

## CICADAS

When the pianist eventually launched into "Someone to Watch over Me," he didn't appear to be responding to a request, considering that a few other numbers had been played since the most recent gratuity. The tune was, after all, in his nightly repertoire..He found it difficult to make a painful personal revelation sound sincere when delivered in a shout, but he managed well enough to bring a shine of tears to her eyes: "Part of my left foot was shot off in this upcountry sweep we did." They wore out a lot of cards and kept a generous supply of all types of decks on hand..Wally drove slowly, carefully, with all the responsibility that you would expect from an obstetrician, pediatrician, and spanking-new fianc?. The trip home to Pacific Heights took twice as long as it would have taken in clear weather on a night without a pledge of troth..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..Although the Rolex was expensive, Junior cared nothing about the monetary loss. He could afford to buy an armful of Rolexes, and wear them from wrist to shoulder..She dealt with them equally, too, favoring neither-except in-the matter of pie delivery. On those rare occasions when she could not make these rounds herself and when she had no one to turn to but a brother, Agnes always asked for Edom's help..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..He liked her face, too. She wore no makeup, and pulled her brown hair back in a bun. Some might say she was mousy, but the only things mousy that Nolly saw about her were a piquant tilt to her nose and a certain cuteness..He pushed back the bedclothes and sat up, leaning against the pillows and headboard. "This is maybe a hard thing for you to do, but it's really important."..Copyright (c) 1999 by Ursula K. Le Guin. "Dragonfly" first appeared in Legends..Tongue clamped between his teeth as he concentrated on keeping the blue crayon within the lines of the bunny, Barty nodded. "Yeah..." "No pie!" Agnes agreed. She parenthesized his head with her hands and punctuated his sweet face with kisses.. "Where did it go?" Grace asked her granddaughter, making as much effort as she could to lighten the mood for the girl's sake..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..By the time they reached the seventh painting, alcohol and rich French cuisine and Jack Lientery's powerful art combined to devastate Frieda. She shuddered, leaned with one hand on a canvas, hung her head, and committed an act of bad PR..Junior was at critical depth. The psychological pressure was at least five thousand pounds per square inch and growing by the second. Implosion imminent..Copyright (c) 2001 by Ursula K. Le Guin All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher..against his face, thorns gouging his skin, piercing his lips. His father, oblivious of his own puncture wounds, trying to..Mustering all her hostess skills, Agnes gradually turned the conversation from disastrous explosions to Fourth of July fireworks, and then to reminiscences of summer evenings when she, Joey, Edom, and Jacob. "No," Otter said, and hesitated. He felt he owed this man an explanation. "See, it's not so much won't as can't. I thought of making plugs in the planking of that galley, near the keel-you know what I mean by plugs? They'd work out as the timbers work when she gets in a heavy sea." Hound nodded. "But I couldn't do it. I'm a shipbuilder. I can't build a ship to sink. With the men aboard her. My hands wouldn't do it. So I did what I could. I made her go her own way. Not his way."..As Wally followed them inside, Celestina grinned at him. "From the car to the living room, all as neat as a well-practiced ballet. We've got a big headstart on this married thing."..Softened by a Shantung shade, the lamplight was golden on his small smooth face, but sapphire and emerald in his eyes..AS GREASY WITH FEAR sweat as a pig on a slaughterhouse ramp, Junior woke from a nightmare that he could not remember. Something \*is reaching for him-that's all he could recall, hands clutching at him out of the dark-and then he was awake, wheezing. Night still pressed at the glass beyond the venetian blind. The pharmacy lamp in the corner was aglow, but the chair that had been beside it was no longer there. It had been moved closer to Junior's bed..At dawn, he and his mother went down to the sea, to watch the rolling waves filigreed with foam and gilded with the molten gold of morning sun, to see the kiting gulls and to scatter bread that brought the winged multitudes to earth..She asked him how many fingers she was holding up, and he said four, and four it was. Then two fingers. Then seven. Her hands so pale, the palms both bruised..She was not yet twenty-one, and he was at least twice her age, but he leaned like a small child against her, and like a mother she comforted him..Harrison and Grace had welcomed him in spite of the fact that a friend and parishioner had died on Thursday, leaving them both bereft and with church obligations..Her father respected and admired Tom, so she was thankful for his presence. And anyone who could survive whatever catastrophe had left him with this cubistic face was a man she wanted on her team in a crisis..A blood test might prove that Junior was the father. Accusations might sooner or later be made against him by bitter and hate-filled members of her family, perhaps not even with the hope of sending him to prison, but solely for the purpose of getting their hands on a sizable pan of his fortune, in the form of child support..As a matter of principle, Junior considered firing the slit-mouthed troll on the spot, but then Magusson said, "You shouldn't be bothered any further by Detective Vanadium."..than the left: slack yet with a pulled look. The left eyelid drooped. That side of her..On hearing of Bartholomew's-and/or Celestina's-death, Neddy would be on the phone to the police, pointing them toward Junior, in twelve seconds. Maybe fourteen..Finished, Joshua excused himself and went down the hall to his office. He was gone perhaps five minutes, and when he returned, he sent Barty off to the waiting room, where the receptionist kept a jar of lemon-

and orange-flavored hard candies. "A few of them have your name on 'em, Bartholomew." Besides, being a future-focused guy who believed that the past was a burden best shed, he never made an effort to nurture memories. Sentimental wallowing in nostalgia had none of the appeal for him that it had for most people..Ten months later, he finally wore her down. She accepted his proposal, and they set a date for the wedding..must either change her mind or commit herself to a more difficult and challenging life than any she had envisioned only this morning..This back blow wasn't just sport, either, but more like Vietnam as lie sometimes told women that he remembered it. As though pitched by a grenade blast, Junior went from his feet to the floor with chin-rapping impact, teeth guillotining together so hard that he would have severed his tongue if it had been between them..of drool. Her eyes rolled, wild with fear, and seemed not to be focused on anything..Sometimes, while shaving or combing his hair, as he was looking in the bathroom or foyer mirror, Junior thought that he glimpsed a presence, dark and vaporous, less substantial than smoke, standing or moving behind him. At other times, this entity seemed to be within the mirror. He couldn't focus on it, study it, because the moment he became aware of the presence, it was gone..He went directly to the kitchen and drew a glass of water at the sink faucet. He swallowed two antiemetic tablets that he had brought with him, to guard against vomiting..The moon shimmered, and the stars blurred-but only briefly, for her devotion to this boy was a fiery furnace that tempered the steel of her spine and brought a drying heat to her eyes. Without Franklin Chan's full approval but with his complete understanding, Agnes took Barty home. On Monday, they would return to Hoag Hospital, where Barty would receive surgery on Tuesday.."Apple juice, lime Jell-O, and four soda crackers," said the detective. "If you don't have enough of a conscience to make you confess..After much oily commiseration, sanctimonious babble about Naomi having gone to a better place, and insincere talk of the government's desire always to ensure the public safety and to treat every citizen with compassion, Knacker or Hisscus, or Nork, finally got around to the issue of compensation..Caring for her, in every sense of that word, had made him a far happier man than he would otherwise have been-and a far better one..Joey was not illuminated by the light of this world. Agnes realized that he was translucent, his skin like fine milk glass through which shone a light from elsewhere..Tears burst from Junior, stinging torrents, a salt sea of grief that blurred his vision and bathed his face in brine. "Get out of here, you disgusting, sick son of a bitch," he demanded, his voice simultaneously shaking with sorrow and twisted by righteous anger. "Get out of here now, get out!".Tom proved to be more useful than either a cop or a priest to Pie Lady Services, when he discovered a talent for money management that protected their funds from twelve percent inflation and in fact brought them a handsome return in real terms.."Do you know him?" Edom asked, gazing longingly now at the open door, from which Jacob had turned away. "Obadiah Sepharad?".Maria's mother, visiting from Mexico, was babysitting, so Maria came without her children, as a guest, joining Agnes and the laugh-a-minute Isaacson twins, chroniclers of destruction. They ate in the dining room, rather than at the kitchen dinette, with a lace-trimmed tablecloth, the good china, crystal wineglasses, and fresh flowers..They sat in silence, and the moment held such an extraordinary quality of expectation that Kathleen would not have been surprised if the vanished quarter had suddenly appeared in midair and dropped, winking brightly, to the center of Nolly's desk, there to spin with perpetual motion, until Vanadium chose to pluck it up..a deeply troubled John Wayne while the delightful David Niven floated along overhead in a basket suspended from a huge, colorful hot-air balloon..Clutching the red rose in his left hand, the brightly wrapped gift box half crushed in his right, Thomas Vanadium lay at Junior's mercy, with no tricks to perform, no quarter to set dancing across his knuckles..Agnes delighted in their conversations. Barty was far ahead of the language learning curve for his age, but he was still a child, and his observations were filled with innocence and charm. "You mean your cold is like in your nose but not in your feet?".He'd never had a chance to read this to Perri or to benefit from her opinion. Now, as he scanned the lines of his calligraphic handwriting, his words seemed foolish, inappropriate, confused..The shriek of the sirens groaned into silence. The police must have pulled to the curb in the street.."Fourteen. It's usually the family that's behind an expression of the calling at such a young age, but in my case, I had to argue my folks into it." "And even in her dreams, you're determined to be there for her. There was a boogeyman, I have no doubt you would kick his hairy ass, and he wouldn't come around again, ever. So you just go in this gallery..For a moment, none of them spoke. The silence was as flawless as the preternatural hush reputed to precede the biggest quakes..Lipscomb women gladly obey the wishes of Lipscomb men-unless they disagree, of course, or don't disagree but are just feeling mulish..Now, without realizing when it had happened, he had been lowered from his knees to his right side. Head elevated and tilted by one of the paramedics. So he could expel the bile, the blood, rather than choke on it..Seraphim White had come to California to give birth to him in or to spare her parents-and their congregation--embarrassment..She lay beside her boy in the darkness, gazing at the covered window, where the faint glow of the moon pressed through the blind, suggesting another world thriving with strange life just beyond a thin membrane of light..Maria said nothing, working busily, but Agnes recognized that special silence in which difficult words were sought and laboriously stitched together.."Oh!" She blotted her eyes on the heels of her hands. "Wait! Give me a second chance. I can do it better, I'm sure I can." Turning his attention to Barty, Obadiah broke into a smile, revealing a gold upper tooth. "Something here is sweeter than that lovely pie. What's the child's name?".By the time he put his suitcase and three boxes of books--the collected works of Zedd and selections from the Book-of-the-Month Club-in the Suburban, Junior had rushed twice more to the bathroom. His legs were shaky, and he felt hollow, frail, as if he'd lost more than was apparent, as if the essential substance of himself was gone.."And how about this," he continued. "Every point in the universe is directly connected to every other point, regardless of distance, so any point on Mars is, in some mysterious way, as close to me as is any of you. Which means it's possible for information-and objects, even people-to move instantly between here and London without wires or microwave transmission. In fact, between here and a distant star, instantly. We just

haven't figured out how to make it happen. Indeed, on a deep structural level, every point in the universe is the same point. This interconnectedness is so complete that a great flock of birds taking flight in Tokyo, disturbing the air with their wings, contributes to weather changes in Chicago." She also sought forgiveness for the hardness with which she had treated Nicholas Deed. Although he had made no effort to summon them, tears spilled from Junior's closed eyes. They weren't drawn from him by thoughts of poor Naomi. These next few days—perhaps weeks—were going to be tedious, until he could have Nurse Victoria Bressler. Under the circumstances, he had good reason to feel sorry for himself. "He knew how you felt about having too much life insurance. So he didn't disclose it to you." The boy dashed for the front passenger's door. Agnes didn't follow him, because she knew that he would politely but pointedly express frustration if any attempt was made to help him with a task that he could perform himself. These kids were the same age, yet listening to them was akin to hearing Angel do her charming shtick with an adult who had a lot of patience, a sense of humor, and an awareness of generational ironies. Edom had turned away from the box of groceries that he was packing. Frowning at the pies, he said, "You don't think. . . In case someone was waiting in the hallway, he flushed the john for authenticity, though binding foods and paregoric still gave him the sturdy bowels of any brave knight in battle. 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. At sunset, the boy stood in the backyard, gazing up through the branches of the giant oak as an orange sky darkened to coral, to red, to purple, to indigo. He no longer had any reason to follow an exercise regimen. For twenty-three years, he'd needed to maintain good health in order to meet his responsibilities, but all the responsibilities that mattered to him had been lifted from his shoulders. Tammy—the stock analyst, broker, and cat-food-eating feline fetishist—whom he had dated from Christmas of '65 through February of '66, had given him the timepiece in return for all the trading commissions and perfect sex that he had given her. Junior would have liked to pursue spiritual matters with Sklent, but numerous other partyers wanted their time with the great man. In parting, sure that he would give the artist a laugh, Junior withdrew the brochure for "This Momentous Day" from his jacket and coyly asked for an opinion of Celestina White's paintings. When the two vertical panes of the casement window were still less than seven inches apart, they stuttered. The mechanism produced a dismal grinding rasp that sounded like a guttural pronunciation of the problem itself, c-c-c-corrosion, and seized up. Candle flames blurred into bright smears, and the faces of her good parents shimmered like the half-seen countenances of angels in dreams. This was not a ghost. This was not a walking dead man. This was something else, but until he knew what it was, who it was, the only person he could possibly look for was Vanadium. After a while, Franklin Chan asked, "Do you want me with you when you tell him?" Otter hesitated and said, "Yes." Confused, Panglo held out his right hand, but Jacob said, "Sorry, no offense, but I don't shake with anyone." He slid his plate aside. From a pocket, he withdrew a quarter, which always served him as well with children as with murderers. The popeyed little toad smirked over there on the far side of his pretentious desk. Fortifying herself with more coffee, Jolene said, "Edom, you were going to tell us how Joey's coping with fatherhood." Above the wainscoting, the walls were Sheetrock, unlike the plaster elsewhere in the apartment. On one of them, Enoch Cain had scrawled Bartholomew three times. When his stomach rolled uneasily and his scalp prickled, he was seized by panic, certain that he was going to suffer both violent nervous emesis and severe hives, breaking out and chucking up at the same time. He popped the capsules into his mouth but couldn't produce enough saliva to swallow them, so he turned on the faucet, filled his cupped hands with water, and drank, dribbling down the front of his jacket and sweater. When at last the caller spoke again, her voice sounded a kingdom away: "Will you tell Bartholomew ... ?" He shouldered past two counter waitresses, past the short-order cook who was working eggs and burgers and bacon on the open griddle and grill. Whatever expression wrenched Junior's face, it must have been intimidating, for without protest but with walleyed alarm, the employees squeezed aside to let him pass. Shortly after four o'clock, here was Neddy, already spiffed for work in black tuxedo, pleated white shirt, and black bow tie, with a red bud rose as a boutonniere, standing just inside the open door to Celestina White's studio apartment, holding forth in tedious detail as to the reasons why she was in flagrant breach of her lease and obligated to move by the end of the month. The issue was Angel, lone baby in an otherwise childless building: her crying (though she rarely cried), her noisy play (though Angel wasn't yet strong enough to shake a rattle), and the potential she represented for damage to the premises (though she was not yet able to get out of a bassinet on her own, let alone go at the plaster with a ball-peen hammer). As spectacularly busy as the not-yet-dead Jayne Mansfield, Frieda never wore a bra. In 1966, this free-swinging style was little seen. Initially, Junior didn't realize bralessness was a declaration of Frieda's liberation; he thought it meant she was a slut. She started to get up from the chair behind the desk, but he encouraged her to stay seated. "Could you undo the spell you put on her?" After the detective returned the box to the nightstand, the coin began to turn again. Before Junior had become a physical therapist, he had considered studying to be a dentist. A low tolerance for the stench of halitosis born of gum disease had decided him against dentistry, but he still could appreciate a set of teeth as exceptional as these. To Dr. Parkhurst, Vanadium said, "In my work, I see lots of people who've just lost loved ones. None of them has ever puked like Vesuvius." "From time to time now, you're going to be written about," Helen warned. "Be prepared for a peevish critic or two, furious about your optimism." Continuing to avert his eyes from the battered face and the two-tone eyelids, Junior found the keys in an exterior pocket of the sports jacket. The credentials were tucked in an interior pocket: a single-fold leather holder containing the shiny badge and a photo ID. He desperately needed closure in the matter of Naomi's death. That was what these past three years and these supernatural events were all about. 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. The porch light wasn't on. No landscape lighting brightened the backyard. Barty was a gray shadow moving through darkness and through the darkling drizzle. The two men detached and rolled up the pleated green skirt that hung from the rectangular frame of the graveyard winch on which the casket was suspended. Green, rather than black, because Naomi loved nature: Junior had been thoughtful about the details of the service. Startled, he snatched his hand back. The object fell, ringing faintly against the pavement. "I'm no hero," Paul insisted. "I just got your mom out of there in the process of saving myself." Judging by the smeariness of the letters and by the fact that some had run before they dried, the writing instrument hadn't been a felt-tip marker, as Vanadium first thought. A spattering of red droplets on the closed lid of the toilet and across the beige marble floor, all dry now, gave rise to a suspicion. "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?" He added verisimilitude to his threats by concluding with a few hard punches where they wouldn't show, in her breasts and belly, and then he, went home to Naomi, to whom he'd been married, at that time, less than five months. This was the image that plied the turbulent waters of Junior Cain's imagination when he sailed out of the driver's door and came around to face the Studebaker, his heart dropping like an anchor. One moment, girl and yellow vinyl ball. The next moment, gone as if they'd never been. Celestina sensed an easy camaraderie between these two men, but also tension that was perhaps related to the reference to an illegal search. During the five years following Agnes's death, their family of many names thrived. Barty and Angel had brought them all together in this place fifteen years previously, but the destiny about which Toni had spoken on the back porch, that night in the rain, seemed to be in no hurry to manifest itself. Barty could find no painless way to sustain secondhand sight, so he lived without the light. Angel had no reason to shove anyone else into the world of the big bugs, where she'd pushed Cain. The only miracles in their lives were the miracles of love and friendship, but the family remained convinced of eventual wonders, even as they got on with the day at hand. Grace dropped the phone. Harrison let the frosting knife slip out of his fingers. "Anyway, something clicked in me on the roller coaster, and I grasped a new angle of approach to the problem. I've figured out that I can walk in the idea of sight, sort of sharing the vision of another me, in another reality, without actually going there." He smiled into her astonishment. "So what do you say about that?" Agnes's contractions were getting more frequent and slightly more severe, so she said, "All right, but let me go tell Edom and Jacob that we're leaving." The ball of sodden Kleenex was gripped so tightly in Junior's left hand that had its carbon content been higher, it would have been compacted into a diamond. He saw Vanadium staring at his clenched fist and sharp white knuckles. He tried to ease up on the wad of Kleenex, but he wasn't able to relent. He threw away his necktie, because in the elevator, on the way down from Renee's--or Rene's--penthouse, and again on the walk back to his apartment, he had scrubbed his tongue with it. On further consideration, he threw away everything that he had been wearing, including his shoes. This galerieur was tall, with silver hair, chiseled features, and the all-knowing, imperious manner of a gynecologist to royalty. He wore a well-tailored gray suit, and his gold Rolex was the very watch that Wroth Griskin might have killed for in his salad days. Ashamed and scared, she told no one. Although a victim, she blamed herself, and the prospect of being exposed to ridicule so horrified her that despair got the better of good judgment. Smiling in the fearless dark, she listened to the rhythmic breathing of a sleeping boy. He must be careful in his approach to her. He dared not rush into this. Think it through. Devise a strategy. This valuable opportunity must not be wasted. One of his favorite gifts for Christmas 1967 was a twelve-hole chromatic harmonica with forty-eight reeds providing a full three-octave range. Even in his little hands, and with the limitations of his small mouth, this more sophisticated instrument enabled him to produce full-bodied versions of any song that appealed to him. Angel didn't join the grieving women, but sat on the floor in front of the television, switching back and forth between Gunsmoke and The Monkees. Too young to be genuinely involved in either show, nevertheless she occasionally made gunfire sounds when Marshal Dillon went into battle or invented her own lyrics to sing along with the Monkees. With her rock of faith under her, and breathing hope as much as ever, she was nevertheless unable to be as strong for him as she wanted to be. She felt her face go soft, her mouth tremble, and when she tried to repress a sob, it burst from her with wretched force. Both angry and mortified, yet still fearful, a walking multimedia collage of emotions, Junior left the gallery. "Just now." Although Angel tried to sound nonchalant, she was trembling. "I'm not sure I can do it again." .... That discord sets up lots of other vibrations, some of which will return to you in ways you might expect .... A forgetful client had left the bumbershoot in the office six months ago. Otherwise, Nolly wouldn't have had any umbrella at all. When he pushed Naomi, profit was the motive. He killed Victoria and Vanadium in self-defense. Those three deaths were necessary. 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." Once he had toured the exhibition, managing not to shudder openly, he tried to hang out within hearing distance of Celestina White, but without appearing to be listening with special intensity. Choking fumes, blinding soot. A licking heat told him that slithering fire had followed the smoke up the stairs and now coiled perilously close in the murk. As beautiful as they were, none of these women satisfied him as profoundly as Naomi had satisfied him. With his refreshed drink, studying Celestina's photograph in the brochure, Junior returned to the living

room. She was as stunning as her sister, but unlike her poor sister, she wasn't dead and was, therefore, an appealing prospect for romance. From her, he must learn whatever she knew that might help him in the Bartholomew hunt, without alerting her to his motive. At the same time, there was no reason that they couldn't have a fling, a love affair, even a serious future together..Repressing a smirk, feigning a respectful solemnity, he dared to glance at Vanadium, but the detective stared into Naomi's grave as though he hadn't heard the mockery-or, having heard it, didn't recognize it for what it was..The Rolex. Because most of the trash in the huge bin was bagged, finding the watch would be easier than Junior had feared..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.."I love you, Daddy," she said, and put the palms of her hands flat against his temples..Weatherworkers used to carry a leather sack in which they said they kept the winds, untying it to let a fair wind loose or to capture a contrary one. Maybe it was only for show, but every weatherworker had a bag, a great long sack or a little pouch..At the end of their second date, however, Frieda invited Junior up to her apartment, to see her Lientery collection and, no doubt, to take a ride on the Cain ecstasy machine. She owned seven canvases by the painter, received as partial payment of his PR bills..Over many proud generations and at least to the extent of second cousins, no one on either side of Celestina's family had skin of this light color. They were without exception medium to dark mahogany, many shades darker than this infant..At the farthest end of the loft from the stereo speakers, voices nevertheless had to be raised in even the most intimate exchanges. The artist who had created In the Baby 's Brain Lies the Parasite of Doom, Version 6, however, possessed a voice as deep, sharp-edged, and penetrating as his talent..This was a California live oak, green even in winter, although its leaves were fewer now than they would be in warmer seasons. The elaborate branch structure, reflected around him, was an exquisite and harmonious maze overlaying a mosaic of sunlight green on grass, and something in its patterns suddenly touched him, moved him, seized his imagination. He felt as if he were balanced on the brink of an astonishing insight..With Barty's presence, Christmas Eve dinners had become even more agreeable, especially this year when he was almost-three-going-on-twenty. He talked about the visits to friends that he and his mother and Edom had made earlier in the day, about Father Brown, as if that cleric-detective were real, about the puddle-jumping toads that had been singing in the backyard when he and his mother had arrived home from the cemetery, and his chatter was engaging because it was full of a child's charm yet peppered with enough precocious observations to make it of interest to adults.

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