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Ursula K. Le Guin

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF THE EARTHSEA TRILOGY

The Eye of the Heron



1.00

CITY OF LIGHT

They came out from the shadow of a house into the level golden light. The sun lay, a molten blur, between the dark sea and the dark clouds, and the roofs of the City burned with unearthly fire. They stopped, looking into that tremendous brightness and darkness of the west. The sea wind, smelling of salt and space and wood smoke, blew cold in their faces.

"Don't you see," Lev said, "you can see it—you can see what it should be, what it is."

Luz saw it, with his eyes, she saw the glory, the City that should be, and was. . . .

THE EYE OF THE HERON

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THE EYE OF THE HERON

Ursula K. Le Guin



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THE EYE OF
THE HERON

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In the sunlight in the center of a ring of trees Lev sat cross-legged, his head bent above his hands.

A small creature crouched in the warm, shallow cup of his palms. He was not holding it; it had decided or consented to be there. It looked like a little toad with wings. The wings, folded into a peak above its back, were dun-colored with shadowy streaks, and its body was shadow-colored. Three golden eyes like large pin-heads adorned its head, one on each side and one in the center of the skull. This upward-looking central eye kept watch on Lev. Lev blinked. The creature changed. Dusty pinkish fronds sprouted out from

under its folded wings. For a moment it appeared to be a feathery ball, hard to see clearly, for the fronds or feathers trembled continually, blurring its outlines. Gradually the blur died away. The toad with wings sat there as before, but now it was light blue. It scratched its left eye with the hindmost of its three left feet. Lev smiled. Toad, wings, eyes, legs vanished. A flat mothlike shape crouched on Lev's palm, almost invisible because it was, except for some shadowy patches, exactly the same color and texture as his skin. He sat motionless. Slowly the blue toad with wings reappeared, one golden eye keeping watch on him. It walked across his palm and up the curve of his fingers. The six tiny, warm feet gripped and released, delicate and precise. It paused on the tip of his fingers and cocked its head to look at him with its right eye while its left and central eyes scanned the sky. It gathered itself into an arrow shape, shot out two translucent underwings twice the length of its body, and flew off in a long effortless glide toward a sunlit slope beyond the ring of trees.

"Lev?"

"Entertaining a wotsit." He got up, and joined Andre outside the tree-ring.

"Martin thinks we might get home tonight/'

"Hope he's right," Lev said. He picked up his backpack and joined the end of the line of seven men. They set off in single file, not talking except when one down the line called to indicate to the leader a possible easier way to take, or when the second in line, carrying the compass, told the leader to bear right or left. Their direction was southwestward. The going was

not hard, but there was no path and there were no landmarks. The trees of the forest grew in circles, twenty to sixty trees forming a ring around a clear central space. In the valleys of the rolling land the tree-rings grew so close, often interlocking, that the travelers' way was a constant alternation of forcing through undergrowth between dark shaggy trunks, clear going across spongy grass in the sunlit circle, then again shade, foliage, crowded stems and trunks. On the hillsides the rings grew farther apart, and sometimes there was a long view over winding valleys endlessly dappled with the soft rough red circles of the trees.

As the afternoon wore on a haze paled the sun. Clouds thickened from the west. A fine, small rain began to fall. It was mild, windless. The travelers' bare chests and shoulders shone as if oiled. Water-drops clung in their hair. They went on, bearing steadily south by west. The light grew grayer. In the valleys, in the circles of the trees, the air was misty and dark.

The lead man, Martin, topping a long stony rise of land, turned and called out. One by one they climbed up and stood beside him on the crest of the ridge. Below a broad river lay shining and colorless between dark beaches.

The eldest of them, Holdfast, got to the top last and stood looking down at the river with an expression of deep satisfaction. "Hullo there," he murmured, as to a friend.

"Which way to the boats?" asked the lad with the compass.

"Upstream," Martin said, tentative.

"Down," Lev proposed. "Isn't that the high point of the ridge, west there?"

They discussed it for a minute and decided to try downstream. For a little longer before they went on they stood in silence on the ridge top, from which they had a greater view of the world than they had had for many days. Across the river the forest rolled on southward in endless interlocking ring patterns under hanging clouds. Eastward, upriver, the land rose steeply; to the west the river wound in gray levels between lower hills. Where it disappeared from sight a faint brightness lay upon it, a hint of sunlight on the open sea. Northward, behind the travelers' backs, the forested hills, the days and miles of their journey, lay darkening into rain and night.

In all that immense, quiet landscape of hills, forest, river, no thread of smoke; no house; no road.

They turned west, following the spine of the ridge. After a kilometer or so the boy Welcome, in the lead now, hailed and pointed down to two black chips on the curve of a shingle beach, the boats they had pulled up there many weeks before.

They descended to the beach by sliding and scrambling down the steep ridge. Down by the river it seemed darker, and colder, though the rain had ceased.

"Dark soon. Should we camp?" Holdfast asked, in a reluctant tone.

They looked at the gray mass of the river sliding by, the gray sky above it.

"It'll be lighter out on the water," Andre said, pulling out the paddles from under one of the beached, overturned canoes.

A family of pouchbats had nested among the paddles. The half-grown youngsters hopped and scuttered off across the beach, squawking morosely, while the exasperated parents swooped after them. The men laughed, and swung the light canoes up to their shoulders.

They launched and set off, four to a boat. The paddles lifting caught the silver light of the west. Out in midstream the sky seemed lighter, and higher, the banks low and black on either hand.

O when we come, O when we come to Lisboa, The white ships will be waiting, O when we come. . . .

One man in the first canoe began the song, two or three voices in the second picked it up. Around the brief, soft singing lay the silence of the wilderness, under and over it, before and after it.

The riverbanks grew lower, farther away, more shadowy. They were now on a silent flood of gray half a mile wide. The sky darkened between glance and glance. Then far to the south one point of light shone out, remote and clear, breaking the old dark.

Nobody was awake in the villages. They came up through the paddy fields, guided by their swinging lanterns. They smelled the heavy fragrance of peat-smoke in the air. They came quiet as the rain up the street between the little sleeping houses, until Welcome let out a yell: "Hey, we're home!" and flung

open the door of his family's house. "Wake up, Mother! It's me!"

Within five minutes half the town was in the street. Lights were lit, doors stood open, children danced about, a hundred voices talked, shouted, questioned, welcomed, praised.

Lev went to meet Southwind as she came hurrying down the street, sleepy-eyed, smiling, a shawl drawn over her tangled hair. He put out his hands and took hers, stopping her. She looked up into his face and laughed. "You're back, you're back!"

Then her look changed; she glanced around very swiftly at the cheerful commotion of the street, and back at Lev.

"Oh," she said, "I knew it. I knew."

"On the way north. About ten days out. We were climbing down into a stream gorge. The rocks slipped under his hands. There was a nest of rock scorpions. He was all right at first. But there were dozens of stings. His hands began to swell. . . ."

His hands tightened on the girl's; she still looked into his eyes.

"He died in the night."

"In much pain?"

"No," Lev said, lying.

Tears filled his eyes.

"So he's there," he said. "We made a cairn of white boulders. Near a waterfall. So he—so he's there."

Behind them in the commotion and chatter a woman's voice sounded clearly: "But where's Timmo?"

Southwind's hands went loose in Lev's; she seemed to grow smaller, to shrink down, shrink away.

"Come

with me," he said, and they went in silence, his arm about her shoulders, to her mother's house.

Lev left her there with Timmo's mother and her own mother. He came out of the house and stood hesitant, then returned slowly toward the crowd. His father came forward to meet him; Lev saw the curly gray hair, the eyes seeking through torchlight. Sasha was a slight, short man; as they embraced

Lev felt the bones beneath the skin, hard and frail.

"You were with Southwind?"

"Yes. I can't—"

He clung for a minute to his father, and the hard, thin hand stroked his arm. The torchlight blurred and stung in his eyes. When he let go, Sasha drew back to look at him, saying nothing, intent dark eyes, the mouth hidden by a bristly gray mustache.

"You've been all right, Father?"

Sasha nodded. "You're tired. Come on home." As they started down the street he said, "Did you find the promised land?"

"Yes. A valley. A river-valley. Five kilos from the sea. Everything we need. And beautiful—the mountains above it— Range behind range, higher and higher, higher than the clouds, whiter— You can't believe how high you have to look to see the highest peaks." He had stopped walking.

"Mountains in between? Rivers?"

Lev looked down from the white visionary heights, into his father's eyes.

"Enough to keep the Bosses from following us there?"

After a moment Lev smiled. "Maybe," he said.

« # *

It was the middle of the bog-rice harvest, so that many of the farming people could not come, but all the villages sent a man or woman to Shantih to hear what the explorers reported and what the people said. It was afternoon, still raining; the big open place in front of the Meeting House was crowded with umbrellas made of the broad, red, papery leaves of the thatch-tree- Under the umbrellas people stood or squatted on leaf-mats in the mud, and cracked nuts, and talked, until at last the little bronze bell of the Meeting House went tonka-tonka-tonk] then they all looked at the porch of the Meeting House, where Vera stood ready to speak.

She was a slender woman with iron-gray hair, a narrow nose, dark oval eyes. Her voice was strong and clear, and while she spoke there was no other sound but the quiet patter of the rain, and now and then the chirp of a little child in the crowd, quickly hushed.

She welcomed the explorers back. She spoke of Timmo's death, and, very quietly and briefly, of Timmo himself, as she had seen him on the day the exploring party left. She spoke of their hundred-day trek through the wilderness. They had mapped a great area east and north of Songe Bay, she said, and they had found what they went to find—a site for a new settlement, and a passable way to it. "A good many of us here," she said, "don't like the idea of a new settlement so far from Shantih. And among us now are also some of our neighbors from the City, who may wish to join in our plans and discussions. The whole matter must be fully considered and freely discussed.

So first let Andre and Lev speak for the explorers, and tell us what they saw and found."

Andre, a stocky, shy man of thirty, described their journey to the north. His voice was soft and he did not speak easily, but the crowd listened intently to his sketch of the world beyond their long-familiar fields. Some, towards the back, craned until they saw the men from the City, of whose presence Vera had politely warned them. There they were near the porch, six men in jerkins and high boots: Bosses' bodyguards, each with a long sheathed knife on the thigh and a whip, the thong neatly curled, tucked into the belt.

Andre mumbled to a close and gave place to Lev, a young man, slight and rawboned, with thick, black, bright hair. Lev also began hesitantly, groping for words to describe the valley they had found and why they thought it most suitable for settlement. As he spoke his voice warmed and he began to forgive himself, as if he saw before him what he described: the wide valley and the river which they had named Serene, the lake above it, the bog-lands where rice grew wild, the forests of good timber, the sunny slopes where orchards and root crops could be planted and houses could stand free of the mud and damp. He told of the river mouth, a bay full of shellfish and edible kelp; and he spoke of the mountains that stood above the valley to the north and east, protecting it from the winds that made the winter a weariness of mud and cold at Songe. "The peaks of them go up and up into the silence and sunlight above the clouds," he said. "They shelter the valley, like a mother with a child in her arms. We called them the Mountains of

the Mahatma. It was to see if the mountains kept off the storms that we stayed so long there, fifteen days. Early autumn there is like midsummer here, only the nights are colder; the days were sunny, and no rain. Holdfast thought there might be three rice harvests a year there. There's a good deal of fruit in the forests, and the fishing in the river and the bay shores would help feed the first year's settlers till the first harvest. The mornings are so bright there! It wasn't just to see how the weather was that we stayed. It was hard to leave the place, even to come home."

They listened with enchantment, and were silent when he stopped.

Somebody called, "How far is it, in days of travel?" "Martin's guess is about twenty days, with families and big pack loads." "Are there rivers to cross, dangerous places?" "The best arrangement would be an advance party, a couple of days ahead, to mark out the easiest route. Coming back we avoided all the rough country we went through going north. The only difficult river crossing is right here, the Songe, that'll have to be done with boats. The others can be forded, till you get to the Serene."

More questions were shouted out; the crowd lost its enraptured quiet and was breaking into a hundred voluble discussions under the red-leaf umbrellas, when Vera came forward again and asked for silence. "One of our neighbors is here and wishes to talk with us," she said, and stood aside to let a man behind her come forward. He wore black, with a broad silver-embossed belt. The six men who had stood near the

porch had come up on it with him and moved forward in a semicircle, separating him from the other people on the porch.

"Greetings to you all," the man in black said. His voice was dry, not loud.

"Falco," people murmured to one another. "The Boss Falco/"

"I am pleased to present the congratulations of the Government of Victoria to these brave explorers. Their maps and reports will be a most valued addition to the Archives of the State in Victoria City. Plans for a limited migration of farmers and manual workers are being studied by the Council. Planning and control are necessary to ensure the safety and welfare of the community as a whole. As this expedition makes clear, we dwell in one corner, one safe haven, of a great and unknown world. We who have lived here longest, who keep the records of the early years of the Settlement, know that rash schemes of dispersal may threaten our survival, and that wisdom lies in order and strict cooperation. I am pleased to tell you that the Council will receive these brave explorers with the welcome of the City, and present them a suitable reward for their endeavors."

There was a different kind of silence.

Vera spoke; she looked fragile beside the group of bulky men, and her voice sounded light and clear. "We thank the representative of the Council for his courteous invitation."

Falco said, "The Council will expect to receive the explorers, and examine their maps and reports, in three days' time."

Again the pent silence.

"We thank Councillor Falco," Lev said, "and decline his invitation."

An older man tugged at Lev's arm, whispering hard; there was much quick, low talk among the people on the porch, but the crowd before the Meeting House kept silent and motionless.

"We must arrive at decisions on several matters," Vera said to Falco, but loud enough that all could hear, "before we're ready to reply to the invitation of the Council."

"The decisions have been made, Senhora Adelson. They have been made by the Council. Only your obedience is expected." Falco bowed, to her, raised his hand in salutation to the crowd, and left the porch, surrounded by his guards. The people moved wide apart to let them pass.

On the porch, two groups formed: the explorers and other men and women, mostly young, around Vera, and a larger group around a fair, blue-eyed man named Elia. Down among the crowd this pattern was repeated, until it began to look like a ringtree forest: small circles, mostly young, and larger circles, mostly older. All of them argued passionately, yet without anger. When one tall old woman began shaking her red-leaf umbrella at a vehement girl and shouting, "Runaway! You want to run away and leave us to face the Bosses! What you need is a spanking!"—with a whack of the umbrella demonstration—then very rapidly the people around her seemed to melt away, taking with them the girl who had annoyed her. The old woman was left standing alone, as red as her um-

brella, brandishing it sullenly at nothing. Presently, frowning and working her lips, she joined the outskirts of another circle.

The two groups up on the porch had now joined. Elia spoke with quiet intensity: "Direct defiance is violence, Lev, as much as any blow of fist or knife."

"As I refuse violence, I refuse to serve the violent, O the young man said.

"If you defy the Council's request, you will cause violence."

"Jailings, beatings maybe; all right. Is it liberty we want, Elia, or mere safety?"

"By defying Falco, in the name of liberty or anything else, you provoke repression. You play into his hands."

"We're in his hands already, aren't we?" Vera said. "What ^vve want is to get out."

"We all agree that it's time, high time, that we talk with the Council—talk firmly, reasonably. But if we begin with defiance, with moral violence, nothing will be achieved, and they'll fall back on force."

"We don't intend defiance," Vera said, "we shall simply hold fast to the truth. But if they begin with force, you know, Elia, even our attempt at reason becomes a resistance."

"Resistance is hopeless, we must talk together! If violence enters in, in act or word, the truth is lost—our life in Shantih, our liberty will be destroyed. Force will rule, as it did on Earth!"

"It didn't rule everybody on Earth, Elia. Only those who consented to serve it."

"Earth cast our fathers out," Lev said. There was a

brightness in his face; his voice caught at a harsh, yearning note, like the deep strings of a harp plucked hard. "We're outcasts, the children of outcasts. Didn't the Founder say that the outcast is the free soul, the child of God? Our life here in Shantih is not a free life. In the north, in the new settlement, we will be free."

"What is freedom?" said a beautiful, dark woman, Jewel, who stood beside Elia. "I don't think you come to it by the path of defiance, resistance, refusal. Freedom comes with you if you walk the path of love. To accept all is to be given all."

"We've been given a whole world," Andre said in his subdued voice. "Have we accepted it?"

"Defiance is a trap, violence is a trap, they must be refused—and that's what we're doing," Lev said. "We are going free. The Bosses will try to stop us. They'll use moral force, they may use physical force; force is the weapon of the weak. But if we trust ourselves, our purpose, our strength, if we hold fast, all their power over us will melt away like shadows when the sun comes up!"

"Lev," the dark woman said softly, "Lev, this is the world of shadows."

2

Rainclouds moved in long dim lines above Songe Bay. Rain pattered and pattered on the tile roof of the House of Falco. At the end of the house, in the

kitchens, there was a far-off sound of life astir, of servants' voices. No other sound, no other voice, only the rain.

Luz Marina Falco Cooper sat in the deep window seat, her knees drawn up to her chin. Sometimes she gazed out through the thick, greenish glass of the window at the sea and the rain and the clouds. Sometimes she looked down at the book that lay open beside her, and read a few lines. Then she sighed and looked out the window again. The book was not interesting.

It was too bad. She had had high hopes of it. She had never read a book before.

She had learned to read and write, of course, being the daughter of a Boss. Besides memorizing lessons aloud, she had copied out moral precepts, and could write a letter offering or declining an invitation, with a fancy scrollwork frame, and the salutation and signature written particularly large and stiff. But at school they used slates and the copybooks which the schoolmistresses wrote out by hand. She had never touched a book. Books were too precious to be used in school; there were only a few dozen of them in the world. They were kept in the Archives. But, coming into the hall this afternoon, she had seen lying on the low table a little brown box; she had lifted the lid to see what was in it, and it was full of words. Neat, tiny words, all the letters alike, what patience to make them all the same size like that! A book—a real book, from Earth. Her father must have left it there. She seized it and carried it to the window seat, opened the

lid again carefully, and very slowly read all the different kinds of words on the first leaf of paper.

FIRST AID

A MANUAL OF EMERGENCY CARE FOR INJURIES AND ILLNESS

M. E. Roy, M.D.

The Geneva Press

Geneva, Switzerland

2027

License No. 83A38014 Gen.

It did not seem to make much sense. "First aid" was all right, but the next line was a puzzle. It began with somebody's name, A. Manuel, and then went on about injuries. Then came a lot of capital letters with dots after them. And what was a geneva, or a press, or a Switzerland?

Equally puzzling were the red letters which slanted up the page as if they had been written over the others: donated by the world red cross for the use OF THE penal colony on victoria.

She turned the leaf of paper, admiring it. It was smoother to the touch than the finest cloth, crisp yet pliable like fresh thatch-leaf, and pure white.

She worked her way word by word to the bottom of the first page, and then began to turn several pages at once, since more than half the words meant nothing

anyway. Gruesome pictures appeared: her interest revived with a shock. People supporting other people's heads, breathing into their mouths; pictures of the bones inside a leg, of the veins inside an

arm; colored pictures, on marvelous shiny paper like glass, of people with little red spots on their shoulders, with big red blotches on their cheeks, with horrible boils all over them, and mysterious words beneath the pictures: Allergic Rash. Measles. Chicken Box. Small Box. No, it was pox, not box. She studied all the pictures, sometimes making a foray into the words on the facing pages. She understood that it was a book of medicine, and that the doctor, not her father, must have left it on the table the night before. The doctor was a good man, but touchy; would he be angry if he knew she had looked at his book? It had his secrets in it. He never answered questions. He liked to keep his secrets to himself.

Luz sighed again and looked out at the ragged, rain-dropping clouds. She had looked at all the pictures, and the words were not interesting.

She got up, and was just setting the book down on the table exactly where it had lain, when her father entered the room.

His step was energetic, his back straight, his eyes clear and stern. He smiled when he saw Luz. A little startled, guilty, she swept him a fancy curtsy, her skirts hiding the table and the book. "Senhor! A thousand greetings!"

"There's my little beauty. Michael! Hot water and a towel! —I feel dirty all over." He sat down in one of

the carved wooden armchairs and stretched out his legs, though his back stayed as straight as ever.

"Where have you been getting dirty, Papa?"

"Among the vermin/"

"Shanty Town?"

"Three kinds of creature came from Earth to Victoria: Men, lice, and Shanty-Towners. If I could get rid of only one kind, it would be the last." He smiled again, pleased by his joke, then looked up at his daughter and said, "One of them presumed to answer me. I think you knew him."

"I knew him?"

"At school. Vermin shouldn't be allowed into the school. I forget his name. Their names are all nonsense, Sticktight, Holdfast, Howd'youdo, what have you. ... A little black-haired stick of a boy."

"Lev?"

"That's the one. A troublemaker."

"What did he say to you?"

"He said no to me."

Falco's man came hurrying in with a pottery basin and a jug of steaming water; a maid followed with towels. Falco scrubbed his face and hands, puffing and blowing and talking through the water and the

towels. "He and some others just came back from an expedition up north, into the wilderness. He claims they found a fine town site. They want the whole lot to move there."

"To leave Shanty Town? All of them?"

Falco snorted in assent, and stuck out his feet for Michael to take off his boots. "As if they'd last one winter without the City to look after them! Earth sent them here fifty years ago as unteachable imbeciles, which is what they are. It's time they relearned their lesson."

"But they can't just go off into the wilderness," said Luz, who had been listening to her thoughts as well as to her father's words. "Who'd farm our fields?"

Her father ignored her question by repeating it, thus transforming a feminine expression of emotion into a masculine assessment of fact. "They can't, of course, be allowed to start scattering like this. They provide necessary labor."

"Why is it that Shanty-Towners do almost all the farming?"

"Because they're good for nothing else. Get that slop out of the way, Michael."

"Hardly any of our people know how to farm," Luz observed. She was thinking. She had dark, strongly arched eyebrows, as her father did, and when she was thinking they lay in a straight line above her eyes. This straight line displeased her father. It did not suit the face of a pretty girl of twenty. It gave her a hard, unwomanly look. He had often told her this, but she had never broken the bad habit.

"My dear, we are City people, not peasants."

"But who did the farming before the Shanty-Towners came? The Colony was sixty years old when they came."

"The working people did the manual work, of course. But even our working people were never peasants. We are City people."

"And we starved, didn't we? There were the

Famines." Luz spoke dreamily, as if recalling an old history recitation, but her eyebrows were still down in that straight black line. "In the first ten years of the Colony, and other times . . . lots of people starved. They didn't know how to cultivate bog-rice or raise sugar-root, until the Shanty-Towners came."

Her father's black brows were now a straight line too. He dismissed Michael, the maid, and the subject of conversation with one wave of the hand. "It's a mistake," he said in his dry voice, "to send peasants and women to school. The peasants become insolent, the women become boring."

It would have made her cry, two or three years ago. She would have wilted, and crept off to her room to weep, and been miserable until her father said something kind to her. But these days he could not make her cry. She didn't know why it was, and it seemed very strange to her. Certainly she feared and admired him as much as ever; but she always knew what he was going to say. It was never anything

new. Nothing was ever new.

She turned and looked out through the thick, whorled glass again at Songe Bay, the farther curve of the shore veiled by unending rain. She stood straight, a vivid figure in the dull light, in her long red homespun skirt and ruffled shirt. She looked indifferent, and alone, standing there in the center of the high, long room; and she felt so. Also she felt her father's gaze on her. And knew what he was going to say.

"It's time you were married, Luz Marina."

She waited for the next sentence.

"Since your mother died. . . ." And the sigh.

Enough, enough, enough!

She turned to face him. "I read that book," she said.

"Book?"

"Doctor Martin must have left it. What does it mean, 'penal colony?'"

"You had no business to touch that!"

He was surprised. That at least made things interesting.

"I thought it was a box of dried fruits," she said, and laughed. "But what does it mean, 'penal colony? A colony of criminals, a prison?'"

"That is nothing you need to know."

"Our ancestors were sent here as prisoners, is that right? That's what the Shanty-Towners in school said." Falco's face was getting white, but the danger exhilarated Luz; her mind raced, and she spoke her mind. "They said the First Generation were all criminals. The Earth Government used Victoria for a jail. The Shanty-Towners said they were sent because they believed in peace or something, but we were sent because we were all thieves and murderers. And most of them, the First Generation, were men, their women couldn't come unless they were married to them, and that's why there were so few women to start with. That always seemed stupid, not to send enough women for a colony. And it explains why the ships were made only to come, not to go back. And why the Earth people never come here. We're locked out. It's true, isn't it? We call ourselves Victoria Colony. But we're a jail."

Falco had risen. He came forward; she stood still,

poised on her feet. "No," she said, lightly, as if indifferent. "No, don't, Papa."

Her voice stopped the man in his anger; he too stood still, and looked at her. For a moment he saw her. She saw in his eyes that he saw her, and that he was afraid. For a moment, only a moment.

He turned away. He went to the table and picked up the book Dr. Martin had left. "What does all that

matter, Luz Marina?" he said at last.

"I'd like to know."

"It was a hundred years ago. And Earth is lost. And we are what we are."

She nodded. When he spoke that way, dry and quiet, she saw the strength she admired and loved in him.

"What angers me," he said, but not with anger, "is that you listened to that talk from those vermin. They put everything backward. What do they know? You let them tell you that Luis Firmin Falco, my greatgrandfather, the founder of our House, was a thief, a jailbird. What do they know about it? I know, and I can tell you, what our ancestors were. They were men. Men too strong for Earth. The Government on Earth sent them here because they were afraid of them. The best, the bravest, the strongest—all the thousands of little weak people on Earth were afraid of them, and trapped them, and sent them off in the one-way ships, so that they could do as they liked with Earth, you see. Well, when that was done, when the real men were gone, the Earth people were left so weak and womanish that they began to be afraid even of rabble like the Shanty-Towners. So they sent them here for us to keep in order. Which we have done. You see? That's how it was."

Luz nodded. She accepted her father's evident intent to placate her, though she did not know why for the first time he had spoken to her placatingly, explaining something as if she were his equal. Whatever the reason, his explanation sounded well; and she was used to hearing what sounded well, and figuring out later what it might really mean. Indeed, until she had met Lev at school, it had not occurred to her that anyone might prefer to speak a plain fact rather than a lie that sounded well. People said what suited their purposes, when they were serious; and when they weren't serious, they talked without meaning anything at all. Talking to girls, they were hardly ever serious. Ugly truths were to be kept from girls, so that their pure souls did not become coarse and soiled. And anyhow, she had asked about the penal colony mostly to get her father off the subject of her marriage; and the trick had worked.

But the trouble with such tricks, she thought when she was in her own room alone, is that they trick you too. She had tricked herself into arguing with her father, and winning the argument. He would not forgive her that.

All the girls of her age and class in the City had been married for two or three years now. She had evaded marriage only because Falco, whether he knew it or not, didn't want to let her go from his house. He was used to having her there. They were alike, very much alike; they enjoyed each other's company more, perhaps, than anyone else's. But he had looked

at her this evening as if seeing someone different, someone he wasn't used to. If he began noticing her as a person different from himself, if she began winning battles with him, if she was no longer his little girl pet, he might begin thinking about what else she was—what use she was.

And what use was she, what was she good for? The continuation of the house of Falco, of course. And then what? Either Herman Marquez or Herman Mac-milan. And nothing whatever she could do about it. She would be a wife. She would be a daughter-in-law. She would wear her hair in a bun, and scold

the sen/ants, and listen to the men carousing in the hall after supper, and have babies. One a year. ~~Little Marquez Falcos. Little Macmilan Falcos.~~ Eva, her old playmate, married at sixteen, had three babies and was expecting the fourth. Eva's husband, the Councillor's son Aldo Di Giulio Hertz, beat her; and she was proud of it. She showed the bruises and murmured, "Aldito has such a temper, he's so wild, like a little boy in a tantrum."

Luz made a face, and spat. She spat on the tiled floor of her room, and let the spittle lie. She stared at the small grayish blob and wished she could drown Herman Marquez in it, and then Herman Macmilan. She felt dirty. Her room was close, dirty: a prison cell. She fled the thought, and the room. She darted out into the hall, gathered up her skirts, and climbed the ladder to the place under the roof where nobody else ever came. She sat on the dusty floor there—the roof, loud with rain, was too low to stand up under—and let her mind go free.

It went straight out, away from the house and the hour, back to a wider time.

On the playing field by the schoolhouse, an afternoon of spring, two boys were playing catch, Shanty Towners, Lev and his friend Timmo. She stood on the porch of the schoolhouse watching them, wondering at what she saw, the reach and stretch of back and arm, the lithe swing of the body, the leap of the ball through light. It was as if they played a silent music, the music of moving. The light came under storm clouds, from the west, over Songe Bay, level and golden; the earth was brighter than the sky. The bank of raw earth behind the field was golden, the weeds above it burned. The earth burned. Lev stood waiting to catch a long throw, his head back, his hands poised, and she stood watching, amazed by beauty.

A group of City boys came around the schoolhouse to play football. They yelled at Lev to hand over the ball, just as he leaped, his arm at full stretch, to catch Timmo's high throw. He caught it, and laughed, and tossed the ball over to the others.

As the two came by the porch, she ran down the steps. "Lev!"

The west blazed behind him, he stood black between her and the sun.

"Why did you give them the ball like that?"

She could not see his face against the light. Timmo, a tall, handsome boy, held back a little and did not look into her face.

"Why do you let them push you around?"

Lev answered at last. "I don't/" he said. As she came closer to him she saw him looking straight at her.

"They say 'Give it here!' And you just give it—"

"They want to play a game; we were just fooling around. We had our turn."

"But they don't ask you for it, they order you. Don't you have any pride?"

Lev's eyes were dark, his face was dark and rough, unfinished; he smiled, a sweet, startled smile. "Pride? Sure. If I didn't, I'd hang onto it when it's their turn."

"Why are you always so full of answers?"

"Because life's so full of questions."

He laughed, but he kept looking at her as if she were a question herself, a sudden question with no answer. And he was right, for she had no idea why she was challenging him like this.

Timmo stood by, a little uncomfortable. Some of the boys on the playing field were already looking at them: two Shanty-boys talking to a senhorita.

Without a word said, the three walked away from the schoolhouse, down to the street below it, where they could not be seen from the field.

"If any of them talked to each other like that, the way they yelled at you," Luz said, "there'd have been a fight. Why don't you fight?"

"For a football?"

"For anything!"

"We do."

"When? How? You just walk away."

"We walk into the City, to school, every day," Lev said. He was not looking at her now as they walked along side by side, and his face looked as usual, an ordinary boy's face, stubborn, sullen. She did not understand what he meant at first, and when she did, she did not know what to say.

"Fists and knives are the least of it," he said, and perhaps heard pomposity in his own voice, a certain boastfulness, for he turned to Luz with a laugh and shrug—"and words aren't much good either!"

They came out from the shadow of a house into the level golden light. The sun lay, a molten blur, between the dark sea and the dark clouds, and the roofs of the City burned with unearthly fire. The three young people stopped, looking into that tremendous brightness and darkness of the west. The sea wind, smelling of salt and space and wood smoke, blew cold in their faces. "Don't you see," Lev said, "you can see it—you can see what it should be, what it is."

She saw it, with his eyes, she saw the glory, the City that should be, and was.

The moment broke. The haze of glory still burned between sea and storm, the City still stood golden and endangered on the eternal shore; but people came down the street behind them, talking and calling. They were Shanty-girls, who had stayed in school to help the mistresses clean up the classrooms. They joined Timmo and Lev, greeting Luz gently but, like Timmo, warily. Her way home lay to the left, down into the City; theirs to the right, up over the bluffs and onto the Town Road.

As she went down the steep street she glanced back at them going up it. The girls wore work suits of bright, soft colors. City girls sneered at Shanty girls for wearing trousers; but they made their own

skirts of Shanty cloth if they could get it, for it was finer and better dyed than any the City made. The boys' trousers and long-sleeved, high-necked jackets were the creamy white of the natural silkweed fiber. Lev's head of thick, soft hair looked very black above that whiteness. He was walking behind the others, with Southwind, a beautiful, low-voiced girl. Luz could tell from the way his head was turned that he was listening to that low voice, and smiling.

"Screw!" said Luz, and strode down the street, her long skirts whipping at her ankles. She had been too well brought up to know swearwords. She knew "Hell!" because her father said it, even in front of women, when he was annoyed. She never said "Hell!"—it was her father's property. But Eva had told her, years ago, that "screw" was a very bad word, and so, when alone, she used it.

And there, materializing like a wotsit out of nothing, and like a wotsit humpbacked, beady-eyed, and vaguely feathery, there was her duenna, Cousin Lores, who she thought had given up and gone home half an hour ago. "Luz Marina! Luz Marina! Where were you? I waited and waited—I ran all the way to Casa Falco and back to the school—where were you? Why are you walking all by yourself? Slow down, Luz Marina, I'm dying, I'm dying."

But Luz would not slow down for the poor squawking woman. She strode on, fighting tears that had come upon her unawares: tears of anger because she could never walk alone, never do anything by herself,

never. Because the men ran everything. They had it all their way. And the older women were all on their side. So that a girl couldn't walk in the streets of the City alone, because some drunken working man might insult her, and what if he did get put in jail or get his ears cut off for it afterward? A lot of good that would do. The girl's reputation would be ruined. Because her reputation was what the men thought of her. The men thought everything, did everything, ran everything, made everything, made the laws, broke the laws, punished the lawbreakers; and there was no room left for the women, no City for the women. Nowhere, nowhere, but in their own rooms, alone.

Even a Shanty-Towner was freer than she was. Even Lev, who wouldn't fight for a football, but who challenged the night as it came up over the edge of the world, and laughed at the laws. Even Southwind, who was so quiet and mild—Southwind could walk home with anyone she liked, hand in hand across the open fields in the wind of evening, running before the rain.

The rain drummed on the tile roof of the attic, where she had taken refuge that day three years ago when she got home at last, Cousin Lores puffing and squawking behind her all the way.

The rain drummed on the tile roof of the attic, where she had taken refuge today.

Three years, since that evening in the golden light. And nothing to show for it. Less now than there had been then. Three years ago she had still gone to school; she had believed that when school was over she would magically be free.

A prison. All Victoria was a prison, a jailhouse. And no way out. Nowhere else to go.

Only Lev had gone away, and found a new place somewhere far in the north, in the wilderness, a place to go. . . . And he had come back from it, and had stood up and said "No" to the Boss Falco.

But Lev was free, he had always been free. That was why there was no other time in her life, before or since, like the time when she had stood with him on the heights of her City in the golden light before the storm, and seen with him what freedom was. For one moment. A gust of the sea wind, a meeting of the eyes.

It was more than a year since she had even seen him. He was gone, back to Shanty Town, off to the new settlement, gone free, forgetting her. Why should he remember her? Why should she remember him? She had other things to think about. She was a grown woman. She had to face life. Even if all life had to show her was a locked door, and behind the locked door, no room.

3

The two human settlements on the planet Victoria were six kilometers apart. There were, so far as the inhabitants of Shantih Town and Victoria City knew, no others.

A good many people had work, hauling produce or drying fish, which took them from one settlement to the other frequently, but there were many more who

lived in the City and never went to the Town, or who lived in one of the farm-villages near the Town and never from year's end to year's end went to the City.

As a small group, four men and a woman, came down the Town Road to the edge of the bluffs, several of them looked with lively curiosity and considerable awe at the City spread out beneath them on the hilly shore of Songe Bay; they stopped just under the Monument Tower—the ceramic shell of one of the ships that had brought the first settlers to Victoria—but did not spend much time looking up at it; it was a familiar sight, impressive by its size, but skeletal and rather pitiful set up there on the cliff-top, pointing bravely at the stars but serving merely as a guide to fishing boats out at sea. It was dead, the City was alive. "Look at that!" said Hari, the eldest of the group. "You couldn't count all those houses if you sat here for an hour! Hundreds of them!"

"Just like a city on Earth," another, a more frequent visitor, said with proprietary pride.

"My mother was born in Moskva, in Russia the Black," a third man said. "She said the City would one day be a little town, there on Earth." But this was rather farfetched, to people whose lives had been spent between the wet fields and the huddled villages, in a close continuous bind of hard work and human companionship, outside which lay the immense, indifferent wilderness. "Surely," one of them said with mild disbelief, "she meant a big town?" And they stood beneath the hollow shell of the space ship, looking at the bright rust color of the tiled and thatched roofs, and the smoking chimneys, and the geometrical

lines of walls and streets, and not looking at the vast landscape of beaches and bay and ocean, empty valleys, empty hills, empty sky, that surrounded the City with a tremendous desolation.

Once they came down past the schoolhouse into the streets they could entirely forget the presence of the wilderness. They were surrounded on all sides by the works of mankind. The houses, mostly row-built, lined the way on both sides with high walls and little windows. The streets were narrow, and a foot deep in mud. In places walkways of planking were laid over the mud, but these were in bad repair and slippery with rain. Few people passed, but an open door might give a glimpse into the swarming

interior courtyard of a house, full of women, washing, children, smoke, and voices. Then again the cramped, sinister silence of the street.

"Wonderfull Wonderfull" sighed Hari.

They passed the factory where iron from the Government mines and foundry was made into tools, kitchenware, door latches, and so on. The doorway was wide open, and they stopped and peered into the sulfurous darkness lit with sparking fires and loud with banging and hammering, but a workman yelled at them to move on. So they went on down to Bay Street, and looking at the length and width and straightness of Bay Street, Hari said again, "Wonder-full" They followed Vera, who knew her way about the City, up Bay Street to the Capitol. At the sight of the Capitol, Hari had no words left, but merely stared.

It was the biggest building in the world—four times the height of any common house—and built of solid stone. Its high porch was supported by four columns, each a single huge ringtree trunk, grooved and whitewashed, the heavy capitals carved and gilt. The visitors felt small passing between these columns, small entering the portals that gaped so wide and tall. The entry hall, narrow but also very high, had plastered walls, and these had been decorated years ago with frescoes that stretched from floor to ceiling. At the sight of these the people from Shantih stopped again and gazed, silent; for they were pictures of the Earth.

There were still people in Shantih who remembered Earth and would tell about it, but the memories, fifty-five years old, were mostly of things seen by children. Few were left who had been adults at the time of the exile. Some had spent years of their lives in writing down the history of the People of the Peace and the sayings of its leaders and heroes, and descriptions of the Earth, and sketches of its remote, appalling history. Others had seldom spoken of the Earth; at most they had sung to their children born in exile, or to their children's children, an old song with strange names and words in it, or told them tales about the children and the witch, the three bears, the king who rode on a tiger. The children listened round-eyed. "What is a bear? Does a king have stripes too?"

The first generation of the City, on the other hand, sent to Victoria fifty years before the People of the Peace, had mostly come from the cities, Buenos Aires, Rio, Brasilia, and the other great centers of Brasil-America; and some of them had been powerful men,

familiar with stranger things even than witches and bears. So the fresco painter had painted scenes that were entirely marvelous to the people now looking at them: towers full of windows, streets full of wheeled machines, skies full of winged machines; women with shimmering, bejeweled clothes and blood-red mouths; men, tall heroic figures, doing incredible things— sitting on huge four-legged beasts or behind big shiny blocks of wood, shouting with arms upraised at vast crowds of people, advancing among dead bodies and pools of blood at the head of rows of men all dressed alike, under a sky full of smoke and bursting fire. . . . The visitors from Shantih must either stand there gazing for a week in order to see it all, or hurry on past at once, because they should not be late to the Council meeting. But they all stopped once more at the last panel, which was different from the others. Instead of being filled with faces and fire and blood and machines, it was black. Low in the left corner was a little blue-green disk, and high in the right corner was another; between and around them, nothing—black. Only if you looked close at the blackness did you see that it was flecked with a countless minute glittering of stars; and at last you saw the finely drawn silver space ship, no longer than a

fingernail-paring, poised in the void between the worlds.

At the doorway beyond the black fresco two guards stood, imposing figures, dressed alike in wide trousers, jerkins, boots, belts. They carried not only coiled whips stuck in their belts, but guns: long muskets, with hand-carved stocks and heavy barrels. Most of

the Shantih people had heard of guns but never seen one, and they stared with curiosity at them.

"Haiti" said one of the guards.

"What?" said Hari. The people of Shantih had early adopted the language spoken in Victoria City, since they had been people of many different tongues and needed a common language among themselves and with the City; but some of the older ones had not learned some of the City usages. Hari had never heard the word "Halt."

"Stop there," the guard said.

"All right," Hari said. "We're to wait here," he explained to the others.

The sound of voices making speeches came from behind the closed doors of the Council Room. The Shantih people presently began to wander back down the hall to look at the frescoes while they waited; the guards ordered them to wait in a group, and they came wandering back. At last the doors were opened, and the delegation from Shantih was escorted by the guards into the Council Hall of the Government of Victoria: a big room, filled with grayish light from windows set up high in the wall. At the far end was a raised platform on which ten chairs stood in a half-circle; on the wall behind them hung a sheet of red cloth, with a blue disk in the middle, and ten yellow stars around the disk. A couple of dozen men sat here and there on the rows of benches, facing the dais. Of the ten chairs on the dais, only three were occupied.

A curly-headed man who sat by a little table just below the dais stood up and announced that a delegation from Shanty Town had asked permission to address the Supreme Plenum of the Congress and Council of Victoria.

"Permission granted/*" said one of the men on the dais.

"Come forward—no, not there, along the side—" The curly man whispered and fussed till he got the delegation where he wanted them, near the platform. "Who is the spokesman?"

"Her," said Hari, nodding at Vera.

"State your name as listed in the National Registry. You are to address the Congressmen as 'Gentlemen' and the Councillors as 'Your Excellencies,'" the clerk whispered, frowning with agitation. Hari watched him with benign amusement, as if he were a pouchbaL "Go on, go on!" the clerk whispered, sweating.

Vera took a step forward from the group. "I'm Vera Adelson. We came to discuss with you our plans for sending a group north to start a new settlement. We hadn't had time the other day to talk the matter over, and so there was some misunderstanding and disagreement. That's all settled. Jan has the map

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