into a sour sweat at the sight of the bloody pulsing reflections of the revolving rooftop beacons on the bracketing cut-shale walls. Now and then, the siren shrieked to clear traffic ahead, and he felt the urge to scream with it, to let loose a wail of terror and anguish and confusion and loss.."I'm paying," Celestina insisted when they were seated. "I'm now a successful artist, with untold numbers of critics just waiting to savage me."..Besides, he couldn't any longer afford to spend endless hours either learning a new language or attending the opera. His life was too full, leaving him insufficient time for the Bartholomew search..In a swirl of London Fog and righteous indignation, Neddy turned his back on Junior and drifted away through the nibbling, nattering crowd..Celestina gave birth to Seraphim in '69, saw her painting on the cover of American Artist in '70, and gave birth to Harrison in '72..Edom, who had never made it big, medium, or little, watched his sister blur before him. He strove to contain the shimmering hotness in his eyes. His love was not for magic, and his pride was not in any skill he possessed, for he possessed none worth noting. His love was for his good sister; she was his pride, too, and he felt that his small life had precious meaning as long as he was able to drive her on days like this, carry her pies, and occasionally make her smile..Charmed by the vulnerability of the young, he'd never slept with an older woman. The prospect intrigued him. She would have tricks in her repertoire that younger women were too inexperienced to know..Consequently, he scheduled more time every day with the phone books. He had obtained directories for all nine counties that, with the city itself, comprised the Bay Area.."Well, as years pass, they're going to be a financial burden, if nothing else, so I'm glad I've got a little surprise for you."..Instead of immediately killing anyone, Junior returned to his apartment on the afternoon of December 29, and went to bed, fully clothed. To calm down. To think about focus..The currents of irrational fear, which bring periodic turbulence to virtually every childhood, didn't disturb the smoothly flowing river of Barty's first three years. He showed no fear of the doctor or the dentist..MONDAY MORNING, January 17, Agnes's lawyer, Vinnie Lincoln, came to the house with Joey's will and other papers requiring attention..Currently, the rental market was extremely tight. The first day of his search resulted only in the discovery that he was going to have to pay more than he expected even for modest quarters.."But you don't understand." She recounted the extraordinary draw of aces during the fortune-telling session Friday evening..She felt that she had failed her sister. She didn't know what more she could have done, but if she'd been wiser and more insightful and more attentive, surely this terrible loss would not have come to pass..Kid's room. Bartholomew's room. Furniture in cheerful primary colors. Pooh posters on the wall..For just one hour, which was not too taxing, he walked in the idea of a world where he had healthy eyes, and shared the vision of other Barty's in other places, so he would be able to see his bride as she walked down the aisle and as, beside him, she took their vows with him, and as she held out her hand to receive the ring..He knocked the pepper shaker on its side, and then with a groan put it upright once more..The only light came from a reading lamp. An adjustable brass shade directed the light down onto a chair..Maintaining a brutal strangling pressure, Junior turned his head aside, to protect his eyes. He kneed Neddy in the crotch, crunching the remaining fight out of him..Needlepoint, meditation, and even sex had not recently provided him with significant relief of tension. The paintings of Sklent and the works of Zedd were packed in the van, where he couldn't at the moment take solace from them..Industrial Woman, which he'd purchased for a little more than nine thousand dollars, less than eighteen months ago and at another gallery, would fetch at least thirty thousand in the current market, so rapidly had Bavor Poriferan's reputation risen..They were inseparable, her son and this cherished girl, as they had been virtually since the moment they had met, more than six years ago. The special perception that they shared--all the ways things are-accounted for part of their closeness, but only part. The bond between them was so deep that it defied understanding, as mysterious as the concept of the Trinity, three gods in one..The birthmarked man identified himself as Detective Thomas Vanadium. He did not use the familiar, diminutive form of his name, as had the doctor,

and his voice was as uninflected as his face was flat and homely.. "Could you undo the spell you put on her?" "If you don't, your feeling gland isn't working. Want me to read you to sleep?" "Crafty men" is what they called wizards in those days..against the operating table. The lights had grown painfully bright, and the air had..Shuddering, rubbing furiously at himself, he stumbled into the bathroom. In the mirror, he confronted a face he hardly recognized: swollen, lumpy peppered with red hives..Junior held the silencer-fitted 9-mm pistol under his left arm, clamped against his side, freeing both hands to use the automatic pick..In a cabinet above the bench, Junior found a pair of clean, cotton gardening gloves. He tried them on, and they fit well enough..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.. "She reads too much hard-boiled detective fiction," Nolly said. "And lately, she's talking about writing it."..She looked surprised, all right, but her expression wasn't the one that Junior had painted on the canvas of his imagination. Her surprise had no delight in it, and she didn't at once break into a radiant smile..Retracing his path across the kitchen, he caught a faint whiff of jasmine from the backyard. Funny, jasmine here inside. Two paces later, he felt a draft..His eyes were strangely radiant, as she had never seen them before, as if the shining angel who would guide him elsewhere had already entered his body and was with him to begin the journey..As Joey opened the driver's door and got in behind the steering wheel, he said, "Okay?"..An emergency kit in the trunk of his car contained a flashlight. He fetched it and sweetened the bribe to the valet..After the amusement park, no hospital for the Pie Lady. With Wally near, she had a doctor all her own, capable of giving her the anticancer drugs and transfusions that she required. While radiation therapy is prescribed for acute lymphoblastic leukemia, it is much less useful to treat myeloblastic cases, and in this instance, it wasn't deemed helpful, which made treatment at home even easier.. "The princess is correct," he acknowledged, revealing that this hand was still empty. Then he reached to the girl and plucked the quarter from her ear..He was a pretty good detective, but as regarded the minutiae of daily life, he wasn't as organized as he would like to be. He never remembered to set aside his holey socks for darning; and once he had worn a hat with a bullet hole in it for nearly a year before he'd at last thought to buy a new one..I know what you're thinking," her mother said, reaching across the table and placing one hand over Celestina's. "I know how useless you feel, how helpless, how small, but you must remember this . . .Hunched over his desk, leaning forward conspiratorially, his piggy eyes glittering like those of an ogre discussing his favorite recipe for cooking children, Nolly said, "I've been able to confirm your suspicions..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..Holding the pistol, fully extending his right arm in execution style, the gunman approached the fallen minister.. "Then I'll attend to everything right away," the doctor said, reaching for the privacy curtain that surrounded the ER bed..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..Already, he was up two hours past his bedtime. In recent months, he'd exhibited the more erratic sleeping habits of older children. Some nights, he seemed to possess the circadian rhythms of owls and bats; after being sluggish all day, he suddenly became alert and energetic at dusk wanting to read long past midnight.. "I didn't know her well. She didn't hang out or party much--especially after the baby."..Hound meant well in sending the young man to Samory, but he did not understand the quality of Otter's will. Nor did Otter himself. He was too used to obeying others to see that in fact he had always followed his own bent, and too young to believe that anything he did could kill him..He rolled Neddy onto one side, but no gold watch lay underneath, so he let the musician flop onto his back again.. "Your mother's wise," Paul said. "More than all the owls in the world," the boy agreed..In adversity lies great opportunity, as Caesar Zedd teaches, and always, of course, there is a bright side even when you aren't able immediately to see it..He had visited the library primarily to confirm that Harrison White was unquestionably dead. He'd shot the man four times. Two bullets 'in the gas tank of the stolen Pontiac destroyed the parsonage and should have incinerated the reverend. When you were dealing with black magic, however, you could never be too cautious..Sunday evening, here he was, cracking open four new decks, as if fresh cards might enable the magic to repeat..Quickly, he searched for the source, but in less than a minute, before he could trace the voice, it faded away. Unlike that night in December, this time the singing didn't resume..Angel didn't want to go, maybe because the boogeyman schemed beneath the bed in some of her nightmares..Before he taught himself to read books, he also taught himself numbers, and then how to read a clock. The significance of time had a more profound impact on him than Agnes could understand, perhaps because acquiring an awareness of the infinite nature of the universe and the finite nature of each human life-and fully understanding the implications of this knowledge-takes most of us till early adulthood if not later, whereas for Barty, the vast glories of the universe and the comparatively humble nature of human existence were recognized, contemplated, and absorbed in a matter of weeks..He capped the bottle, pocketed it, and then kicked the dead man, kicked him again, and spat on him..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..She protested that her ruined body had neither any comforts to offer a man nor the strength to be a bride..Hope, on many wings, hovered all around the physician, but he was afraid to let it roost..Mary Lampion, little light, was home-schooled as her father and mother had been. But she didn't study just reading, writing, and arithmetic. Gradually she developed a range of fascinating talents not taught in any school, and she went exploring in a great number of the many ways things are, journeying to worlds right here but unseen..Almost as an afterthought, as he was leaving, he tucked the brochure for "This Momentous Day" into a jacket pocket. There would be amusement value in hearing a group of cutting-edge young artists analyze Celestina's greeting-card images. Besides, as the Academy of Art College was the premier school of its type on the West Coast, a

few of the partygoers might actually know her and be able to give him some valuable background. The party raged in a cavernous loft on the third-and top-floor of a converted industrial building, the communal residence and studio of a group of artists who believed that art, sex, and politics were the three hammers of violent revolution, or something like that..The night that followed might as well have been a night in Hell, though a hell in which Satan provided an electrolytically balanced beverage..Agnes was able to respond, Paul sprang up and moved away. Other friends knelt and crouched and bent to her, and she lost sight of the pharmacist as he moved off through the dispersing crowd..Aware that his tension was building intolerably, Junior decided that he needed Scamp more than he dreaded her. He spent the remainder of Wednesday, until dawn Thursday, with the indefatigable redhead, whose bedroom contained a vast collection of scented massage oils in sufficient volume to fragrantly lubricate half the rolling stock of every railroad company doing business west of the Mississippi..From childhood, Celestina was encouraged to be confident that life had meaning, and when she'd needed to share that belief with Dr. Lipscomb as he struggled to come to terms with his experience in the operating room, she'd done so without hesitation. Strangely, however, she herself was having difficulty absorbing these two small miracles..Here they came at last, guns drawn, wary. Different uniforms, yet they reminded him of the cops in Oregon, gathered in the shadow of the fire tower. The same faces: hard-eyed, suspicious..He ardently wished that he hadn't killed her with such merciful swiftness. If he'd tortured her first, he would now have the memory of her suffering from which to take consolation..And now Cain was aware of her, interested in her. Informed of this development, Harrison would no doubt rethink his position..A half bath downstairs. Two bedrooms and a full bath on the upper floor. All deserted..Awed, dropping to one knee before Barty, Tom fingered the sleeve of the boy's shirt..Wednesday, with a swiftness that confirmed its eagerness to make a deal, the state supplied records on the fire tower. For five years, a significant portion of the maintenance funds had been diverted by bureaucrats to other uses. And for three years, the responsible maintenance supervisor filed an annual report on this specific tower, requesting immediate funds for fundamental reconstruction; the third of these documents, submitted eleven months prior to Naomi's fall, was composed in crisis language and stamped urgent..Vanadium, lending an aura of normalcy to the house. Now he wanted silence, so he would immediately hear another car in the driveway if one arrived..or the barber. Never was he afraid to fall asleep, and having fallen asleep, he appeared to have only pleasant dreams.. "There's no clear evidence of birth defects, but a couple tests reveal some worrisome anomalies. We'll know when we see the child."..On second thought-no. If Seraphim had told anyone she'd been raped, the police would have been at Junior's doorstep in minutes, with a warrant for his arrest. No matter that they would have no proof. In this age of high sympathy for the previously oppressed, the word of a teenage Negro girl would have greater weight than Junior's clean record, fine reputation, and heartfelt denials..At the bed, he spread the garment across his pillow. Lying down, he pressed his face into the sweater. The sweet subtle scent of Naomi was as effective as a lullaby, and soon he dozed off..Anyway, the thing that scared her was not the monstrous father of this child. The fearsome thing was the decision that she had made a few minutes ago, in the unused hospital room on the seventh floor..Saturday morning, he walked to a drugstore in town and purchased eight decks of cards. With four, he passed the day re-creating, again and again, what he'd done at the dining-room table the previous evening. The four knaves never appeared..The boy's difference was defined as much by what he didn't do as by what he did. For one thing, he didn't observe the Terrible Twos, the period of toddler rebellion that usually frayed the nerves of the most patient parents. No tantrums for the Pie Lady's son, no bossiness, no crankiness..The artist, six feet four and two hundred fifty pounds, looked markedly more dangerous in person than in his scary publicity photo. Still in his twenties, he had white hair that fell limp and straight to his shoulders. Dead-white skin. His deep-set eyes, as silver-gray as rain with an albino-pink undertone, had a predatory glint as chilling as that in the eyes of a panther. Terrible scars slashed his face, and red hash marks covered his big hands, as though he'd frequently defended himself barehanded against men armed with swords..He rolled his head back and forth on the pillow. "Nope. It's still just something you gotta feel."..under the spoon to catch drips, she conveyed the shimmering sliver to Agnes's mouth..The big-headed, bulging-eyed, slit-mouthed runt had collected \$850,000 from Naomi's death, so the least he could do was provide a little information. He'd probably bill for the time, anyway..One of the paramedics knelt beside the body, checking Naomi for a pulse, although in these circumstances, his action was such a formality that it was almost harebrained..Later, in early '66, out of his coma and recovering sufficiently to have visitors, Vanadium spent a most difficult hour with his old friend Harrison White. Out of respect for the memory of his lost daughter, and not at all out of concern for his image as a minister, the reverend had refused to acknowledge either that Seraphim had been pregnant or that she'd been raped-although Max Bellini had already confirmed the pregnancy and believed, based on cop's instinct, that it had been the consequence of rape. Harrison's attitude seemed to be that Phimie was gone, that' nothing could be gained by opening this wound, and that even if there was a villain involved, the Christian thing was to forgive, if not forget, and to trust in divine justice..Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Le Guin, Ursula K., 1929-.Barty followed the movement of her hand, raised his gaze to her eyes, hesitated, and then said questioningly, "No pie?"..His waitress was a cutie. She flirted with him, and he knew he could have her if he wanted..The stress that he currently felt wasn't the same that he so often relieved with women. This was an energizing tension, a not-unpleasant tightening of the nerves, a delicious anticipation that he wanted to experience to its fullest-until the gallery reception for Celestina, on the evening that her show opened, January 12. This tension could not be released by intercourse, but only by the killing of Bartholomew, and when that long-sought moment arrived, Junior expected the relief he experienced would far exceed mere orgasm..He'd once spoken that very sentiment to her. Golden haze, sun in the heart. His words had melted her, tears had sprung into her eyes, and sex been better than ever..The boy didn't at once answer, and when Agnes looked up from Red Planet, she saw

that he was staring oddly at her. He squinted, as if puzzled, and said, "The twisty spots just jumped off the page right up on your face." The boy wasn't translucent, as his father's ghost had been on that drizzly January night almost three years ago. The same drowned light of this gray afternoon that revealed the gravestones and the dripping

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