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XENOCIDE

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XENOCIDE

Orson Scott Card



**A TOM DOHERTY
ASSOCIATES BOOK
NEW YORK**

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to real people or events is purely coincidental.

XENOCIDE

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To Clark and Kathy Kidd:
for the freedom, for the haven,
and for frolics all over America.

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PRONUNCIATION

A few names may seem strange to English-speaking readers. From Chinese, *Qing-jao* is pronounced “tching jow”; *Jiang-qing* is “jee-eng tching.” From Portuguese, *Quim* is pronounced “keeng”; *Novin* is “no-VEEN-ya”; *Olhado* is “ol-YAH-doe.” From Swedish, *Jakt* is “yahkt.”

Other names are either easier to pronounce as written, or repeated rarely enough that they shouldn't cause difficulty.

XENOCIDE

A PARTING

龍

<Today one of the brothers asked me: Is it a terrible prison, not to be able to move from the place where you're standing?>

<You answered . . .>

<I told him that I am now more free than he is. The inability to move frees me from the obligation to act.>

<You who speak languages, you are such liars.>

Han Fei-tzu sat in lotus position on the bare wooden floor beside his wife's sickbed. Until a moment ago he might have been sleeping; he wasn't sure. But now he was aware of the slight change in her breathing, a change as subtle as the wind from a butterfly's passing.

Jiang-qing, for her part, must also have detected some change in him, for she had not spoken before and now she did speak. Her voice was very soft. But Han Fei-tzu could hear her clearly, for the house was silent. He had asked his friends and servants for stillness during the dusk of Jiang-qing's life. Time enough for careless noise during the long night that was to come, when there would be no hushed words from her lips.

"Still not dead," she said. She had greeted him with these words each time she woke during the past few days. At first the words had seemed whimsical or ironic to him, but now he knew that she spoke with disappointment. She longed for death now, not because she hadn't loved life, but because death was now unavoidable, and what cannot be shunned must be embraced. That was the Path. Jiang-qing had never taken a step away from the Path in her life.

"Then the gods are kind to me," said Han Fei-tzu.

"To you," she breathed. "What do we contemplate?"

It was her way of asking him to share his private thoughts with her. When others asked his private thoughts, he felt spied upon. But Jiang-qing asked only so that she could also think the same thought: it was part of their having become a single soul.

"We are contemplating the nature of desire," said Han Fei-tzu.

"Whose desire?" she asked. "And for what?"

My desire for your bones to heal and become strong, so that they don't snap at the slightest

pressure. So that you could stand again, or even raise an arm without your own muscles tearing away in chunks of bone or causing the bone to break under the tension. So that I wouldn't have to watch you wither away until now you weigh only eighteen kilograms. I never knew how perfectly happy we were until I learned that we could not stay together.

"My desire," he answered. "For you."

"'You only covet what you do not have.' Who said that?"

"You did," said Han Fei-tzu. "Some say, 'what you *cannot* have.' Others say, 'what you *should* not have.' I say, 'You can truly covet only what you will always hunger for.'"

"You have me forever."

"I will lose you tonight. Or tomorrow. Or next week."

"Let us contemplate the nature of desire," said Jiang-qing. As before, she was using philosophy to pull him out of his brooding melancholy.

He resisted her, but only playfully. "You are a harsh ruler," said Han Fei-tzu. "Like your ancestor-*of-the-heart*, you make no allowance for other people's frailty." Jiang-qing was named for a revolutionary leader of the ancient past, who had tried to lead the people onto a new Path but was overthrown by weak-hearted cowards. It was not right, thought Han Fei-tzu, for his wife to die before him: her ancestor-*of-the-heart* had outlived her husband. Besides, wives *should* live longer than husbands. Women were more complete inside themselves. They were also better at living in the presence of children. They were never as solitary as a man alone.

Jiang-qing refused to let him return to brooding. "When a man's wife is dead, what does he long for?"

Rebelliously, Han Fei-tzu gave her the most false answer to her question. "To lie with her," he said.

"The desire of the body," said Jiang-qing.

Since she was determined to have this conversation, Han Fei-tzu took up the catalogue for her. "The desire of the body is to act. It includes all touches, casual and intimate, and all customary movements. Thus he sees a movement out of the corner of his eye, and thinks he has seen his dead wife moving across the doorway, and he cannot be content until he has walked to the door and seen that it was not his wife. Thus he wakes up from a dream in which he heard her voice, and finds himself speaking her answer aloud as if she could hear him."

"What else?" asked Jiang-qing.

"I'm tired of philosophy," said Han Fei-tzu. "Maybe the Greeks found comfort in it, but not me."

"The desire of the spirit," said Jiang-qing, insisting.

"Because the spirit is of the earth, it is that part which makes new things out of old ones. The husband longs for all the unfinished things that he and his wife were making when she died, and all the unstarted dreams of what they would have made if she had lived. Thus a man grows angry at his children for being too much like him and not enough like his dead wife. Thus a man hates the house they lived in together, because either he does not change it, so that it is as dead as his wife, or because he *does* change it, so that it is no longer half of her making."

"You don't have to be angry at our little Qing-jiao," said Jiang-qing.

"Why?" asked Han Fei-tzu. "Will you stay, then, and help me teach her to be a woman? All I can teach her is to be what *I* am—cold and hard, sharp and strong, like obsidian. If she grows like that while she looks so much like you, how can I help but be angry?"

"Because you can teach her everything that I am, too," said Jiang-qing.

"If I had any part of you in me," said Han Fei-tzu, "I would not have needed to marry you to become a complete person." Now he teased her by using philosophy to turn the conversation away.

from pain. "That is the desire of the soul. Because the soul is made of light and dwells in air, it is the part which conceives and keeps ideas, especially the idea of the self. The husband longs for his wife, which was made of the husband and wife together. Thus he never believes any of his own thoughts, because there is always a question in his mind to which his wife's thoughts were the only possible answer. Thus the whole world seems dead to him because he cannot trust anything to keep its meaning before the onslaught of this unanswerable question."

"Very deep," said Jiang-qing.

"If I were Japanese I would commit seppuku, spilling my bowels into the jar of your ashes."

"Very wet and messy," she said.

He smiled. "Then I should be an ancient Hindu, and burn myself on your pyre."

But she was through with joking. "Qing-jiao," she whispered. She was reminding him he could do nothing so flamboyant as to die with her. There was little Qing-jiao to care for.

So Han Fei-tzu answered her seriously. "How can I teach her to be what you are?"

"All that is good in me," said Jiang-qing, "comes from the Path. If you teach her to obey the gods, honor the ancestors, love the people, and serve the rulers, I will be in her as much as you are."

"I would teach her the Path as part of myself," said Han Fei-tzu.

"Not so," said Jiang-qing. "The Path is not a natural part of you, my husband. Even with the gods speaking to you every day, you insist on believing in a world where everything can be explained by natural causes."

"I obey the gods." He thought, bitterly, that he had no choice; that even to delay obedience was torture.

"But you don't *know* them. You don't love their works."

"The Path is to love the people. The gods we only obey." How can I love gods who humiliate me and torment me at every opportunity?

"We love the people because they are creatures of the gods."

"Don't preach to me."

She sighed.

Her sadness stung him like a spider. "I wish you would preach to me forever," said Han Fei-tzu.

"You married me because you knew I loved the gods, and that love for them was completely missing from yourself. That was how I completed you."

How could he argue with her, when he knew that even now he hated the gods for everything they had ever done to him, everything they had ever made him do, everything they had stolen from him in his life.

"Promise me," said Jiang-qing.

He knew what these words meant. She felt death upon her; she was laying the burden of her life upon him. A burden he would gladly bear. It was losing her company on the Path that he had dreaded for so long.

"Promise that you will teach Qing-jiao to love the gods and walk always on the Path. Promise that you will make her as much my daughter as yours."

"Even if she never hears the voice of the gods?"

"The Path is for everyone, not just the godspoken."

Perhaps, thought Han Fei-tzu, but it was much easier for the godspoken to follow the Path, because to them the price for straying from it was so terrible. The common people were free; they could leave the Path and not feel the pain of it for years. The godspoken couldn't leave the Path for an hour.

"Promise me."

I will. I promise.

~~But he couldn't say the words out loud. He did not know why, but his reluctance was deep.~~

In the silence, as she waited for his vow, they heard the sound of running feet on the gravel outside the front door of the house. It could only be Qing-jao, home from the garden of Sun Cao-pi. On Qing-jao was allowed to run and make noise during this time of hush. They waited, knowing that she would come straight to her mother's room.

The door slid open almost noiselessly. Even Qing-jao had caught enough of the hush to walk softly when she was actually in the presence of her mother. Though she walked on tiptoe, she could hardly keep from dancing, almost galloping across the floor. But she did not fling her arms around her mother's neck; she remembered that lesson even though the terrible bruise had faded from Jiang-qing's face, where Qing-jao's eager embrace had broken her jaw three months ago.

"I counted twenty-three white carp in the garden stream," said Qing-jao.

"So many," said Jiang-qing.

"I think they were showing themselves to me," said Qing-jao. "So I could count them. None of them wanted to be left out."

"Love you," whispered Jiang-qing.

Han Fei-tzu heard a new sound in her breathy voice—a popping sound, like bubbles bursting with her words.

"Do you think that seeing so many carp means that I will be godspoken?" asked Qing-jao.

"I will ask the gods to speak to you," said Jiang-qing.

Suddenly Jiang-qing's breathing became quick and harsh. Han Fei-tzu immediately knelt and looked at his wife. Her eyes were wide and frightened. The moment had come.

Her lips moved. Promise me, she said, though her breath could make no sound but gasping.

"I promise," said Han Fei-tzu.

Then her breathing stopped.

"What do the gods say when they talk to you?" asked Qing-jao.

"Your mother is very tired," said Han Fei-tzu. "You should go out now."

"But she didn't answer me. What do the gods say?"

"They tell secrets," said Han Fei-tzu. "No one who hears will repeat them."

Qing-jao nodded wisely. She took a step back, as if to leave, but stopped. "May I kiss you, Mama?"

"Lightly on the cheek," said Han Fei-tzu.

Qing-jao, being small for a four-year-old, did not have to bend very far at all to kiss her mother's cheek. "I love you, Mama."

"You'd better leave now, Qing-jao," said Han Fei-tzu.

"But Mama didn't say she loved me too."

"She did. She said it before. Remember? But she's very tired and weak. Go now."

He put just enough sternness in his voice that Qing-jao left without further questions. Only when she was gone did Han Fei-tzu let himself feel anything but care for her. He knelt over Jiang-qing's body and tried to imagine what was happening to her now. Her soul had flown and was now already in heaven. Her spirit would linger much longer; perhaps her spirit would dwell in this house, if it had truly been a place of happiness for her. Superstitious people believed that all spirits of the dead were dangerous, and put up signs and wards to fend them off. But those who followed the Path knew that the spirit of a good person was never harmful or destructive, for their goodness in life had come from the spirit's love of making things. Jiang-qing's spirit would be a blessing in the house for many years to come, if she chose to stay.

Yet even as he tried to imagine her soul and spirit, according to the teachings of the Path, there was a cold place in his heart that was certain that all that was left of Jiang-qing was this brittle, dried-up body. Tonight it would burn as quickly as paper, and then she would be gone except for the memories in his heart.

Jiang-qing was right. Without her to complete his soul, he was already doubting the gods. And the gods had noticed—they always did. At once he felt the unbearable pressure to do the ritual of cleansing, until he was rid of his unworthy thoughts. Even now they could not leave him unpunished. Even now, with his wife lying dead before him, the gods insisted that he do obeisance to them before he could shed a single tear of grief for her.

At first he meant to delay, to put off obedience. He had schooled himself to be able to postpone the ritual for as long as a whole day, while hiding all outward signs of his inner torment. He could do that now—but only by keeping his heart utterly cold. There was no point in that. Proper grief could come only when he had satisfied the gods. So, kneeling there, he began the ritual.

He was still twisting and gyrating with the ritual when a servant peered in. Though the servant saw nothing, Han Fei-tzu heard the faint sliding of the door and knew what the servant would assume: Jiang-qing was dead, and Han Fei-tzu was so righteous that he was communing with the gods even before he announced her death to the household. No doubt some would even suppose that the gods had come to take Jiang-qing, since she was known for her extraordinary holiness. No one would guess that even as Han Fei-tzu worshiped, his heart was full of bitterness that the gods would dare demand this of him even now.

O Gods, he thought, if I knew that by cutting off an arm or cutting out my liver I could be rid of you forever, I would seize the knife and relish the pain and loss, all for the sake of freedom.

That thought, too, was unworthy, and required even more cleansing. It was hours before the gods at last released him, and by then he was too tired, too sick at heart to grieve. He got up and fetched the women to prepare Jiang-qing's body for the burning.

At midnight he was the last to come to the pyre, carrying a sleepy Qing-jao in his arms. She clutched in her hands the three papers she had written for her mother in her childish scrawl. "Fish" she had written, and "book" and "secrets." These were the things that Qing-jao was giving to her mother to carry with her into heaven. Han Fei-tzu had tried to guess at the thoughts in Qing-jao's mind as she wrote those words. *Fish* because of the carp in the garden stream today, no doubt. And *book*—that was easy enough to understand, because reading aloud was one of the last things Jiang-qing could do with her daughter. But why *secrets*? What secrets did Qing-jao have for her mother? He could not ask. One did not discuss the paper offerings to the dead.

Han Fei-tzu set Qing-jao on her feet; she had not been deeply asleep, and so she woke at once and stood there, blinking slowly. Han Fei-tzu whispered to her and she rolled her papers and tucked them into her mother's sleeve. She didn't seem to mind touching her mother's cold flesh—she was too young to have learned to shudder at the touch of death.

Nor did Han Fei-tzu mind the touch of his wife's flesh as he tucked his own three papers into his other sleeve. What was there to fear from death now, when it had already done its worst?

No one knew what was written on his papers, or they would have been horrified, for he had written "My body," "My spirit," and "My soul." Thus it was that he burned himself on Jiang-qing's funeral pyre, and sent himself with her wherever it was she was going.

Then Jiang-qing's secret maid, Mu-pao, laid the torch onto the sacred wood and the pyre burst into flames. The heat of the fire was painful, and Qing-jao hid herself behind her father, only peeking around him now and then to watch her mother leave on her endless journey. Han Fei-tzu, though

welcomed the dry heat that seared his skin and made brittle the silk of his robe. Her body had not been as dry as it seemed; long after the papers had crisped into ash and blown upward into the smoke of the fire, her body still sizzled, and the heavy incense burning all around the fire could not conceal from him the smell of burning flesh. That is what we're burning here: meat, fish, carrion, nothing. Not me, Jiang-qing. Only the costume she wore into this life. That which made that body into the woman that I loved is still alive, *must* still live. And for a moment he thought he could see, or hear, or somehow feel the passage of Jiang-qing.

Into the air, into the earth, into the fire. I am with you.

A MEETING

龍

<The strangest thing about humans is the way they pair up, males and females. Constantly at work with each other, never content to leave each other alone. They never seem to grasp the idea that males and females are separate species with completely different needs and desires, forced to come together only to reproduce.>

<Of course you feel that way. Your mates are nothing but mindless drones, extensions of yourself, without their own identity.>

<We know our lovers with perfect understanding. *Humans* invent an imaginary lover and put that mask over the face of the body in their bed.>

<That is the tragedy of language, my friend. Those who know each other only through symbolic representations are forced to imagine each other. And because their imagination is imperfect, they are often wrong.>

<That is the source of their misery.>

<And some of their strength, I think. Your people and mine, each for our own evolutionary reasons, mate with vastly unequal partners. Our mates are always, hopelessly, our intellectual inferiors. Humans mate with beings who challenge their supremacy. They have conflict between mates, not because their communication is inferior to ours, but because they commune with each other at all.>

Valentine Wiggin read over her essay, making a few corrections here and there. When she was done, the words stood in the air over her computer terminal. She was feeling pleased with herself for having written such a deft ironic dismemberment of the personal character of Rymus Ojman, the chairman of the cabinet of Starways Congress.

“Have we finished another attack on the masters of the Hundred Worlds?”

Valentine did not turn to face her husband; she knew from his voice exactly what expression would be on his face, and so she smiled back at him without turning around. After twenty-five years of marriage, they could see each other clearly without having to look. “We have made Rymus Ojman look ridiculous.”

Jakt leaned into her tiny office, his face so close to hers that she could hear his soft breathing as he

read the opening paragraphs. He wasn't young anymore; the exertion of leaning into her office, bracing his hands on the doorframe, was making him breathe more rapidly than she liked to hear.

Then he spoke, but with his face so close to hers that she felt his lips brush her cheek, tickling her with every word. "From now on even his mother will laugh behind her hand whenever she sees the poor bastard."

"It was hard to make it funny," said Valentine. "I caught myself denouncing him again and again."

"This is better."

"Oh, I know. If I had let my outrage show, if I had accused him of all his crimes, it would have made him seem more formidable and frightening and the Rule-of-law Faction would have loved him all the more, while the cowards on every world would have bowed to him even lower."

"If they bow any lower they'll have to buy thinner carpets," said Jakt.

She laughed, but it was as much because the tickling of his lips on her cheek was becoming unbearable. It was also beginning, just a little, to tantalize her with desires that simply could not be satisfied on this voyage. The starship was too small and cramped, with all their family aboard, for any real privacy. "Jakt, we're almost at the midpoint. We've abstained longer than this during the mishmish run every year of our lives."

"We could put a do-not-enter sign on the door."

"Then you might just as well put out a sign that says, 'naked elderly couple reliving old memories inside.'"

"I'm not elderly."

"You're over sixty."

"If the old soldier can still stand up and salute, I say let him march in the parade."

"No parades till the voyage is over. It's only a couple of weeks more. We only have to complete the rendezvous with Ender's stepson and then we're back on course to Lusitania."

Jakt drew away from her, pulled himself out of her doorway and stood upright in the corridor—only one of the few places on the starship where he could actually do that. He groaned as he did it, though.

"You creak like an old rusty door," said Valentine.

"I've heard you make the same sounds when you get up from your desk here. I'm not the only senile, decrepit, miserable old coot in our family."

"Go away and let me transmit this."

"I'm used to having work to do on a voyage," said Jakt. "The computers do everything here, and this ship never rolls or pitches in the sea."

"Read a book."

"I worry about you. All work and no play makes Val a mean-tempered old hag."

"Every minute that we talk here is eight and a half hours in real time."

"Our time here on this starship is just as real as *their* time out there," said Jakt. "Sometimes I wish Ender's friends hadn't figured out a way for our starship to keep up a landside link."

"It takes up a huge amount of computer time," said Val. "Until now, only the military could communicate with starships during near-lightspeed flight. If Ender's friends can achieve it, then I owe it to them to use it."

"You're not doing all this because you owe it to somebody."

That was true enough. "If I write an essay every hour, Jakt, it means that to the rest of humanity Demosthenes is publishing something only once every three weeks."

"You can't possibly write an essay every hour. You sleep, you eat."

"You talk, I listen. Go away, Jakt."

“If I’d known that saving a planet from destruction would mean my returning to a state of virginity I’d never have agreed to it.”

He was only half teasing. Leaving Trondheim was a hard decision for all her family—even for her, even knowing that she was going to see Ender again. The children were all adults now, or nearly so, and they saw this voyage as a great adventure. Their visions of the future were not so tied to a particular place. None of them had become a sailor, like their father; all of them were becoming scholars or scientists, living the life of public discourse and private contemplation, like their mother. They could live their lives, substantially unchanged, anywhere, on any world. Jakt was proud of them, but disappointed that the chain of family reaching back for seven generations on the seas of Trondheim would end with him. And now, for her sake, he had given up the sea himself. Giving up Trondheim was the hardest thing she could ever have asked of Jakt, and he had said yes without hesitation.

Perhaps he would go back someday, and, if he did, the oceans, the ice, the storms, the fish, the desperately sweet green meadows of summer would still be there. But his crews would be gone, *we* *already* gone. The men he had known better than his own children, better than his wife—those men were already fifteen years older, and when he returned, if he returned, another forty years would have passed. Their grandsons would be working the boats then. They wouldn’t know the name of Jakt. He would be a foreign shipowner, come from the sky, not a sailor, not a man with the stink and yellowy blood of skrika on his hands. He would not be one of them.

So when he complained that she was ignoring him, when he teased about their lack of intimacy during the voyage, there was more to it than an aging husband’s playful desire. Whether he knew he was saying it or not, she understood the true meaning of his overtures: After what I’ve given up for you, have you nothing to give to me?

And he was right—she was pushing herself harder than she needed to. She was making more sacrifices than needed to be made—requiring overmuch from him as well. It wasn’t the sheer number of subversive essays that Demosthenes published during this voyage that would make the difference. What mattered was how many people read and believed what she wrote, and how many then thought and spoke and acted as enemies of Starways Congress. Perhaps more important was the hope that some within the bureaucracy of Congress itself would be moved to feel a higher allegiance to humanity and break their maddening institutional solidarity. Some would surely be changed by what she wrote. Not many, but maybe enough. And maybe it would happen in time to stop them from destroying the planet Lusitania.

If not, she and Jakt and those who had given up so much to come with them on this voyage from Trondheim would reach Lusitania just in time to turn around and flee—or be destroyed along with all the others of that world. It was not unreasonable for Jakt to be tense, to want to spend more time with her. It *was* unreasonable for her to be so single-minded, to use every waking moment writing propaganda.

“You make the sign for the door, and I’ll make sure you aren’t alone in the room.”

“Woman, you make my heart go flip-flop like a dying flounder,” said Jakt.

“You are so romantic when you talk like a fisherman,” said Valentine. “The children will have a good laugh, knowing you couldn’t keep your hands off me even for the three weeks of this voyage.”

“They have our genes. They should be rooting for us to stay randy till we’re well into our second century.”

“I’m well into my fourth millennium.”

“When oh when can I expect you in my stateroom, Ancient One?”

“When I’ve transmitted this essay.”

“And how long will that be?”

“Sometime after you go away and leave me alone.”

With a deep sigh that was more theatre than genuine misery, he padded off down the carpeted corridor. After a moment there came a clanging sound and she heard him yelp in pain. In mock pain, of course; he had accidentally hit the metal beam with his head on the first day of the voyage, but ever since then his collisions had been deliberate, for comic effect. No one ever laughed out loud, of course—that was a family tradition, not to laugh when Jakt pulled one of his physical gags—but then Jakt was not the sort of man who needed overt encouragement from others. He was his own best audience; a man couldn't be a sailor and a leader of men all his life without being quite self-contained. As far as Valentine knew, she and the children were the only people he had ever allowed himself to need.

Even then, he had not needed them so much that he couldn't go on with his life as a sailor and fisherman, away from home for days, often weeks, sometimes months at a time. Valentine went with him sometimes at first, when they were still so hungry for each other that they could never be satisfied. But within a few years their hunger had given way to patience and trust; when he was away she did her research and wrote her books, and then gave her entire attention to him and the children when he returned.

The children used to complain, “I wish Father would get home, so Mother would come out of her room and talk to us again.” I was not a very good mother, Valentine thought. It's pure luck that the children turned out so well.

The essay remained in the air over the terminal. Only a final touch remained to be given. At the bottom, she centered the cursor and typed the name under which all her writings were published:

DEMOSTHENES

It was a name given to her by her older brother, Peter, when they were children together fifty—no, three thousand years ago.

The mere thought of Peter still had the power to upset her, to make her go hot and cold inside. Peter was the cruel one, the violent one, the one whose mind was so subtle and dangerous that he was manipulating *her* by the age of two and the world by the age of twenty. When they were still children on Earth in the twenty-second century, he studied the political writings of great men and women living and dead, not to learn their ideas—those he grasped instantly—but to learn how they said them. To learn, in practical terms, how to sound like an adult. When he had mastered it, he taught Valentine and forced her to write low political demagoguery under the name Demosthenes while he wrote elevated statesmanlike essays under the name Locke. Then they submitted them to the computer networks and within a few years were at the heart of the greatest political issues of the day.

What galled Valentine then—and still stung a bit today, since it had never been resolved before Peter died—was that he, consumed by the lust for power, had forced *her* to write the sort of thing that expressed *his* character, while *he* got to write the peace-loving, elevated sentiments that were hers by nature. In those days the name “Demosthenes” had felt like a terrible burden to her. Everything she wrote under that name was a lie; and not even her lie—Peter's lie. A lie within a lie.

Not now. Not for three thousand years. I've made the name my own. I've written histories and biographies that have shaped the thinking of millions of scholars on the Hundred Worlds and helped shape the identities of dozens of nations. So much for you, Peter. So much for what you tried to make of me.

Except that now, looking at the essay she had just written, she realized that even though she had freed herself from Peter's suzerainty, she was still his pupil. All she knew of rhetoric, polemic—yes, of demagoguery—she had learned from him or because of his insistence. And now, though she was using it in a noble cause, she was nevertheless doing exactly the sort of political manipulation that Peter had loved so much.

Peter had gone on to become Hegemon, ruler of all humanity for sixty years at the beginning of the Great Expansion. He was the one who united all the quarreling communities of man for the vast effort that flung starships out to every world where the buggers had once dwelt, and then on to discover more habitable worlds until, by the time he died, all the Hundred Worlds had either been settled or had colony ships on the way. It was almost a thousand years after that, of course, before Starway Congress once again united all of humankind under one government—but the memory of the first true Hegemon—the Hegemon—was at the heart of the story that made human unity possible.

Out of a moral wasteland like Peter's soul came harmony and unity and peace. While Ender's legacy, as far as humanity remembered, was murder, slaughter, xenocide.

Ender, Valentine's younger brother, the man she and her family were voyaging to see—he was the tender one, the brother she loved and, in the earliest years, tried to protect. He was the *good* one. Of course, yes, he had a streak of ruthlessness that rivaled Peter's, but he had the decency to be appalled by his own brutality. She had loved him as fervently as she had loathed Peter; and when Peter exiled his younger brother from the Earth that Peter was determined to rule, Valentine went with Ender—his final repudiation of Peter's personal hegemony over her.

And here I am again, thought Valentine, back in the business of politics.

She spoke sharply, in the clipped voice that told her terminal that she was giving it a command. "Transmit," she said.

The word *transmitting* appeared in the air above her essay. Ordinarily, back when she was writing scholarly works, she would have had to specify a destination—submit the essay to a publisher through some roundabout pathway so that it could not readily be traced to Valentine Wiggin. Now, though, her subversive friend of Ender's, working under the obvious code name of "Jane," was taking care of all that for her—managing the tricky business of translating an ansible message from a ship going at near-light-speed to a message readable by a planetbound ansible for which time was passing more than five hundred times faster.

Since communicating with a starship ate up huge amounts of planetside ansible time, it was usually done only to convey navigational information and instructions. The only people permitted to send extended text messages were high officials in the government or the military. Valentine could not begin to understand how "Jane" managed to get so much ansible time for these text transmissions—and at the same time keep anyone from discovering where these subversive documents were coming from. Furthermore, "Jane" used even more ansible time transmitting back to her the published responses to her writings, reporting to her on all the arguments and strategies the government was using to counter Valentine's propaganda. Whoever "Jane" was—and Valentine suspected that "Jane" was simply the name for a clandestine organization that had penetrated the highest reaches of the government—she was extraordinarily good. And extraordinarily foolhardy. Still, if Jane was willing to expose herself—themselves—to such risks, Valentine owed it to her—them—to produce as many tracts as she could, and as powerful and dangerous as she could make them.

If words can be lethal weapons, I must provide them with an arsenal.

But she was still a woman; even revolutionaries are allowed to have a life, aren't they? Moments of joy—or pleasure, or perhaps only *relief*—stolen here and there. She got up from her seat, ignoring the

pain that came from moving after sitting so long, and twisted her way out of the door of her tiny office—a storage bin, really, before they converted the starship to their own use. She was a little ashamed of how eager she was to get to the room where Jakt would be waiting. Most of the great revolutionary propagandists in history would have been able to endure at least three weeks of physical abstinence. Or would they? She wondered if anyone had done a study of that particular question.

She was still imagining how a researcher would go about writing a grant proposal for such a project when she got to the four-bunk compartment they shared with Syfte and her husband, Lars, who had proposed to her only a few days before they left, as soon as he realized that Syfte really meant to leave Trondheim. It was hard to share a cabin with newlyweds—Valentine always felt like such an intruder using the same room. But there was no choice. Though this starship was a luxury yacht, with all the amenities they could hope for, it simply hadn't been meant to hold so many bodies. It had been the only starship near Trondheim that was remotely suitable, so it had to do.

Their twenty-year-old daughter, Ro, and Varsam, their sixteen-year-old son, shared another compartment with Plikt, who had been their lifelong tutor and dearest family friend. The members of the yacht's staff and crew who had chosen to make this voyage with them—it would have been wrong to dismiss them all and strand them on Trondheim—used the other two. The bridge, the dining room, the galley, the salon, the sleeping compartments—all were filled with people doing their best not to let their annoyance at the close quarters get out of hand.

None of them were in the corridor now, however, and Jakt had already taped a sign to their door:

STAY OUT OR DIE.

It was signed, "The proprietor." Valentine opened the door. Jakt was leaning against the wall so close to the door that she was startled and gave a little gasp.

"Nice to know that the sight of me can make you cry out in pleasure."

"In shock."

"Come in, my sweet seditiousist."

"Technically, you know, *I'm* the proprietor of this starship."

"What's yours is mine. I married you for your property."

She was inside the compartment now. He closed the door and sealed it.

"That's all I am to you?" she asked. "Real estate?"

"A little plot of ground where I can plow and plant and harvest, all in their proper season." He reached out to her; she stepped into his arms. His hands slid lightly up her back, cradled her shoulder. She felt contained in his embrace, never confined.

"It's late in the autumn," she said. "Getting on toward winter."

"Time to harrow, perhaps," said Jakt. "Or perhaps it's already time to kindle up the fire and keep the old hut warm before the snow comes."

He kissed her and it felt like the first time.

"If you asked me to marry you all over again today, I'd say yes," said Valentine.

"And if I had only met you for the first time today, I'd ask."

They had said the same words many, many times before. Yet they still smiled to hear them, because they were still true.

—

The two starships had almost completed their vast ballet, dancing through space in great leaps and delicate turns until at last they could meet and touch. Miro Ribeiro had watched the whole procedure from the bridge of his starship, his shoulders hunched, his head leaned back on the headrest of the seat. To others this posture always looked awkward. Back on Lusitania, whenever Mother caught him sitting that way she would come and fuss over him, insist on bringing him a pillow so he could be *comfortable*. She never seemed to grasp the idea that it was only in that hunched, awkward-seeming posture that his head would remain upright without any conscious effort on his part.

He would endure her ministrations because it wasn't worth the effort to argue with her. Mother was always moving and thinking so quickly, it was almost impossible for her to slow down enough to listen to him. Since the brain damage he had suffered passing through the disruptor field that separated the human colony and the piggies' forest, his speech had been unbearably slow, painful to produce and difficult to understand. Miro's brother Quim, the religious one, had told him that he should be grateful to God that he was able to speak at all—the first few days he had been incapable of communicating except through alphabetic scanning, spelling out messages letter by letter. In some ways, though, spelling things out had been better. At least then Miro had been silent; he hadn't had to listen to his own voice. The thick, awkward sound, the agonizing slowness of it. Who in his family had the patience to listen to him? Even the ones who tried—his next-younger sister, Ela; his friend and stepfather, Andrew Wiggin, the Speaker for the Dead; and Quim, of course—he could feel their impatience. They tended to finish his sentences for him. They needed to *hurry* things. So even though they said they wanted to talk with him, even though they actually sat and listened as he spoke, he still couldn't speak freely to them. He couldn't talk about *ideas*; he couldn't speak in long, involved sentences, because by the time he got to the end his listeners would have lost track of the beginning.

The human brain, Miro had concluded, just like a computer, can only receive data at certain speeds. If you get too slow, the listener's attention wanders and the information is lost.

Not just the listeners, either. Miro had to be fair—he was as impatient with himself as they were. When he thought of the sheer effort involved in explaining a complicated idea, when he anticipated trying to form the words with lips and tongue and jaws that wouldn't obey him, when he thought of how *long* it would all take, he usually felt too weary to speak. His mind raced on and on, as fast as ever, thinking so many thoughts that at times Miro wanted his brain to shut down, to be *silent* and give him peace. But his thoughts remained his own, unshared.

Except with Jane. He could speak to Jane. She had come to him first on his terminal at home, her face taking form on the screen. "I'm a friend of the Speaker for the Dead," she had told him. "I think we can get this computer to be a little more responsive." From then on, Miro had found that Jane was the only person he could talk to easily. For one thing, she was infinitely patient. She never finished his sentences. She could *wait* for him to finish them himself, so that he never felt rushed, never felt that he was boring her.

Perhaps even more important, he didn't have to form his words as fully for her as he did for human listeners. Andrew had given him a personal terminal—a computer transceiver encased in a jewel like the one Andrew wore in his own ear. From that vantage point, using the jewel's sensors, Jane could detect every sound he made, every motion of the muscles in his head. He didn't have to *complete* each sound, he had only to begin it and she would understand. So he could be lazy. He could speak more quickly and be understood.

And he could also speak silently. He could subvocalize—he didn't have to use that awkward barking, yowling voice that was all his throat could produce now. So that when he was talking to Jane he could speak quickly, naturally, without any reminder that he was crippled. With Jane he could feel

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