



the
**HALF-MADE
WORLD**

FELIX GILMAN

*"Gripping, imaginative, terrifically inventive ...
we haven't had a science-fiction novel like this for a long time."*

URSULA K. LE GUIN

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TOR BOOKS BY FELIX GILMAN

The Half-Made World

THE HALF-MADE WORLD



FELIX GILMAN



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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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HOW THE GENERAL DIED

~ 1878 ~

The General lay flat on his back, arms outflung, watching the stars.

A rock pressed into the base of his spine. He'd hit his head and turned his ankle when he fell, but the rock was the worst of his pain. Other sensations were leaving him, but the rock, obstinately persisted; yet he was powerless to move. He was powerless to will himself to move. Between his will and his body, there was the *noise*.

A dark cloud passed before the stars, and their light was shadowed, then returned, cold as ever. He watched the night sky over the mountains burn and wheel, hiss and dance, shudder and fall.

The General was losing his mind.

There were no trees—no pines. He lay in a bare hollow, a high flat stony clearing. The General and his last most loyal twenty-two men had been caught in their desperate flight between the Line behind them and the cliff's edge before them.

If the General could only have mustered the will to turn his head, he would have seen the mountain's peak. It was dark, and forked like a gesture of benediction. It had been his destination before this—this unfortunate interruption. It would have been better, he thought, to have died watching the mountain than the stars, which were meaningless.

In the end, no shots had been fired. No words exchanged or warnings given. The Linesmen's awful weapon had simply come whistling out of the night sky, fallen like a stone at Lieutenant Deerfield's feet, and poor young Deerfield had gone pale, eyes wide, turning to the General for last words; then the *noise* had begun, the mad awful *noise*, and Deerfield's wide eyes had filled with fear and blood, and he'd toppled one way and the General had toppled the other, and now they both lay where they fell.

The weapon had quickly burned through its fuel and gone silent, but the terrible noise still echoed in the General's mind. The noise split his mind in two, then in four, then into scattered pieces. The echoes ground him to finer and finer dust. The process was frightening and painful.



The General was a man of extraordinary character. He'd built the Red Valley Republic out of nothing—hadn't he? He'd preserved it against all enemies and all odds, he'd taken the mere words of politicians and philosophers and he'd *beaten* the world into their mold. As the noise crashed rhythmlessly back and forth across his mind, he held tightly to his pride—which maybe slowed the process of disintegration but could not stop it.

For twenty years the Republic had flourished, and it had been the finest moment in the history of the West; indeed, the finest of all possible moments, for the Republic had been constructed in accordance with the best possible theories of political virtue. Gun and Line and their endless war had been banished—the Republic had been an island of peace and sanity. It was gone now, ten years gone, undermined by the spies and blackmailers of Gun, crushed by the wheels of the Line, never to return.

But it had lasted long enough to raise a generation of young men and women in its mold, and it was for those young persons that the General wished he could somehow utter, and have recorded, some noble and inspiring last words; but all that now came to his shattered mind were fragments of old fairy tales, curse words, obscenities, babble. He thought he might be weeping. He couldn't tell.



He was vaguely aware of the Linesmen going through the bodies around him. He could see them out of the corner of his eye. Squat little men in their grays and blacks stepping dismissively over the bodies of heroes! They stopped sometimes and knelt down to use their dull-bladed boot-knives to silence the murmuring throats. They went like busy doctors from patient to patient. The General's men lay helplessly. A bad way to end. A bad way for it all to end.

Would the Linesmen notice the General, still breathing? Maybe, maybe not. There was nothing he could do to stop it.

One more section of the architecture of his mind crumbled to dust, and for a moment he entirely forgot who he was, and he became preoccupied with his memories. He'd been a leader of some kind. He'd had some great final duty, which had brought him up into these damned cold ugly mountains; but he forgot what it was. For some reason, he remembered instead a fairy tale his nursemaid had told him many, many years ago back in green Glen Lily, in Ulver County: a tale regarding a prince who set out from his father's red castle bearing nothing but a sword and, and, an owl, in search of the princess who . . . no, bearing a *message* for the princess, who . . . the princess was a prisoner, chained in a tower, ebony-skinned, beautiful black hair to her waist, bare-naked . . .

A Linesman stepped over him—black boots momentarily blocked out the stars. The Linesman's black trousers were worn and smeared gray with dust. The Linesman shouted something, something the General couldn't understand, and moved on, not looking down.

The General clutched at the scattering dust of himself and recalled that this was not the first time he'd lain outside at night, under the stars, among the dead, bleeding and dying. Indeed, a night like this had been the making of him, once. As a young soldier he had been wounded in the shoulder by a lucky shot at the battle of A . . . at the battle of . . . at the field of gorse and briars, by the stone bridge. He had been left for dead in the first retreat and spent the night among the dead, too weak to walk, strong enough only to hold his jacket to his shoulder and pray for the slow bleed to stop, and to watch the cold stars. He'd been very young then. There he had learned to dedicate his soul and his strength to a bright distant purpose, to lay his course by a remote star. He had learned to be *heroic* and not to fear death. So he'd told too many generations of fresh young recruits.

The recruits hadn't been so fresh or so young, or so many, in recent years—not since the horrors of Black Cap Valley. Not since all was lost. Not since the Line drove them into the hills and the woods and the back alleys like bandits, not since the army of the Republic, reduced to a desperate fiercer remnant of its former glory, became a matter of secret meetings and disguises and dead-drops and midnight explosions and code words and signals. He remembered! No—he remembered only the codes, not why they were sent. Matters of great weight and significance hidden in the lines of humble everyday domestic correspondence—*The children are growing tall and strong* meant *The weapons are ready to be retrieved*—he struggled and grasped at codes and symbols. . . .

He remembered they sent messages encoded, among other things, in fairy tales, in letters that purported to be addressed to much-loved children safe at home. He remembered writing, *Once upon a time, the Prince of Birds looked down from the Mountain over his kingdom and was unhappy*. It meant something secret; it conveyed maybe good news, more likely bad, because all the news had been bad for ten years; he couldn't remember what.

He tried to recall the names of some of his men—many of whom, perhaps all of whom, lay scattered on the mountainside around him, their own minds ruined and crumbling like his own. Names came to him. What came to him instead were the faces of three Presidents, three of his masters: Bellow, big-bearded, who was once only Mayor of Morgan, who drafted the Charter; Iredell, little wiry brilliant man, who was the first to sign it at Red Valley; stout but simpleminded Killbuck, who in retrospect was perhaps a sign of the Republic's rapid decline.

But his memory of Bellow's bearded face was perhaps confused with an illustrated king from the storybook his nursemaid read to him.

The noise kept sounding in his head, and he forgot Bellow forever. The noise ricocheted madly back and forth against the chamber of his skull like a bullet. The *meaninglessness* of the noise was its worst quality. He forgot his battle standards. He recalled, then forgot again, the stables at Glen Lick where he first learned to ride and read and hold a sword. The stables were long since ground under by the Line. He recalled with sudden sickness that he had a daughter of his own, whom he had not seen for years, for all these years of hard campaigning, of hiding in the hills, of raiding and harrowing the Line. He wrote letters; she always waited for him to come home. Now he never would.

He'd sent her a last letter, from the foot of the mountains, just days ago: there was something very important in it, but he couldn't recall what. Something about these mountains and these stones on which his mind now bled. He recalled that he signed and sealed it with a reckless wild abandon. He said things it was dangerous to say. He had set years of discretion and secrecy aside. He remembered thinking, *Secrecy is behind us now. If we win through, the earth will shake.* He forgot why.

He remembered, terribly vividly, the stink of Black Cap Valley, after the battle, its mud and wildflowers black and glistening, slick with red blood. One of his sons had died there. He forgot where the other one had died.



A Linesman stepped back over him, knocking his head sideways, so that he could no longer see the stars. He saw instead the shuffling legs of the Linesmen and the body of Lieutenant Deerfield. Deerfield! A good man. He wore trappers' furs, not his old red uniform, because the days of splendid red uniforms were long gone. He was pale and dead.

Behind Deerfield, the General saw the body of Kan-Kuk, the stone-caster, the Hill-man, *his* Hill-man. His ally among the First Folk. There were a great many secrets about Kan-Kuk in his last letter. The General had forgotten them all.

Kan-Kuk's naked bone-white body jerked and flopped like a landed fish. Kan-Kuk's long skinny arms flailed like stripped branches in a storm. Kan-Kuk tore at his wild mane and ripped away great black fistfuls. That struck the General as strange; the General was fairly sure that he himself was still very still. Perhaps the mind-bombs affected different species of person in different ways. Or perhaps the General himself, without knowing it, was also thrashing and flailing and screaming. Everything was very numb; he couldn't be sure.

The General wondered if Kan-Kuk would rise again. It was said of the Folk, and perhaps it was only a fairy tale, like the story of the princess and the prince and the mountain . . . It was said of the Folk that when they died, and were buried, they rose again, in due season, immortal, like a song or a dream—or like the masters of Gun and Line. If Kan-Kuk were to be buried, and to rise again from the red earth, would his mind recover, or was Kan-Kuk ruined now, too? His fine, strange mad mind, now ruined.

It was at Kan-Kuk's request that the General had gone on this last mad mission. Those were the terms of their deal. People had said for years that the General was mad to keep a Hill-man around like

that, and maybe they were right. Now the General remembered what Kan-Kuk promised: that his people had a secret. A Song, Kan-Kuk had called it, though the General had thought: *a weapon*. A weapon to bring peace. An alliance between resolution and atonement for peace and goodwill, the oldest dream. The General would have tended his garden in his old age, grown roses perhaps. Kan-Kuk's people had been ready to share it at last, to forgive, again, at last. There was a cave, there was a cave in the red navel of the world, there was drumming, there was the City of the First Folk, for the others, too, were fallen from greatness. Down in the dark, fallen. There were, so Kan-Kuk whispered, to have been tests of courage and virtue and . . .



Now a song sounded in the General's head, but it was a terrible one, not peaceful, not a cure for anything, but a gathering torrent of mad noise. Kan-Kuk! The General remembered Kan-Kuk and then he forgot again, forever. Kan-Kuk and Deerfield. The names of Putnam and Holmes occurred to him as well. The echo in his mind grew and thundered rhythmically over and over like horses' hooves. The names of Halley and Orange surfaced from the sinking ruin of his mind, and he remembered that Orange was once from the Twenty-third Regiment of the Third Army of the Republic, before the Third Army was lost at Black Cap. The echo of horses; it was tearing him apart, but for a moment it made him think of *escape*—he imagined that the horses were thundering an escape, thundering new hope. He could escape one more time; he could regroup. Regroup what? He forgot. The black boots of the Linesman stopped in front of him. The echo was not rhythmic—the horses that galloped across his mind were limping, falling, screaming. What shattered the soul, what set the brain's delicate architecture bleeding and crumbling, was that horrid senseless arrhythmia. The General recalled and forgot the names of Holmes and Mason and Darke. A Linesman bent down and gripped Kan-Kuk's beard and forced back the hinge of his long white neck and silenced him with a boot-knife. (Would he rise again?) The rhythm of the Linesmen's noisemaker was *not* horses, of course, nothing so natural; it was the sound of Engines. The Linesmen, being already mad, were inured to it, but to the General it sounded out madness, worse than death. He recalled that the battle standard of his first regiment, which he made the standard of this desperate rump of the Republic, after Black Cap, bore two eagles. The eagle was a noble bird. He recalled a story regarding a prince who set out from his father's castle of red rock into the mountains with nothing to accompany him but an eagle, no course to follow but the course the eagle's black wings marked across the blue sky. He couldn't recall why, and it frustrated him. *Begin again: Once upon a time and it was the last time I went into the mountains to find . . .*



“That one.”

“Where?”

“There.”

“Right. I see him.”

Private (Third Class) Porter, soldier of the Line in the First Army of the Gloriana Engine, stood over the body and poked it with his foot. An elderly fellow, weather-beaten, dark-skinned but with a startlingly silver-white beard. His eyes, which stared blankly up into Porter's own, were a deep vibrant green, which Porter disliked. The pupils had collapsed almost to pinpricks. That often happened with the mind-bombs. The old man didn't respond to a poke in the ribs or when Porter nudged his head from side to side with the blood-slick sole of his boot.

Still breathing, just about, but the mind was gone. Porter's back ached after the long char-

through the mountains, and he couldn't be bothered to bend down to finish the old man off.

“Already dead,” Porter lied.

Private (First Class) Copper looked around him. The hollow was strewn with bodies. “Good. That’s all of them, then. All gone. Might as well do that savage, too, shut him up. Soap.”

Private (Second Class) Soap drew his knife, yanked the jerking, shrieking Hillfolk fellow up by his mane, and took care of business.

Porter gave the old man another poke with his boot. “Who do you think they were?”

Copper shrugged. “No one important. Who cares? They’re dead now.”

“Wonder what they were doing up here.”

“Trespassing,” Copper said. “Where they didn’t belong.”

“Odd-looking bunch, though.”

“Shut up,” Copper said. “Not our place to ask questions.”

“Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.”

“Been a long night,” Copper said. “I want to get back to bed. Leave these idiots for the crows.”

BOOK ONE

OUT TO THE EDGE OF THINGS

CHAPTER 1

THE DEPARTURE

~ 1889 ~

One fine spring afternoon, when the roses in the gardens of the Koenigswald Academy were in bloom and the lawns were emerald green, and the river was sapphire blue, and the experimental greenhouses burst with weird life, the professors of the Faculty of Psychological Sciences met in the Faculty's ancient August Hall, in a handsomely appointed upstairs library, where they stood in a little group drinking sherry and saying their good-byes to their colleague Dr. Lysvet Alverhuysen—*Liv* to her friends—who was, against all reasonable advice, determined to go west.



“You’ll fall behind, Dr. Alverhuysen.” Dr. Seidel shook his head sorrowfully. “Your work will suffer. There are no faculties of learning in the West, none at all. None worth the name, anyway. Can they even read? You won’t have access to any of the journals.”

“Yes,” *Liv* said. “I believe they can read.”

“Seidel overstates his argument,” Dr. Naumann said. “Seidel is known for overstating his arguments. Eh, Seidel? But not *always* wrong. You *will* lose touch with science. You will *rip* yourself from the bosom of the scientific community.”

He laughed to show what he thought of the scientific community. Handsome and dark of complexion, Dr. Naumann was the youngest of the Faculty’s professors and liked to think of himself as something of a radical. He was engaged in a study of the abnormal or misdirected sexual drive which he regarded as fundamental to all human activity and belief.

Liv smiled politely. “I hope you’ll write to me, gentlemen. There are mail coaches across the mountains, and the Line will carry mail across the West.”

“Hah!” Dr. Naumann rolled his eyes. “I’ve seen the maps. You’re going to the edge of the world, Dr. Alverhuysen. Might as well hope to send mail to the moon, or the bottom of the sea. Are there mail coaches to the moon?”

“They’re at war out there,” Dr. Seidel said. “It’s very dangerous.” He twisted his glass nervously in his hands.

“Yes,” *Liv* agreed. “So I’ve heard.”

“There are wild men in the hills, who are from what I hear only very debatably human. I saw a sketch of one once, and I don’t mind admitting it gave me nightmares. All hair and knuckles, it was white as death, and painted in the most awful way.”

“I won’t be going into the hills, Doctor.”

“The so-called civilized folk are only marginally better. Quite mad. I don’t make that diagnosis lightly. Four centuries of war is hardly the only evidence of it. Consider the principal factions in the war, which are from what I hear not so much political entities as religious enthusiasms, not so much

religion as forms of shared mania. . . . Cathexis, that is, a psychotic transference of responsibility from themselves to *objects* that—”

“Yes,” she said. “Perhaps you should publish on the subject.”

If she listened to another moment of Dr. Seidel’s shrill voice, she was in danger of having her resolve shaken.

“Will you excuse me, Doctors?” She darted quickly away, neatly interposing Dr. Mistler between herself and Seidel.

It was stuffy and dusty in the library; she moved closer to the windows, where there was a breeze and the faint green smell of the gardens, and where Liv’s dear friend Agatha from the Faculty of Mathematics was making conversation with Dr. Dahlstrom from the Faculty of Metaphysics, who was terribly dull. As she approached, Agatha waved over Dahlstrom’s shoulder and her eyes said, *Help!* Liv hurried over, sidestepping Dr. Ley, but she was intercepted by Dr. Ekstein, the head of her own Faculty, who was like a looming stone castle topped with a wild beard, and who took both her hands in his powerful ink-stained hands and said: “Dr. Alverhuysen—may I abandon formality—*Liv*—will you be safe? Will you be safe out there? Your poor late husband, rest his soul, would never forgive me if I was not allowed . . .”

Dr. Ekstein was a little sherry-drunk and his eyes were moist. His life’s work had been a system of psychology that divided the mind into contending forces of thesis and antithesis, from the struggle of which a peaceful synthesis was derived, the process beginning again and again incessantly. Liv considered the theory mechanical and unrealistic.

“I have made my decision, Doctor,” she reminded him. “I shall be quite safe. The House of Dolorous is in neutral territory, far from the fighting.”

“Poor Bernhardt,” Dr. Ekstein said. “He would *haunt* me if anything were to happen to you—no, of course, that I would expect that it would, but if anything *were* to happen—”

Dr. Naumann insinuated himself. “Hauntings? Here? Sounds like you’ll miss all the real excitement, Dr. Alverhuysen.”

Ekstein frowned down on Naumann, who kept talking: “On the other hand, you won’t be bored—oh my no. No place out there is neutral for long. No matter how remote your new employer may be, soon enough *you-know-what* will come knocking.”

“I’m afraid I *don’t* know, Dr. Naumann. I understand things are very turbulent out there. Excuse me, I must—”

“Turbulent! A good word. If you cut into the living brain of a murderer or sex criminal, you might say what you saw was *turbulent*. I mean the forces of the Line.”

“Oh.” She tried to look discreetly around Dr. Ekstein’s mass for sight of Agatha. “Well, isn’t that for the best? Isn’t the Line on the side of science and order?”

Dr. Naumann raised an eyebrow, which Liv found irritating. “Is that right? Consider Logtown, which they burned to the ground because it harbored Agents of the Gun; consider the conquest of Mason, where . . .” He rattled off a long list of battles and massacres.

Dr. Alverhuysen looked at him in surprise. “You know a lot about the subject.”

He shrugged. “I take an interest in their affairs. A professional interest, you might say.”

“I’m afraid I don’t follow their politics closely, Dr. Naumann.”

“You will. You will.” He leaned in close and whispered to her, “*They’ll follow you, Liv.*”

She whispered back, “Perhaps you should travel that way yourself, Philip.”

“Absolutely under no circumstances whatsoever.” He straightened again and consulted his watch. “I shall be late for my afternoon Session!” He left his glass on a bookshelf and exited by the south stairs.

“Unhealthy,” Ekstein said. “Unhealthy interests.” He glanced down at Liv. “Unhealthy.”

“Excuse me, Dr. Ekstein.”

~~She stepped around him, exchanged a polite *good luck, good luck to you, too*, with a gray-haired woman whose name she forgot, passed through a cool breeze and shaft of dusty afternoon sunlight that entered through the oriel window, heard and for nearly the last time was delighted by the sound of the peacocks crying out on the lawns, and deftly linked arms with Agatha and rescued her from Professor Dahlstrom’s droning. Unfortunately, Agatha turned out to be a little too drunk and a little too maudlin and did not share any of Liv’s nervous excitement. She blinked back tears and held Liv’s hand very tightly and damply and said, “Liv—oh, Liv. You must promise you’ll come back.”~~

Liv waved a hand vaguely. “Oh, I’m sure I will, Agatha.”

“You must come back soon.”

In fact, she hadn’t given a moment’s thought to when she might return, and the demand rather annoyed her. She said, “I shall write, of course.”

To Liv’s relief then, Dr. Ekstein tapped on a glass for silence, and quickly got it, because everyone was by now quite keen to return to their interrupted afternoon’s work. He gave a short speech, which did not once mention where Liv was going or why, and rather made it sound as if she were retiring due to advanced senility, which was the Faculty’s usual procedure. Finally he presented her with a gift from the Faculty: a golden pocket watch, heavy and overly ornate, etched with sentimental scenes of Koenigswald’s mountains and pine forests and gardens and narrow high-peaked houses. The occasion was complete, and the guests dispersed by various doors and into the stacks of the library.



The Academy stood on a bend in the river a few miles north of the little town of Lodenstein, which was one of the prettiest and wealthiest towns of Koenigswald, which was itself one of the oldest and wealthiest and most stable and peaceful nations of the old and wealthy and stable and peaceful nations of the old East.

Six months ago, a letter had arrived at the Academy from out of the farthest West. It was battered and worn, and stained with red dust, sweat, and oil. It had been addressed to *The Academy, Koenigswald—Of the Seven*. Koenigswald’s efficient postal service had directed it to Lodenstein without too much difficulty. “Of the Seven” was a strange affectation, initially confusing, until Dr. Naumann remembered that four hundred years ago, Koenigswald had—in an uncharacteristic fit of adventurism—been one of the Council of Seven Nations that had jointly sent the first expedition West, over the World’s End Mountains, into what was then un-made territory. Perhaps that fact still meant something to the westerners; Koenigswald had largely forgotten it.

Strictly speaking, the letter was addressed not to Liv, but to a *Mr. Dr. Bernhardt Alverhuysen*, which was the name of her late husband, who was recently deceased; but her husband had been a Doctor of Natural History, and the letter sought the assistance of a Doctor of Abnormal Psychology, a title that more accurately described Liv herself. Therefore, Liv opened it.

Dear Dr. Alverhuysen,

I hope this letter finds you well. No doubt you are surprised to receive it. There is little commerce these days between the new world and the old. We do not know each other, and though I have heard great things of your Academy, I am not familiar with your work; my own House is in a very remote part of the world, and it is hard to keep up with the latest science and therefore I write to you.

I am the Director of the House Dolorous. The House was founded by my late father, and

now it has fallen into my care. We can be found on the very farthest western edge of the world, nestled in the rocky bosom of the Flint Hills, northwest of a town called Greenbank of which you no doubt have not heard. West of us, the world is still not yet Made, and on clear days, the views from our highest windows over Uncreation are unsettled and quite extraordinary.

Are you an adventurous man, Dr. Alverhuysen?

We are a hospital for those who have been wounded in our world's Great War. We take those who have been wounded in body, and we take those who have been wounded in mind. We do not discriminate. We are in neutral territory, and we ourselves are neutral. The Line does not reach out to the Flint Hills, and the agents of its wicked Adversary are not welcome among us. We take all who suffer, and we try to give them peace.

We have able field doctors and sawbones in residence, and we know how to treat burn and bullet wounds and lungs torn by poison gas. But the mind is something of a mystery to us. We are ignorant of the latest science. There are mad people in our care, and there is so little we can do for them.

Will you help us, Dr. Alverhuysen? Will you bring the benefit of your learning to our House? I understand that it is a long journey, rarely undertaken; but if you are not moved by the plight of our patients, then consider that we have all manner of mad folk here, wounded in ways that you will not find in the peaceful North—not least those who have been maddened by the terrible mind-shattering noise-bombs of the Line—and that your own studies may prosper in a House that provides such ample subject matter. If that does not move you, consider that our House is generously endowed. My father owned silver mines. I enclose a promissory note that will cover your travel by coach and by riverboat and by Engine of the Line; I enclose a map, and letters of introduction to all necessary guides and coachmen on this side of the World; and finally I enclose my very best wishes,

Yours in Brotherhood,

Director Howell, Jr., the House Dolorous.

She had shown the letter to her colleagues. They treated it as a joke. Out of little more than spirit of perversity, she wrote back requesting further information. All winter she busied herself with teaching, with her studies, with the care of her own subjects. She received no reply; she didn't expect to. On the first day of spring, rather to her own surprise, she wrote again, to announce that she had made her decision and that she would be traveling West at the first opportunity.



Now she couldn't sleep. The golden watch ticked noisily at her bedside and she couldn't sleep, and her head was full of thoughts of distance and speed. She'd never seen one of the Engines of the Line and could not picture what they looked like; but last year she had seen, in one of the galleries in town, an exhibition of paintings of the West's immense vistas, its wide-open plains like skies or seas. Perhaps it was two years ago—Bernhardt had been alive. The paintings had been huge, wall-to-wall, mountains and rivers and tremendous skies, some blue and unclouded and others tempestuous. Forests and valleys. The *panorama*: that was what they painted in the West. Geography run wild and mad. There'd been several with bloody battles going on at the bottom of the frame: *Fall of the Red Republic*, something like that, was especially horrible, with its storm clouds of doom clenched in the sky like sick hearts seizing, thousands of tiny men struggling in a black valley, battle standards falling in the mud. They always seemed to be fighting about *something*, out in the West. There'd been half a dozen

depicting nature bisected by the Line; high arched rail bridges taming the mountains or railroads shaving the forests away; the black paint blots that were the Engines seeming to *move*, to drag the eye across the canvas. There were even a few visions of the very farthest West, where the world was still entirely uncreated and full of wild lights and lightning storms and land that surged like sea and strange beautiful demonic forms being born in the murk. . . . Liv remembered how Agatha had shuddered and held herself tight. She remembered, too, how Bernhardt had held her in his heavy tweed-clad arm, and droned about Faculty politics, and so she had not quite lost herself in the paintings' wild depths.

Now those scenes rushed through her mind, blurred with speed and distance. The House was a world away. She could not picture traveling by Line, but she imagined herself leaving town by coach and the wheels clattering into sudden unstoppable motion, and the horses rearing, and the coach lurching so that all her settled life spilled out behind her in a cascade of papers and old clothes and . . .

It was not an unpleasant sensation, she decided; it was as much exhilaration as terror. Nevertheless she needed to sleep, and so she took two serpent-green drops of her nerve tonic in a glass of water. As always, it numbed her very pleasantly.



Liv settled her affairs. Her rooms were the property of the Faculty—she ensured that they would be made available to poor students during her absence. She consulted a lawyer regarding her investments. She dined almost nightly with Agatha and her family. She canceled her subscriptions to the scholarly periodicals. The golden watch presented an unexpected problem, because of course her clothes had no pockets suitable for such a heavy ugly thing, nor was she sufficiently unsentimental to leave it behind. Eventually she decided to have a chain made and wear it around her neck, where it beat against her heart.

She visited her subjects and made arrangements for their future. The Andresen girl she transferred into Dr. Ekstein's care; the girl's pale and fainting neurasthenic despair might, she hoped, respond well to Ekstein's gruff cheerfulness. The Fussel boy she bequeathed to Dr. Naumann, who might find his frequent sexual rages interesting. With a satisfying stroke of her pen, she split the von Meer twins—who suffered from cobwebbed and romantic nightmares—sending one girl to Dr. Ekstein and the other to Dr. Lenkman. An excellent idea, as they only encouraged each other's hysteria. She wondered why she hadn't done it years ago! The Countess Romsdal had nothing at all wrong with her, in Liv's opinion, other than being too rich and too idle and too self-obsessed; so she thought Dr. Seid might as well humor her. She gave Wilhelm and the near-catatonic Olanden boy to Dr. Bergman. She sent sweet little Bernarda, who was scared of candles and shadows and windows and her husband, to rest cure in the mountains. As for Maggfrid . . .

Maggfrid came crashing into her office, late in the afternoon. He never understood to knock. The shock made her spill ink on her writing desk. He was in tears. "Doctor—you're leaving?"

She put down her pen and sighed. "Maggfrid, I told you I was leaving last week. And the week before that."

"They told me you were leaving."

"I told you I was leaving. Don't you remember?"

He stood there dumbly for a moment, then hurried over and began to mop at her desk with his sleeve. She put her hand on his arm to stop him.

He was nearly a giant. His huge hands were scarred from a multitude of small accidents—he didn't have the sense to look after himself properly. Someone who didn't know him might have found him terrifying—in fact, he was gentle and as loyal as a dog. Maggfrid was her first subject and, in manner of speaking, her oldest friend.

Maggfrid's condition was congenital. His own blood had betrayed him. Sterile, he was the last of a line of imbeciles. Liv had found him sweeping the stone floors of the Institute in Tuborrrhen, where she herself had spent some years in a high white-walled room, in a fragile state, after the death of her mother. He'd been kind to her then. Later, when she was stronger, he'd been happy to be her test subject; he was always simple and eager to please. He would answer questions for hours with his brow furrowed with effort. He bore even the more intrusive physical examinations without complaint. There were three ugly scars across his bald head, and a burn from a faulty electroplate, but he didn't mind. She couldn't heal him—she had quickly realized he was beyond mending—but he'd provided subject matter for a number of successful monographs, and in return she'd found him work sweeping the floors of August Hall.

“Doctor—”

“You'll be fine, Maggfrid. You hardly need me anymore.”

He began mopping up the ink again. “Maggfrid, no . . .”

She couldn't stop him. She watched him work. He scrubbed with intense determination. It occurred to her that she could get up, walk away, lock the office behind her, and he might remain standing there, implacably scrubbing in the darkness. It was a sad thought.

Besides, she might need a bodyguard; she would need someone to carry her bags. It was even possible that fresh air, adventure, new scenery would do him good. It was certainly what *she* needed.

She put a hand on his arm again. “Maggfrid: Have you ever wanted to travel?”

It took nearly a minute for his big pale face to break into a grin; and then he lifted her from behind her desk and spun her like a child, until the room was a blur and she laughed and told him to let her down.



She spent her very last day at the Faculty on the banks of the river. She sat next to Agatha on an outstretched blanket. They fed the swans and discussed the shapes of clouds. Their conversation was a little forced, and Liv wasn't at all sorry when it drifted away, and for a while they sat in silence.

“You'll have to buy a gun,” Agatha said quite suddenly.

Liv turned to her, rather shocked, to see that Agatha was smiling mischievously.

“You'll have to buy a gun, and learn to ride a horse.”

Liv smiled. “I shall come back quite battle-scarred.”

“With terrible stories.”

“I shall never speak of them.”

“Except when drunk, when you'll tell us all stories of the time you fought off a dozen wild Hillfolk bandits.”

“Two dozen! Why not?”

“No student will ever dare defy you again.”

“I shall walk with a limp, like an old soldier.”

“You will—” Agatha fell silent.

She reached into her bag and took out a small red pocket-sized pamphlet, which she handed solemnly to Liv.

According to its cover, it was *A Child's History of the West*, and it had been published somewhere called Morgan Town, in the year 1856.

Its pages were yellow and crumbling—hardly surprising, given that it was several years older than Liv herself. Its frontispiece was a black-and-white etching of a severe-looking gentleman in military uniform, with dark features, a neat white beard, a nose that could chop wood, and eyes that

were somehow at once fierce and sad. He was apparently General Orlan Enver, First Soldier of the Red Valley Republic and the author of the *Child's History*. Liv had never heard of him.

"I'm afraid it's the only book I could find that says anything about where you're going at all," Agatha said.

"This is from the library."

Agatha shrugged. "Steal it."

"Agatha!"

"Really, Liv, it's hardly the time for you to worry about that sort of thing. Take it! It may be useful. Anyway, we can't send you off with nothing but that horribly ugly watch."

Agatha stood. "Be safe," she said.

"I will."

Agatha turned quickly and walked off.



Grunting, Maggfrid heaved up Liv's heavy cases onto the back of the coach. The horses snorted in the cold morning air and stamped the gravel of August Hall's yard. The Faculty was still sleeping—apart from the coach and the horses and a few curious peacocks, the grounds were empty. Liv and Agatha embraced as the coachman stood by, smoking. Liv hardly noticed herself boarding the vehicle—she'd taken four drops of her nerve tonic to ensure that fear would not sway her resolve, and she was therefore somewhat distant and numb.

The coachman cracked the whip and the horses were away. The die was cast. Liv's heart pounded. Balanced on her lap were the *Child's History of the West*, the ugly golden watch, and a copy of the most recent edition of the *Royal Maessenburg Journal of Psychology*. She found all three of them rather comforting. Maggfrid sat beside her with a frozen smile on his face. Gravel crunched, the lindens went rushing past, the Faculty's tall iron gates loomed like a mountain. Agatha gathered up her skirts and ran a little way after the coach, and Liv waved and in doing so managed to drop her copy of the *Journal*, which fluttered away behind her down the path. The coachman offered to stop, but she told him keep going, keep going!

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