

SECRET PLEASURE

Agnes wasn't able to interpret his expression, not because he was in the least difficult to read, but because her perceptions were skewed by sudden fear and a flood of adrenaline. Her heart seemed to spin like a flywheel in her breast. In spite of major earthquakes pending, explosions of dynamite hauling trucks on the highway, tornadoes somewhere churning, the grim likelihood of a great dam bursting along the route, freak ice storms stored up in the unpredictable heavens, crashing planes and runaway trains converging on the coastal highway, and the possibility of a sudden violent shift in the earth's axis that would wipe out human civilization, they risked crossing the boundaries of Bright Beach and traveled north into the great unknown of territories strange and perilous. "He's an attorney, and this grieving husband comes to him with a big liability case. There's money to be made." Barty stood in the rain, surrounded by the rain, pummeled by the rain, with the rain. Saturated grass squished under his sneakers. The droplets, in their millions, didn't bend-slip-twist magically around his form, didn't hiss into steam a millimeter from his skin. Yet he remained as dry as baby Moses floating on the river in a mother-made ark of bulrushes. "Not really. I love you, Mommy." He yawned and dropped into sleep with a quickness that always amazed her. And then everything changed in one stunning moment. Changed profoundly and forever. Edom bit his lower lip, shook his head, and stubbornly clung to Barty's left foot. Junior didn't know much about guns. He didn't approve of them; he had never owned one. Tales from Earthsea/Ursula K. Le Guin.-1st ed. p. cm. Contents: The finder-Darkrose and Diamond-The bones of the earth-. 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. Mrs. Lombardi had no visitors. She was alone in the world, her two children and her husband having passed away long ago. With Naomi, sex had been glorious, because they were bonded on multiple levels, all deeper than the mere physical. They had been so close, so emotionally and intellectually entwined, that in making love to her, he'd been making love to himself; and he would never experience a greater intimacy than that. More likely than not, Victoria spoke directly to the maniac detective. Even if she reported her sordid fabrications to another officer, it would have gotten back to Vanadium, and the cop would have sought her out at once to hear her filth firsthand, whereupon she would have enhanced her story until it sounded as though Junior had grabbed her knockers and had tried to shove his tongue down her throat. As the bitch began her backswing, Junior grabbed the chair. He didn't try to tear it out of her hands, but used it to shove her as hard as he could. "Of all the things I might be meant to do with my life," he told Agnes, "I believe nothing will matter more than the small part I've had in bringing together these two children." "Tame him or bury him," said Losen, and turned to more important matters. "same," Agnes admonished. "Who's been raising you, sugarpie, if you don't know that? Are you going to pretend you've been brought up by wolves for nine years?" "I was never Cary Grant, to begin with," said Vanadium, still ceaselessly rolling the quarter across his fingers, "so I had no big emotional investment in my appearance. Cosmetic surgery would have added another year of recuperation time, probably much longer, and I was anxious to get after Cain. Seemed to me this mug of mine might be just the thing to scare him into an incriminating mistake, even a confession." A supply of ammunition lined the bottom of all the dresser and bureau drawers, concealed by underwear and other garments. Junior appropriated a box of 9-mm. cartridges. "Bartholomew, huh?" asked Wally as he piloted them through banks of earthbound clouds. If he was left standing on the porch, the visitor would circle the house, peering in windows where the drapes were not drawn, trying the doors in hope of finding one unlocked. Fearful that Victoria was sick or injured, that perhaps she had slipped on a pat of butter and cracked her Mad against the corner of an open oven door, he might try to force his way inside, break a window. Certainly he would go to the neighbors to call the police. Having anticipated a problem of one kind or another, Junior withdrew a packet of crisp new hundred-dollar bills from an inside jacket pocket. The bank band still wrapped the stack, and on it was printed \$10,000. to believe that any man with such a hard gut slung over his belt, with a bull neck. What might have become a waiting game of epic duration was ended when the door to the room swung inward, and a doctor in a white lab coat entered from the corridor. He was backlit by fluorescent glare, his face in shadow, like a figure in a dream. The next thing he knew, he was at the kitchen sink, turning off the water, which he couldn't remember having turned on. He appeared to have washed the bloody candlestick-it was clean-but he had no recollection of this bit of housekeeping. From these ominous spatters, several fibers bristled, having stuck to the pewter when the drizzle was still wet. They appeared to be human hairs. He stood watching until the car cruised out of sight, and even after it dwindled to a speck and vanished in the distance, he stared at the point in the street where it had last been, stared while a breeze turned playful, tossing eucalyptus leaves around his feet, stared until at last he turned and began the long walk home. "Love you," Wally said, and Celestina repeated it, and he said, "I'm gonna stand in the hall till I hear you set both locks." Easter still lay a few weeks away, but already Celestina had begun decorating more than a hundred baskets, so that nothing would need to be done at the last minute except add the candy. Her living room was a warren of baskets, ribbons, bows, beads, bangles, shredded cellophane in green and purple and yellow and pink, and decorative little plush-toy bunnies and baby chicks. or the barber. Never was he afraid to fall asleep, and having fallen asleep, he appeared to have only pleasant dreams. Using a clean rag that they had brought to polish the engraved face of the memorial, Barty said, "Is he good with numbers like me?" Indeed, even the distinct fragrance of pulp paper, yellow with age, was alone sufficient to start him fantasizing. Along the hall to his room. Fast and low through the doorframe. Wary of the closet door standing two inches ajar. "And you give yourself far too little credit," Salk continued gently. "There's no doubt in my mind that Perri was a hero. But she was married to a hero, as well." In his head, without apparent effort, Barty kept a running total of the number of seconds that he had been alive, and of the number of words in every book that he read. Agnes

never checked his word totals for an entire volume; however, when she cited any page in a book that he'd just finished, he knew the number of words it contained..When Agnes woke at 1:50 A.M., she was in the grip of a vague apprehension for which she couldn't identify a source..In the first two weeks, when she wasn't on pie caravans, Agnes received guests in numbers that taxed her. But there were so many people she wanted to see one last time. She fought hard, giving the disease all the what-for that she could, and she held fast to hope, but she received the visitors nonetheless, just in case.."That's enough?" "Silly man." "Cain looks like a movie star." "Does he have nice teeth?" she asked. "They're good. Not perfect." "So kiss me, Mr. Perfect."..No more than a minute after Vanadium departed, a nurse arrived in a rush, no doubt sent by the hateful cop. Hard to tell, through all the tears, if she was a looker. A nice face, perhaps. But such a stick-thin body..When he returned to the kitchen to add ice and sherry to his glass,he looked up White, Celestina in the San Francisco phone directory. Her number was listed; her address was not..From late morning until dinner, people arrived and departed, raised toasts to a merry Christmas and to peace on earth, to health and to happiness, reminisced about Christmases past, marveled about the first heart transplant performed this very month in South Africa, and prayed that the soldiers in Vietnam would come home soon and that Bright Beach would lose no precious sons in those far jungles.."Can't change your own form, even seemingly?" "This is Detective Bellini, with the San Francisco Police Department. Is everything all right there?"..The customers were in a mood, most of them grumbling about their ailments. Others complained about the dreary weather, the increasing number of kids zooming along sidewalks on these damn new skateboards, the recent tax increases, and the New York Jets paying Joe Namath the kingly sum of \$427,000 a year to play football, which some saw as a sign that the country was money-crazy and going to Hell..Shortly before ten o'clock, Junior returned to the cemetery and left his Suburban where the Negro mourners had parked earlier in the day. His was the only vehicle on the service road..He didn't wonder about his sanity, either, as a less self-improved man might have done. No madman strives to enhance his vocabulary or to deepen his appreciation for culture..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..They were in the eastern hills, a mile from Jolene and Bill Klefton's place, where ten days ago, Edom had delivered blueberry pie along with the grisly details of the Tokyo-Yokohama quake of 1923..Busily, earnestly, with great satisfaction, Junior redirected his anger at Celestina and at the man with her. These two were, after all, guardians of the true Bartholomew, and therefore Junior's enemies..Dr. Chan's manner remained professional, providing the strength that Agnes required, but his pain was evident when his gentle voice softened further: "These tumors are so advanced, we won't know until surgery if the malignancy has spread. We may already be too late. And if we aren't too late, we'll have only a small window of opportunity. A small window. Eight days would entail too much risk."..A spirit-shredding bleakness clawed at her, but she couldn't permit it to leave her in tatters. If she traded hope for despair, as her brothers had done, Bartholomew would be finished before he'd begun. She owed him optimism, lessons in the joy of life..When the sound-suppressor was properly attached to the pistol, Junior Cain leaned closer to the girl, peered into her eyes, and whispered, "Naomi, are you in there?" Near the top of the stairs, Barty thought he heard voices in his bedroom. Soft and indistinct. When he stopped to listen, the voices fell silent, or maybe he only imagined them..Shortly past nine o'clock, an hour after Edom and Jacob had gone, Barty came downstairs, book in hand. "The twisties are back."..Yet the most enduring relationship he had all year was with the ghostly singer. On February 18, he returned home in the afternoon, from a class in spirit channeling, and heard singing as he opened his front door. That same voice. And the same hateful song. As faint as before, repeatedly rising and falling..Agnes hoped that the boy would spend a night or two in her room, until he was reoriented to the house. But Barty wanted to sleep in his own bed..wickedly sharp silver scimitar suspended by a filament more fragile than a human hair..Saturday and Sunday, between sessions with the directory, Junior cruised around the county on a series of pleasure drives--testing the theory that the maniac cop was no longer following him. Apparently, Simon Magusson was correct: The case had been closed..Nolly, telling the story of his day's work, paused as the waiter delivered two orders of the crab-cake appetizer with mustard sauce. "Nolly, Mrs. Wulfstan--enjoy!"..Junior got in the car once more, slammed the door, and said, "Panfaced, double-chinned, half-bald, puke-collecting creep.".."The Finder" takes place about three hundred years before the time of the novels, in a dark and troubled time; its story casts light on how some of the customs and institutions of the Archipelago came to be. "The Bones of the Earth" is about the wizards who taught the wizard who first taught Ged, and shows that it takes more than one mage to stop an earthquake. "Darkrose and Diamond" might take place at any time during the last couple of hundred years in Earthsea; after all, a love story can happen at any time, anywhere. "On the High Marsh" is a story from the brief but eventful six years that Ged was Archmage of Earthsea. And the last story, "Dragonfly," which takes place a few years after the end of Tehanu, is the bridge between that book and the next one, The Other Wind (to be published soon). A dragon bridge..As Tom reached Celestina, she said, "Shots." She said, "Gunshots." She held the receiver in one hand and pulled at her hair with the other, as if with the administration of a little pain, she might wake up from this nightmare. She said, "He's in Oregon." "I'm no hero," Paul insisted. "I just got your mom out of there in the process of saving myself."..Seraphim White had come to California to give birth to him in or to spare her parents--and their congregation--embarrassment..As always, curious about how others lived--or, in this case, bad lived--Junior explored the house, poking in drawers and closets. For a widower, Bartholomew Prosser was neat and well-organized..Dr. Lipscomb inclined his head slightly toward the pianist, in the manner of a stem headmaster about to emphasize a lesson with a sharp twist of the offending boy's ear. "Miss White and the baby will have vacated these premises by the end of the week--unless you insist on bothering them with your chatter. For every minute you harass them, their departure will be extended one day."..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. Agnes leaned forward in her chair: knees together, clasped hands resting on her knees, forehead against her hands..Friday brought Scamp again, all of Scamp, all day, every way, wall-to-wall Scamp, so on Saturday he hadn't enough energy to do more than shower..With the earth still tenuously stable beneath them, they arrived at their fifth destination, a new address on Agnes's mercy list.."Oh, yes. When he phoned, Reverend Collins told me all about you and Bartholomew. At the front door, when I asked the boy's name, I already knew it and was just setting up this little trick for you."Mrs. Cain's little boy felt small, weak, sorry for himself, and terribly alone. The detective was still here, but his presence only aggravated Junior's sense of isolation..From, the darkness of his room, Barty now spoke the words for which Agnes had been waiting, his whisper soft yet resonant in the quiet house: "Good-night, Daddy."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..In July, she went for a walk on the shore with Paul Damascus, expecting to do a little beachcombing, to watch the comical scurrying crabs. Somewhere between the seashells and the crustaceans, however, he asked her if she could ever love him..When he woke in- the morning, he raised his head from the pillow to look at the alarm clock-and saw the twenty-five cents on his nightstand. Two dimes and a nickel..If Agnes knew that Jacob had been helping her game, she might never play cards with him again. She would not approve of what he had done. Consequently, his great skill as a card mechanic must be forever his secret..Words eluded him again, and he surveyed the coffee shop, as if someone might step forward to speak for him. He realized people were staring, and embarrassment drew a tighter knot in his tongue..He needed to keep moving, conduct the search, find the watch, and get the hell out of here, but he couldn't stop staring at the musician. Something about the cadaver made him nervous-aside from the fact that it was dead and disgusting and, if he was caught with it, a one-way ticket to the gas chamber..In a stolen black Dodge Charger 440 Magnum, Junior Cain shot out of Spruce Hills on as straight a trajectory to Eugene as the winding roads of southern Oregon would allow, staying off Interstate 5, where the policing was more aggressive.."Me, me," Celestina said. "In fact, fianc?es should come first."Though she worried that reading would strain his eyes, worsening his condition, she recognized the irrationality of her fear. Muscles don't atrophy from use, nor eyes wear out from too much seeing..At first, he couldn't gather the nerve to return to the kitchen. He was crazily certain that in his absence, the dead detective would have risen and would be waiting for him..Undiminished antiperistaltic waves coursed through his duodenum, stomach, and esophagus, and now he gasped desperately for air between each expulsion, without much success..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..obsessed with humanity's sorry penchant for destroying itself either by intention or ineptitude--491 suffocated and burned alive on an evening meant for champagne and revelry..When she was finished with the dishtowel, she returned to the dining room, and though dinner was underway, she called for another toast. Raising her glass, she said, "To Maria, who is more than my friend. My sister. I can't let you talk about what I've given you without telling your girls that you've given back more. You taught me that the world is as simple as sewing, that what seem to be the most terrible problems can be stitched up, repaired." She raised her glass slightly higher. "First chicken to be come with first egg inside already. God bless."In the dark dumpster, tormented by ceaseless torrents of what-ifs, convinced that the spirit of Vanadium was going to slam the lid and lock him in with a revived corpse, Junior had for a while been reduced to the condition of a helpless child. Paralyzed by fear, withdrawn to the corner of the dumpster farthest from the putrefying pianist, squatting in trash, he had shaken with such violence that his castanet teeth had chattered in a frenzied flamenco rhythm to which his bones seemed to knock, knock, like boot heels on a dance floor. He had heard himself whimpering but couldn't stop, had felt tears of shame burning down his cheeks but couldn't halt the flow, had felt his bladder ready to burst from the needle prick of terror but bad with heroic effort managed to refrain from wetting his pants..Had Kathleen Klerkle been a man, she would have enjoyed larger quarters in a newer building in a better part of town. She was more gentle and respectful of the patient's comfort than any male dentist Nolly had ever known, but prejudice hampered women in her profession..than the crows. Tumbled on the grass, in fragments: the broken trophy for the prize rose, the symbol of his sinful.A lamp with a fringed silk shade spread small feathery wings of golden light over one corner of the living room. On the coffee table were three decorative blown-glass oil lamps, ashimmer..Beveled, crackled, distorted, divided into petals and leaves, Deed's face beyond the lead-ad glass, as he leaned closer to try to peer inside, was the countenance of a dream demon swimming up out of a nightmare lake..He gently drew the covers over his wife's ruined body, to her thin shoulders, but arranged her right arm on top of the blankets. He straightened and smoothed the folded-back flap of the top sheet..She tried to raise her right hand, but it flopped uselessly and would not respond..Two cranks operated the winch.. The mortician and his assistant turned the handles in unison, and as the mechanism creaked softly, the casket slowly descended into the hole..Maybes were for babies, but Caesar Zedd had failed to provide a profundity with which Junior could ward off the what-ifs as easily as the maybes..Behind them, the door rebounded forcefully from a rubber-tipped stopper and closed with a thud. The lock wasn't engaged, however, and they might be interrupted momentarily..She poured cold milk and drank it quickly. As she was rinsing the empty glass, she felt as if she might throw up, but she didn't..just as Sinatra broke into song again, Junior thought he heard a footstep on the wood floor of the hallway, and the creak of a board. The music masked the sounds of the visitor's approach if, indeed, he was approaching..Otter's humble

teachers had taught him pride. They had trained into him a deep contempt for wizards who worked for such men as Losen, letting fear or greed pervert magic to evil ends. Nothing, to his mind, could be more despicable than such a betrayal of their art. So it troubled him that he couldn't despise Hound..He never passed through a phase during which he grew resistant to hugging or kissing. He was a hand-holding, cuddling boy to whom displays of affection came easily..He fished the sound-suppressor from a jacket pocket, drew the pistol from his shoulder holster, and began to screw the former to the latter. He misthreaded it at first because his hands had begun to shake..So keep moving. Don't get hung up on the disgusting aftermath. Keep whistling along like a runaway train. Clean up, clean out, roll on..A shock-haired, bright-eyed woman with a candle bound to her forehead set down her pick to show Otter a little cinnabar in a bucket, brownish red clots and crumbs. Shadows leapt across the earth face at which the miners worked. Old timbers creaked, dirt sifted down. Though the air ran cool through the darkness, the drifts and levels were so low and narrow the miners had to stoop and squeeze their way. In places the ceilings had collapsed. Ladders were shaky. The mine was a terrifying place; yet Otter felt a sense of shelter in it. He was half sorry to go back up into the burning day..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..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.. "In a way, he does," Vanadium said. "When you're as hollow as Enoch Cain, the emptiness aches. He's desperate to fill it, but he doesn't have the patience or the commitment to fill it with anything worthwhile. Love, charity, faith, wisdom-those virtues and others are hard won, with commitment and patience, and we acquire them one spoonful at a time. Cain wants to be filled quickly. He wants the emptiness inside poured full, in quick great gushes, and right now. ".The owner's attitude softened somewhat with Junior's reference to the quarter, and softened even further when together they returned to the counter to see the proof in the cheese. He went from righteous anger to abject apology..inking? The sequined and tasseled hat of fame was too gaudy for her; she was a minister's daughter, from Spruce Hills, Oregon, more comfortable in a baseball cap..Deed flinched. "No reason. But I sure never did mean you or your husband any harm, Mrs. Lampion. And not your baby, either, not little Bartholomew.". "No, the more I think about it, the more it feels like this is just kids. Some kids goofing around, that's all. I- guess Vanadium got deeper under my skin than I realized, so when this came up, I couldn't think straight about it. ". "Mommy, did you know, every day on Mars is thirty-seven minutes and twenty-seven seconds longer than ours?". Agnes rubbed noses with him again, kissed him, and rose from the edge of the bed..After coffee had been served, when Celestina and Wally were no longer the center of attention, he indicated the array of desserts with his fork, smiled, and said, "I just want you to know, Celie, that these are sweets enough until we're married.". 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..On that busy night, with Vanadium's corpse in the Studebaker and Victoria's cadaver awaiting a fiery disposal at her house, Junior was too distracted to recognize the pertinence of the message. Now it tormented him from a dark nook in his subconscious..Junior forgot all about seduction. "And she--what?--She adopted her sister's baby?". MONDAY EVENING, January 15, Paul Damascus arrived at the hotel in San Francisco with Grace White. He had kept watch over her in Spruce Hills for more than two days, sleeping on the floor in the hall outside her room both nights, remaining close by her side when she was in public. They stayed with friends of hers until Harrison's funeral this morning, then flew south for a reunion of mother and daughter..Ordinarily, when Celestina was troubled, her art was a perfect sanctuary from all woes. When she was planning, composing, and rendering, time had no meaning for her, and life had no sting..She proceeded down the shadowy center aisle, genuflected at the chancel railing, and went to the votive rack.. "Quick, very quick," he warned, helping Grace through the fire framed window and onto the roof of the porch.. "You can learn em."

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